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The Role of Black South African Women in the Construction of Memory with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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Truth, Reconciliation, Gender: the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Black Women's Intellectual History

This article examines the role of Black women in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It argues that women were the promoters of ubuntu throughout the TRC process, whether they were on the commission or testifying. It argues that forgiveness itself was feminized through the TRC process. It also emphasizes that women were not focused on themselves and that the majority of testimony was given by Black women who were testifying about abuses suffered by (mostly) male family members. Driver understands women in the TRC through two lenses, "women-in community" and "women-in-themselves". She discusses how African femininity bridges the gap between the self and others and how this was used by the commission to further promote their ideals and bring white South Africans into the process as well. Driver writes, "I have argued that although black South African women's writing has conceptually expanded the definitions of both 'community' and 'woman', the TRC denied that women-in-community were women-in-themselves, and thus transgressed women's own self-definition and practice as simultaneously and inseparably individual and community selves" (Driver, 223). She also argues that through this process, Black women were the bestowers of ubuntu, but not the receivers of this. Because they stood in for victims and did the majority of the testimony, they were not able to benefit from their testimonies in the way the rest of the nation was. Because they were busy actually creating a national shared memory, these women were not given ubuntu, which was an important aspect of creating memory.

This article engages in important discussions of the gender dynamics that are embedded in discussions of ubuntu that were perpetuated and exacerbated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Driver emphasizes the importance of the role that women, and particularly Black women, played in the construction of a national memory in which ubuntu was a central concept. Without the testimony of these women South Africa's transition to democracy would have been much more difficult and a shared memory more difficult to achieve. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission fell short in achieving a safe space for victims and providing women an equal place to tell their stories. Driver makes it clear in her analysis that women were only allowed to be "women-in-community" rather than "women-in-themselves." There is debate around whether or not women were content to talk about their loved ones rather than themselves, but it is safe to say that a woman's opinion on that role is unique to each individual. Despite this, the reaction that women like Lita Mazibuko (as described in Krog) got when they spoke about personal abuse rather than familial abuse, further illustrates Driver's idea that the Commission discouraged women from focusing on themselves and their own trauma.

The TRC Women's Hearings as Performance and Protest in the New South Africa

Oboe begins by providing context for the TRC special women's hearings. She states that because the majority of people testifying before the Gross Human Rights Violations committee were women, a special place for their voices to be heard and actively produce a national story was put into place. In these hearings there was an emphasis on trying to recognize the roles that women played in fighting apartheid as active agents rather than mothers or sisters. Oboe recognizes that the TRC was always recognized as a performance. This plays into the stereotypes of the "Kleenex Commission" and the drama that accompanied testimonies. She emphasizes that the act of performance and the drama that came with testimony gave voices to people who had been marginalized under apartheid which gave previously voiceless people the power to create a new national memory as their stories and voices were broadcast around the nation. Oboe spends a section of her paper discussing "the question of power." She writes, "what is immediately clear from the transcripts is that women's testimonies can be read as narratives of black female disempowerment, and their performance in front of the committee as a re-negotiation of power, as they denounce the complicity between the apartheid state and the denigration of women." Throughout the women's testimonies women focus on their quality of life. Whether they were raped, beaten, maimed, or physically harmed in any other way, almost all of the women's testimony is centered around grief relating to a loss of status which affects their livelihoods. Oboe also uses Sheila Masote's testimony as an example of how the TRC's values and wishes did not match the needs of the women who were testifying before the commission. Even when testifying about rape most women did not dwell on the actual event or events that happened to them, they remained focused on the toll the rape took on their lives and relationships as rape was highly stigmatized at the time. Oboe then ponders whether asking women to re-open these chapters of their lives and publicly speak about their trauma is actually a new form of violence against them. Cultural gender norms and expectations affect the behavior of women and the way they respond to trauma, and especially sexual trauma. By asking women to openly speak about past violations against them these cultural codes were ignored.

Beyond the role Black women assumed during the human rights violations committee, it is imperative to understand the women's hearings in order to create a deeper understanding of the role that testifying women played throughout the entirety of the TRC process. The cultural codes that were violated by asking women to testify are key in painting a picture of the way women were asked to behave by the TRC. Black women were asked to lay themselves bare before the nation for the sake of collective healing, but little thought was given as to what effect this may have on the women themselves. Like Driver, Oboe spoke about the testimony of Mazibuko and the cold response she received after her courageous testimony. Black women were expected to tell stories that fit the narrative that the TRC was trying to create. Women who subverted expectations and defied their roles were not offered understanding or compassion. The TRC used Black women to achieve their ends, and this is why the testimony of these women was so crucial to the construction of a new national memory. This is not to say however, that these women did

not have agency. It was Mazibuko's choice to share her story and her truth. Every woman who testified did so so that their voice could be heard, and they were heard, just not always accepted. Oboe's piece is an important look at how the TRC attempted to give women voices and a place in this new society and it illustrates areas where the commission succeeded and failed.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and gender: The Testimony of Mrs Konile Revisited

Kobe begins by delving into the debates that surrounded gender in the TRC. Kobe discusses steps that were viewed positively, such as discussing gendered aspects of apartheid and human rights abuses with members of civil society. Kobe also highlights some steps of the TRC that were seen as harmful to women, such as relying on a dominant masculine point of view, that were seen as preventing women from participating in the project and effectively making them invisible throughout the process. She also acknowledges that many of the abuses that women faced were not considered gross violations of human rights by the TRC which prevented women from testifying about the structural nature of apartheid. After discussing the shortcomings and issues the TRC faced when trying to include women, Kobe reaches the bulk of her paper which is analyzing the testimony of Mrs. Konile, which was dismissed as incoherent by the TRC. Kobe argues that Mrs. Konile did not follow the structure of narrative that the TRC asked for and subverted expectations by focusing on herself rather than her son or the apartheid government. The Gugulethu Seven mothers were instrumental in creating the language of reconciliation for the TRC, yet Mrs. Konile's testimony was dismissed and not used in the final report. Kobe argues that this dismissal and the treatment she received based on her positionality and refusal to forgive perpetrators revealed weaknesses within the TRC. Rather than follow the method of narrative that the TRC commissioners expected, "Mrs. Konile's testimony was deeply influenced by the Isixhosa religion and culture." Rather than following the model set forth by the other Gugulethu Seven mothers, Mrs. Konile focused on how apartheid and the death of her son affected her as a woman. She relied on her son, Zabonke, to receive land rights at her village, and after his death, she was denied privileges and lost her station in society. Historically, Black women in South Africa were very reliant on men as they had few rights or opportunities for employment. In this way, Mrs. Konile's testimony deals with ideas of intersectionality because she speaks about how she was harmed under apartheid due to her race, class, and gender. Her testimony deals explicitly with the patriarchal nature of apartheid and her oppression. Unlike the other mothers she testified with, she refused to talk about her son's death in detail and did not refer to him as a hero who died for a righteous cause. She relied on rural storytelling traditions to explain her story and how she found out about the death of her son. The TRC was not equipped to understand her narrative and she was dismissed as incoherent; the depth and importance of her testimony was lost on the audience and commissioners alike. Her storytelling revealed the limitations of the TRC's model. Apart from not understanding her testimony, people were upset that Mrs. Konile did not embody ubuntu and refused to forgive the men who murdered her son.

Kobe argues that her refusal to forgive also showed inconsistencies within the TRC, which claimed to be a victim-driven process. Her testimony ultimately subverts the expectations of the TRC and exposes the patriarchal system that did not allow her to live as a human. Rather than speaking about her son, she spoke about herself and her suffering relating to Zabonke's death, and she was punished for doing this as the TRC did not use or value her testimony.

This article is deeply important in understanding how the TRC treated women who subverted expected narrative procedures, did not conform to ideas of ubuntu, and took the center stage. Rather than focusing on the idea of Zabonke as a hero who sacrificed himself for the new South Africa, Mrs. Konile took center stage in her story and exposed the injustices Black women faced under apartheid. It is seen time and time again that the TRC rewarded women who embodied ubuntu and told the narrative the commission expected to hear. When women like Mrs. Konile and Masote spoke about structural violence against them, they were not received with grace or warmth. Mrs. Konile's testimony also exposed flaws in the TRC relating to class. She is from a rural area and relied on rural traditions during her testimony. People familiar with Isixhosa culture and religion were able to decode and analyze her testimony which seemed incoherent to commissioners who were unfamiliar with rural oral traditions and imagery. Had the commission been ready to hear testimony from people who relied on rural ideas to express themselves Mrs. Konile and other women who shared similar backgrounds could have been more understood. Ultimately, the TRC was not ready to hear women reveal structural issues that the commission was not designed to handle. When listening to amnesty applications, the TRC focused heavily on the idea that to apply for amnesty one must have had a political motive to commit a crime or human rights violation. Politicians who were in charge of creating and maintaining the system of apartheid were not asked to testify or be apart of the process. These decisions indicate an unwillingness to acknowledge the structural nature of apartheid, which is something Mrs. Konile highlighted.

Ndabethwa lilitye: Assumption, translation and culture in the testimony of one person before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Ratele, Mpolweni-Zantsi, and Krog focus on "the rock incident" portion of Mrs. Konile's testimony. Similarly to Kobe, these authors argue that the misinterpretation of Mrs. Konile's testimony perpetuated stereotypes about rural Black women in South Africa and that the treatment of Mrs. Konile reveals a big flaw in the framing of the TRC that was very damaging to women like Mrs. Konile who testified. Rather than looking at her whole testimony, they focus on one paragraph where she spoke about being pinned under a rock. The authors acknowledge that even beyond her positionality, Mrs. Konile was in a difficult position. She was the last of the Gugulethu mothers to testify which meant people had certain expectations of her and she was expected to deliver her story in a way that would help create a new national memory with new national heroes. Her rural roots changed the way she delivered her narrative. She spoke about being pinned down by a rock after her son's death, which the authors found very interesting. This

scene serves to separate herself from the other mothers and demonstrate the pain and helplessness she felt after Zabonke's death. The other mothers travelled around looking for their sons and spoke of being home and watching television. Mrs. Konile contrasts the established narrative of the other mothers with her being static under a rock. Without her son she was trapped, hurt, crying, and so thirsty she begged to drink urine in order to stay alive. The authors highlight the importance of this scene by acknowledging the power of this metaphor. Throughout the article the small details of this section of her testimony are analyzed. The authors write about how many victims of human rights violations testified about how urine of police and other white people in authority were used to humiliate them. It is thus significant that she begged for urine. Furthermore, thirst has deeper meaning in Black religion in South Africa. As a Black woman with rural roots and strong ties to religion, thirst to her likely represented a disruption to her usual life. She also states that she "gave up" not after her son's death, but after she was not allowed to bury him in Indwe. Her desire to bury him in Indwe rather than Cape Town comes from her socio-cultural background where burial next to one's ancestors is deeply important. The death of her son also pushed her further into poverty because women were not entitled to land under apartheid. The rock and urine are her way of illustrating the destitution she faced as a Black widow with no men left in her life. They conclude by arguing that the Commission failed in its goal to restore personhood to the people testifying because Mrs. Konile was neither truly seen nor heard.

This article is crucial in understanding the implications of Mrs. Konile's testimony from multiple disciplinary lenses. While Kobe's article offered a deeper look at how Mrs. Konile was treated after subverting the expectations of the TRC and delivering a unique narrative with her own suffering at the center, Ratele, Krog, and Mpolweni-Zantsi examined the roots of Mrs. Konile's imagery and what each narrative decision she made may have represented for her. Their research and care in exploring and explaining elements of the testimony such as the rock, urine, and thirst, allowed me to understand Xhosa cultural traditions and other testimonies that had elements similar to Mrs. Konile's. This article emphasized the agency that Mrs. Konile had through her storytelling. Although she was disadvantaged by many aspects of her identity, she had the courage to speak after all the other Gugulethu Seven mothers and tell her own story. She did not reinforce the narrative that had been presented by the other women, she offered her own, which called into question the structural nature of apartheid and the discrimination she faced as a woman. She did not present her son as a national hero to appease the TRC, instead she represented herself and the destitution and loss she experienced at the hands of the apartheid government.

Ambiguities Of mourning law, custom, literature and women before South Africa's truth and reconciliation commission

Sanders begins by giving an overview of the Commission before the report was even finalized. Sanders heavily emphasizes the fact that the Commission would submit a report that would serve as a new national memory and common knowledge of the events from 1960-1994.

BEARING WITNESS Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa

Ross begins by identifying the role of Truth Commissions. She states that they often are a means of bringing about justice and creating shared memories and ideas about suffering and human rights. She states that the framing of the South African TRC allowed some forms of expression to flourish while diminishing others. In this study Ross relied on testimonies and women activists to draw her conclusions. Ross argues that women were a unique category in the eyes of the Commission because they mainly testified about human rights violations committed against men in their lives and did not focus directly on themselves. Ross points out that Act No. 35 of 1994 (the Act) did not address structural violence or discrimination and has vague definitions of what constitutes as gross violations of human rights. By not acknowledging the structural nature of apartheid, many daily acts of violence against women were not included as violations of human rights. She states that the dominant theme of testimonies tended to be men testifying about themselves and women testifying about men. It is significant that women did the majority of testifying but scarcely talked about themselves or their experiences. Ross acknowledges that it is the testimony of Black women which was the key to the success of the country's healing. Despite women being key in the success of the Commission, the TRC remained a male dominated structure. It lacked probing questions which allowed women to focus on others rather than themselves. This contributed to a general lack of silence surrounding issues of sexual assault, but this silence can also be attributed to the fact that rape was viewed as a "private" event and was not meant to be shared. Ross points out how harmful it was for women to testify and publicly describe sexual violence committed against them, yet men were not compelled to testify about their role in sexual violations. All of these ways that women were treated contribute to the way the Commission viewed women as a category. Understanding women as a category is crucial because women can easily be left out of processes of nation and memory building and a unique space needs to be built for them in order to hear their voices and include them.

Having an insider perspective like Ross' is invaluable. By highlighting the intended role of Truth Commissions as well as the importance of women's testimonies I have found a scholar who can back my main claim; Black women were crucial not only to the TRC, but the overall success of the entire transition from the apartheid government to a democracy. Ross' anthropological work of defining women as a category within the TRC is also crucial. The TRC made the effort to include women, both as witnesses and commissioners. The Commission also strove to acknowledge the unique views that women brought to the process, but it came up short in actually supporting women. The majority of women did not testify about themselves and men remained at the center of the new national memory and narrative. Ross emphasizes that despite

its efforts to include women, the TRC remained a male dominated institution. The cultural nuances that shaped women's behavior were also not taken into consideration when women were asked to testify about themselves. Still, despite the shortcomings of the Commission on behalf of women, a unique space was made for them to be involved. This care and forethought (that was pushed by activists and women themselves), was key to the success of the TRC. Without the testimony of Black women and without their embodiment of ubuntu, South Africa would have likely had a much more difficult transition.

Country of my Skull

Country of my Skull is written by Antjie Krog, an Afrikaans reporter who covered the Truth Commission in its entirety. Much of her writing is personal accounts of how the Commission affected her, but her writing also offers great insight into what the Commission looked and felt like when one was attending as well as the cultural impact it had at the time. Krog writes about the inner workings of the TRC, including discussions centering around the inclusion of women. She writes, "All of the women are asked whether they feel there should be women on the commission. No man is asked whether he feels there should be women on the commission. Nobody is asked whether they feel there should be men on the commission" (Krog 23). This reinforces statements made by other scholars that the TRC was a male dominated institution. Despite the decision to include women, men were never in question and men's stories dominated the commission hearings, even if women were the ones testifying. The fact that men would be included was a given, the same cannot be said for women. Another line gives us a similar idea of how women were actually viewed by the commission; "Advocate Denzil Potgieter was added because of apparent unhappiness over the absence of coloured people on the list. What about Glenda Wildschut, she's coloured isn't she? ... Yes, but everybody knows "people" means men" (Krog 27). When decisions about commissioners were being made, people only felt represented if a man from their community was selected. Women did not hold the same status as men and thus, the category of women was constantly visible. Whether it was someone asking whether or not women should be included in the process at all, or highlighting the fact that women commissioners did not hold the same status or sway as men, women's positions as secondary are evident. The divide between commissioners based on gender is exposed through Krog's writing, "the black commissioners can be divided into two groups; those who will eventually be referred to as the Nguni Bloc or Black Caucus – Dumisa Ntzaebeza and Bogani Finca – and the women, Mapule Ramashala, Hlengiwe Mkhize, and Sisi Khampepe" (Krog 28).

Krog uses the testimony of Nomonde Calata to discuss what people viewed as the quintessential part of the Truth Commission. Many people have written about her crying and view it as *the* image of the Truth Commission. Krog quotes someone in saying "and to witness that cry was to witness the destruction of language... was to realize that to remember the past of this country is to be thrown back into a time before language" (Krog 57). It is important to recognize that many people criticized the commission for the amount of crying, but that this

emotion and pain that goes beyond words characterized the commission and led to a new national memory. For so long this pain had been hidden from groups who did not directly experience it and suddenly it was out in the open. Black women made the decision to testify and brought the struggles they, their families, and communities had faced into the open in such a powerful way. Their pain could not be disputed. Significantly, Black audience members are hardly upset by testimonies, they have known about these things for decades. White members on the other hand are often distraught and confused, but at this point the violence committed against Black South Africans could no longer be swept under the rug.

Krog opens up chapter five of her book by writing, “she is sitting behind a microphone, dressed in beret or *kopdoek* and her Sunday best. Everybody recognizes her. Truth has become Woman. Her voice, distorted behind her rough hand, has undermined Man as the source of truth. And yet. Nobody knows her” (Krog 74). To state that truth has become Woman is truly powerful and indicative of the influential role that Black women played by presenting testimony. When recounting national histories, the accomplishments and exploits of men are generally center stage while women and their contributions remain largely invisible. While the majority of testimony and stories told were still about men, women came to represent the truth. They were instrumental in creating a new national memory and providing stories that would shape a common understanding of South Africa’s past. Rather than men authoring the story and their truth being the end all be all, Black women took on the role of authors.

In writing about the Amnesty Hearings Krog reveals the sense of confusion that everyone felt about the whole process. With a past so painful, no one really knew how to reconcile or find common ground. She records a quote from Van Vuuren as he speaks about the orphaned son of a man he killed; “... if he says, ‘Take me to Cape Town,’ then I will take him... but I mean what the hell does one *do?*’ That cry has been echoing in my head ever since. What the hell does one do?” And the truth is, no one knew what to do. Not Nelson Mandela or Desmond Tutu, not the widowers or the orphans. The country was left with a gaping hole caused by violence and discrimination, and no one knew what to do. “What the hell does one *do?*” was the unanswerable question. How do you ease the pain? When one’s country and world is so damaged there is nothing you *can* do to set right the atrocities of the past, and so the task fell to Black women. The country listened to them and relied on them, and their words became truth. They carried the process and did the only thing they could; testify.

Krog writes, “over months we’ve realized what an immense price of pain each person must pay just to stammer out his own story at the Truth Commission. Each word is exhaled from the heart; each syllable vibrates with a lifetime of sorrow” (Krog 132). It is this pain that made the process real and the process successful, but it is owed to Black women. Each time they testified they reopened a wound and shared with the goal of healing the country.

Despite the powerful nature of testimonies, there were still people who hated the TRC and everything it stood for. In her section about politics Krog writes, “A memo is handed to the media describing the commission as a perverted mechanism created by a centralized ANC in an effort to portray themselves as the only righteous anti-apartheid force in the country. The

commission is compared to the McCarthy commission and the Spanish Inquisition” (Krog 133). It is easy to focus on the impact that the Commission had on the people who testified and attended in any capacity. It was undeniably a process centered around grief and pain that shook people to their core and tested the realities of privileged groups. Because it challenged the world view of people who had benefited from apartheid and remained isolated from the violence it drew large amounts of criticisms and threats. To compare the TRC to McCarthyism is a powerful statement. Krog makes it evident that not everyone supported the Commission and some people in fact saw it as a witch hunt. Commissioners struggled to get white South Africans to testify or apply for amnesty and many white people condemned the process. Despite the opposition, pushback, and apathy the Commission received, the testimony of Black South Africans was still successful in changing national memory. White citizens no longer denied that violence against Black communities had happened.

Krog records a long discussion of what reconciliation could mean or look like. She states that Desmond Tutu has an optimistic view of reconciliation and that his model for peace and understanding rides on the backs of the Black people. When Krog describes Tutu’s stance she writes, “Tutu believes that black people have access to an almost superior humanity... what the world lacks, black people have. In his view, the main thrust of reconciliation is between people of all colors—embodied in the “rainbow nation” (Krog 145). Recognizing that this is the stance that the head of the TRC is vital in understanding the way that Black women who testified were treated. Tutu’s belief that Black people have greater humanity created an expectation that Black people would take the lead in the reconciliation process and be the carriers of ubuntu, this applies especially to Black women. In a sense, this gave white people a little bit a pass in the whole process because they were not expected to be as forgiving or emotional as their Black counterparts. Every time a Black person showed forgiveness or ubuntu they were praised by the commissioners because they were seen as having fulfilled their role within the process. In order to heal the country, Black South Africans had to forgive their abusers or their families murderers. From the beginning, it was expected that Black people would take up the mantle and drive this process forward. This explains why much of the burden fell to Black women who were viewed as primary carriers of ubuntu and culture. In this same discussion of reconciliation Krog also writes, “the fact that no revenge attacks have taken place in the wake of revelations at the hearings means that people in their everyday lives have already weighed the costs of reconciliation and revenge.” This is important to acknowledge because the lack of violence it was truly signifies the success of the TRC. Despite claims that the Commission was similar to McCarthyism or the fact that white people remained outsiders for much of the process, the testimony of Black women played an invaluable part in providing the country a peaceful transition, even if unfair expectations were placed on them.

In some ways, despite the fact that the Commission played a large role in a peaceful transition of government, its cultural impact was lacking in the lives of everyday people. In reflecting on this idea Krog writes, “the absolution one has given up on, the hope for a catharsis, the ideal of reconciliation, the dream of a powerful reparation policy... Maybe this is all that is

important—that I and my child know Vlakplaas and Mamasela. That we know what happened there” (Krog 172). This reflection illustrates a realistic assessment of what the impact of the TRC likely was in the lives of everyday people. Testimony often harmed those testifying, especially women who had to open up about trauma that is typically viewed as private. The commission placed the brunt of the work towards reconciliation on Black victims. The TRC did not have sweeping success, there were many complaints and forms of pushback, but there was a new national memory and an acceptance of what had happened under apartheid. Yes reparations were lacking and victims remained marginalized in many ways even after the process concluded, but an overarching narrative was established and recognized by all people of all ages, and that is deeply important. In many ways the Commission allowed people to reconcile with themselves rather than with each other. White people had to alter their world view and accept that atrocities were committed on their behalf. In some cases, testifying was truly freeing for victims. There may not have been an evident large-scale reconciliation like the commissioners had hoped for, but the acceptance of testimonies as truth in itself was a form of reconciliation.

In her chapter, “Truth Is a Woman,” Krog deals with the issue of sexual assault and the complexities that came with trying to bring these stories of abuse into the open. Many women did not want to testify about rape for fear of losing something again. Krog writes about a “strange collusion between the rapist and the raped” (Krog 239). She states that many women who had moved into high level positions under the new democracy had been raped, but it could not be spoken about in the open because they would lose respect. She also transcribes quotes that illustrate the everlooming threat of sexual abuse that Black women faced in the apartheid struggle. This section also covers many double standards. Men who could not be broken by police interrogation were respected while women who did not break were abused further because they should not have had the means to resist people who believed they were so much superior in terms of gender and race. Krog writes, “men don’t use the word ‘rape’ when they testify. They talk about being sodomized, or about iron rods being inserted into them. In doing so they make rape a woman’s issue. By denying their own sexual subjugation to male brutality, they form a brotherhood with the rapists that conspires against their own wives, mothers, and daughters...” After this she states, “there is a lot of anger about women—because women do not have the authority, but often they have a lot of power” (Krog 240). The distinction between authority and power is an important distinction to make. It explains why police were so violent when women defied them and it also emphasizes the power Black women had as they constructed a national memory.

Country of my Skull is a rich source that provide both a broad overview of what it was like to work with the commission and the impact that it had on South Africa in the late 1990’s, but it also gives intimate glimpses and brings to life many of the testimonies that have been translated and organized poorly. It is useful that Krog focuses directly on women, both as commissioners and people providing testimony because she gives first hand accounts of discussions that surrounded women in the TRC. Many scholarly articles that explore women in the TRC rely on Krog and this source was a trove of information.

Kedeboni Dube–Women's Hearings

In this testimony, Kedeboni Dube testifies about her own experiences and what happened to her after the Inkatha party invaded her home. After she had fled a comrade told her that people were looking for her because her boyfriend had supposedly pickpocketed a corpse. The comrade said he would take her to a church so she would be safe, but he did not go in the direction of the church. After he took her to a house and she said she wanted to leave he threatened to take her to the Xhosa people who would kill her. After this he beat and raped her until the morning. Dube states, “My husband said this thing is just a disgrace, a shameful thing, just keep quiet, do not relate anything, but my boyfriend was looking for this guy, because my boyfriend is still very unhappy about the situation.” She speaks about how painful this situation has been for her because she is ashamed and a social outcast, she also contracted syphilis from this incident which has prevented her from being with men. She speaks about how medical workers accuse her of being “naughty” which adds to her shame and has made her consider ending her life. She knows the man who did this to her, but he has never had to take any responsibility and she still sees him around town on a day to day basis which is extremely painful. She states that her parents know his parents. A commissioner asks if their family can come to an agreement so she does not have to see him and she says came to the commission in hopes of having him arrested which she says will ease her pain. At the end the chairperson does attempt to reassure her that it is the men who have raped women that should feel guilt and shame, not her. The chairperson says, “I would like to say that we have heard the experiences of very many different women. Women in all kinds of walks of life, but what is very, very clear is that this conspiracy of silence that exist, in fact allows abuse to carry on and unless our society begins to talk freely about this, unless we begin to bring the people who do this to book, unless we do something about exposing them; we will never be free of this. Because at the end of the day, women seem to be objects which can be used by any side and they're the ones who are usually at the forefront of receiving the violence.”

This testimony illustrates the way that many women felt after experiencing sexual violence and the shame that Dube articulates throughout her testimony explains why many women did not want to come forward and testify about their experiences. This shame has been discussed by many scholars who write about the experiences of women in the TRC. It is something experienced by almost everyone who was sexually violated, and in the TRC, it was specifically a women's issue. The chairperson had valuable insight about the “conspiracy of silence” and in their call for this abuse against women to be de-stigmatized and brought to an end. The fact that Dube wanted her rapist arrested rather than trying to come to an agreement with his family is also worth noting. She said that she wanted him to experience pain like she had. This desire does not make Dube a great carrier of ubuntu, but she was still supported by the chairperson, unlike other women who made controversial statements.

Andra Adonis-Children's Hearings.

Andra Adonis testifies about her involvement in politics beginning at the age of 15 in 1985. She speaks about how she had to hide one day after school when teachers told her the police were looking for her. She says, "Shaun Magmoet then was at the same school as I was and being the only person at school, well, I just managed to get to school sometimes, and that particular morning after the shooting one of our teachers told me that Shaun was shot and, of course, being the only person left of the SRC I, it was my duty to convey the message to the students and I felt like, you know, being 15 and also feeling like a mother at the same time." After this she was banned from her school campus for being an "instigator." She went to another school and got involved with politics again. After she met her husband, police would search her and her parents' house constantly. Before being taken by the police who entered her house while she was sleeping she decided to take a bath. The police officers threatened to hit her and she said she would press charges against them if they did, stating, "I was, like, trying to hit back at him all the time, but also in a very gentle way not to have him think that this is a stubborn woman, because once you show stubbornness, they would show no mercy." Eventually the police released her and told her which station she could find her husband at, but he was not there. She says it took 5 days of phoning and looking for her husband with no avail until she finally found him. She speaks about not ever having a childhood due to her involvement in politics and the fact that she never had friends outside of her comrades. She says, "I mean, I have lost my education and I have lost my childhood although we have in return received our freedom and our democracy in this country, but to what extent did we, as the Comrades, members of BMW gain."

Generally, Adonis' testimony is about her loss of childhood and education due to her need to be involved in politics to fight her oppression. Several aspects of this testimony are rich and worth examining. First of all, her experience of looking for days on end at multiple locations for a loved one is not uncommon at all. Many women, especially mothers and wives, would spend days trying to find male family members who had been taken or killed by the police. Almost every testimony given by a mother includes this phenomena of looking in every station they could for a loved one. What is interesting about Adonis' testimony is that she is not a mother, but she still embodies a lot of the struggles that women with children did. She states that as a 15 year old she felt like a mother. As the head of activism circles in her school she felt responsible for the kids around her, even though they were her same age and sometimes even older. Women were expected to take on unique responsibilities in the anti-apartheid struggle and Adonis is an example of this. Like many activists in the 80's she gave up her education, but that decision was very harmful to her because Black women already struggled with having so few opportunities. Adonis was denied a childhood by the apartheid state and her activism thrust her into a role that felt like motherhood, well before she should have ever had that responsibility.

Dee Dicks-Children's Hearings

Dee Dicks is one of the Wynberg Seven. In 1985 she was 17, this is when she attended protests at Wynberg. She testifies that the police driving down the road had rocks thrown at them and they came back with reinforcements. She says they shot tear-gas and everybody fled. About twenty teenagers ended up in one room together. The police were beating people, they caught her, and brought her to the van. She was sentenced to three years in prison. There were petitions to keep her and the other 6 kids who were sentenced out of prison, but these failed. She says that at the time she did not feel like being in jail affected her, but it has gotten harder to cope with as she has aged. She speaks about how her life has felt aimless and she has been struggling with extreme anxiety. At the end, the commissioners reassure her that many people feel the same way and offer to help expunge criminal charges from her records. Gobodo-Madikizela also says that Dicks' testimony is vital in helping "today's" children understand what students went through in the 80's.

This short testimony gives interesting insight into the ways that some people dealt with trauma stemming from prison experience. At the time Dicks didn't really have time to process what had happened to her, and she felt mentally stable even when she was put through a difficult prison experience. It was only after she was able to take a step back and she was no longer in survival mode that she felt extreme anxiousness. The Commissioners statements at the end of her testimony also help us to understand that this was a common theme throughout the testimonies at the Children's Hearings. Testimonies by women such as Dee Dick's were not only instrumental in helping to construct national memory around events like the Wynberg Seven or other high profile cases, they were also key in building an understanding of how many victims who had their human rights violated at a young age dealt with this trauma and how it manifested itself even as progress was made towards a more equal society.

Audrey Coleman-Children's Hearings

Audrey Coleman presented professional testimony, not as a witness but as someone who worked at the Detainee Parents Support Committee. Coleman emphasizes the fact that South African society as a whole is very traumatized. She states, "you can't expect that society to return to normality. I can't go into all the psychological effects because we don't have time, but you've got a traumatised society, you've got families that are split and broken, you've got orphans, you've got all sorts of things that had happened and I think until we deal with what has happened, I don't think we are going to be able to rectify what has happened in the 1990's." She focuses on the work that mothers did throughout the apartheid struggle to support their children and look for them when they went missing. She states that mothers especially were distraught and the process of looking for a missing child through the police system was very difficult. She states that parents, but specifically mothers, would give up everything to go searching from prison to prison for their children. She also talks about her work with district surgeons and how her organization

was deeply upset with doctors because they often saw torture or signs of torture and they never reported it. Her testimony also emphasizes the structural nature of apartheid and how the entire society and Black community are traumatized, not just the people who fit the TRC's narrow mandate of gross human rights violations. She and her organization challenged privileged adults who believed Black teens were "trouble makers" for provoking the police to think about why teenagers might behave this way and what kind of society would normalize violence against teenagers.

Professional testimony offers a unique opportunity to engage with testimony. Rather than being a mother or activist herself, Coleman is an expert in the role that parents and children took in the anti-apartheid struggle. The Commission relied on her testimony for facts and figures to help establish one aspect of a national memory. Coleman drew on many experiences she had as well as her organization's data to deliver the testimony. Her stories backed up what many women had said during the Children's and Women's hearings, which provided their everyday experiences with professional credibility.

Beauty Ngudle-Heideveld (Cape Town)

Beauty Ngudle testified about the death of her husband, Khulile Looksmart Solwandle Ngudle, who was one of the first people to die in detention in South Africa. After her husband's death in 1963, Beauty was left alone with their three children and no way to support them. Her mother in law had to go and look for his body as Beauty had a young baby, and her mother in law was sent to multiple police stations without being able to find him. She was eventually sent to a station where a woman told her to run away because no one was being buried at that station, it was where they were killing people. She escaped and took the train back home to Beauty. Beauty had to go to Pretoria for a hearing about her husband's death and she had to sleep in the linen room of the prison with her baby. During the case the lawyers insisted that Looksmart had hung himself and that he had not been killed by the police. After the hearing she was told she needed to run because if the police saw her they would shoot her.

The theme of looking for a loved one to no avail at multiple prisons persists throughout Beauty's testimony. Beauty Ngudle's testimony is important because her husband was one of the first people to die in prison and this event took place only three years after the beginning of the time frame that the TRC was mandated to explore. Her testimony also exposes how loved ones, and especially women family members, of people who had been killed by the police were harassed after their death. Beauty, her mother in law, and her children were constantly under threat, whether it be in their home or while they were travelling. Beauty's testimony is important in understanding how police behaved towards women and those who were left behind when apartheid was not at its peak and some people still had hope in relying on the law. This event happened at the same time as the Rivonia Trial, and it is interesting to compare the attitudes of the accused in the Rivonia Trial with Beauty's personal experiences with the police.

Margaret Elizabeth Titus-Heideveld (Cape Town)

Titus is testifying about an event in 1976 when her son was shot. He was shot in the street and when she tried to climb into the ambulance with him she was prevented because they told her he was already dead. Her son was in the hospital for a whole year where he was artificially kept alive and underwent eight operations. The police attempted to hold him in Pollsmoor Prison, but the doctor would not let him go due to the severity of his health. After he was released from the hospital he appeared in court. He was convicted without his charge being known. This incident occurred at the time riots were happening in their hometown. Titus had to look around for her child in multiple locations. Her son still had continuing health issues due to the injuries he suffered after being shot. She also testifies that he has not been mentally sound since he was shot and he never returned to the person he was before the incident. Later he was picked up by the police and Titus did not know where he was and once again, had to look in multiple locations. She says she was constantly worried and could not sleep until he was found. The only thing she asked the Commission for was financial assistance for his family. At this time he was still receiving treatment at the hospital which made work difficult and drained his family's finances.

Titus' request for financial assistance was very common at TRC hearings. Survivors of apartheid sanctioned violence often struggled with memory, anxiety, and physical conditions caused by bullets or other trauma. Titus' son experienced memory loss and nervous ticks on top of his injuries that left him unable to eat solid food. Titus' testimony reflects the common theme of mothers looking for their children, but also serves as a great example of the type of assistance that people requested from the TRC. Despite families suffering major losses financial requests tended to be very conservative. Some people would simply ask for help in obtaining a tombstone, others may request assistance in finishing their education. As Titus' son had a wife and three children, Margaret Elizabeth requested a small amount of money to help support the kids who were very young at the time. Small requests like the one made by Titus reveals how much Black people were struggling under apartheid. They were not aiming to receive large sums of money or other forms of compensation, the requests made to the TRC were aimed at making daily life more manageable and to help survivors deal with the ways their life was changed by a gross human rights violation.

Nomakula Evelyn Zweni-Heideveld (Cape Town)

In 1960 Zweni protested against passes and joined an organization, but this organization had been infiltrated by Boers who reported them. On the 21st of March it was her job to help organize the march. She recalls that bullets were flying all over and she took cover next to a shop. Her husband was shot on this day but he could not get treatment because if you went to the hospital you would be identified as a protester. She claimed there were at least fifteen bodies while the official report of this incident recorded two deaths. Her claims led the Commission to look further into the incident and correct the number of deaths. After this march Boers were going to people's houses and eventually they went to hers. They beat her, but she fought back because she knew that if she died she wanted to die in the struggle against apartheid. The

beatings during 1960 were common but Zweni says that she would verbally resist them. She would tell the men beating her that they were visitors on her land. After years of harassment and beatings at the hands of Boer's Zweni left in exile one day. She took virtually nothing with her and left her small child behind, at the time of this testimony the child had not been found and she had left it behind over twenty years ago. At the end she requests help from the Commission, she states that she has lost her house and she has nothing, but she doesn't make a specific request, just some sort of aid for her. She states that she still has chronic pain from her beatings and at times it prevents her from going anywhere.

This testimony demonstrates the pressure that women who were apart of the anti-apartheid struggle faced. Child care was largely a woman's responsibility and the decision to leave her child was very painful and difficult for her. Upon her return to South Africa she looked everywhere for her kid but was unable to locate them. She also had a lot of responsibility in terms of injuries. Because neither she or her husband could go to the hospital she attempted to do all the necessary care from home, including removing bullets. This testimony exposes how far removed from resources Black communities were under apartheid as well as some of the responsibilities that forced Black women to take on.

Nodwzakazi (Nondwzaki) Juqu-Heideveld (Cape Town)

In this testimony Juqu tells the story of her son, Fuzile Petros Juqu, who was shot and killed at the age of 15 in 1976. Fuzile went to a toi-toi with friends and as it got late that night Juqu began looking for him. Eventually his friends admitted that he had been shot. She and her husband called all the hospitals they could, but no one knew where he was. The next day she told her husband she couldn't work that day and went to look for her son. A few days later her husband found him in the mortuary. She recalls that Fuzile's shirt had more holes from the bullets than she had ever seen. Her one request to the Commission is to have a tombstone for her son. At the end, Chairperson Burton commented on the state of South African society by saying, "In those years in the 70's and the 80's it was a very abnormal society when your children were late home you knew right away that there was a real problem. And you knew the places you had to go looking for them... We would just say now - we would prefer to say now my child has just went away with his friends. For us to be able to reach that stage, it is because of people like you, people who had come forward. People who were victims, it is those people who are - who have made us to be here today."

At the end of Juqu's testimony Ms. Burton offers an acknowledgement of how important this type of testimony is. By bringing these stories forward and making the struggles of Black parents and teens widely known across South African society a new national memory was being created. Before the TRC many white South Africans were able to live in ignorance and did not believe that Black South Africans were mistreated. Juqu's testimony and experience of looking for her son for days on end legitimizes other similar testimony and contribute towards a broad understanding of what it was like to live through apartheid in the 1970's and '80's.

Joan Mantombi King-Heideveld (Cape Town)

In this testimony King tells about the death of her husband in Gugulethu in 1976. She begins by talking about the fear that she experienced living at that time. She was always worried about her children and if they were not home she would have to run around town and look for them. In December of 1976 she took her three children away for the holiday's but left her husband at home. She arrived home on the 6th of January only to find out her husband had been missing since the 26th of December. She went to all of her neighbors asking if they had seen her husband. She and a friend found her husband's body at a mortuary. No one would come forward and say what happened to her husband because they were worried they would also be targeted by the police. His cause of death was listed as a fall which hurt his head and the government said there was no one who could be charged for his death. A lawyer told her after the inquest that there was another doctor's diagnosis that was not read; in this report the cause of death was listed as a gunshot to the head at close range which blew away his eye. King's husband was the main source of income for the family and she was suddenly left alone with three children, so she had to begin working more than one job. Her only request to the Commission was to know what really happened to her husband and to have a plaque with the names of people who were killed so they could be remembered as heroes. At the end of her testimony a Commissioner says, "What strikes me... we've not just your experiences but the experiences of many other women before you... is how you seem to do a lot of running around, moving from place to place. Not really knowing where to find your loved one, whether it is your son, or your husband."

King's request, while not entirely unique, is still interesting. The TRC's stance on the deaths of Black activists or by-standers was that they were heroes. Here we can see King playing into this narrative and wanting her children to know what their father died for. Many people were killed haphazardly by the police, and not for actual political reasons, which completes the idea that they were heroes. By ascribing purpose to these deaths that did not occur in the political struggle it lessens the pain in some ways, but also is lenient on the state that allowed these murders. By not recognizing that some deaths were not related to politics and that some of these people were not joining the fight read to give up their lives, the previous government is let off the hook because the TRC claims everything happened for a reason and all of these sacrifices are what allowed the transition to democracy that was occurring at the time of these hearings. At the end it is also interesting that the Commissioner acknowledges how many women went from place to place looking for a loved one and how they dealt with the pain of not knowing.

Gugulethu Seven

Cynthia Ngewu-Heideveld (Cape Town)

Cynthia Ngewu was the mother of Christopher Ngewu who was part of the Gugulethu Seven. On the day of his death several comrades went to her house and told her her son had been shot and that she should look for him. The police did not know whether or not he had been shot and they sent her to the mortuary, there she identified his body that she was later told had twenty five bullet wounds. That night she turned on the TV and saw the police dragging her son off the

back of a car by a rope that was tied around his waist. Barnard, the policeman, harassed her and her family after Christopher's death, by mocking them and laughing about Christopher's death. The magistrate tried to dictate when Christopher could be buried, but her and the other mother's waited and buried their sons when they wanted to and after family from other areas of the country had arrived. A week or two after the funeral armed police showed up at her house demanding she make a statement. After this she had to go to Wynberg for an inquest where she was told her son was shot by Barnard and Coetzee. She testifies about how helpful her son was around the house and how she relied on him. When asked what she thought about the whole situation she says she could not understand why they were killed. She says she feels like they could have been warned or even wounded, but that they did not need to be killed.

Irene Mtsingwa-Heideveld (Cape Town)

Mtsingwa begins by expressing the fact that she never thought her son would be killed or in a place where boys were murdered by the police because he was very well behaved. Her son went missing and she had to look for several days in every hospital and police station she could find. While she was looking for her son, she had a grandchild who passed away from an illness. Eventually, it was a neighbor who found her son in a mortuary. She said the worst part was seeing the body of her son and the others all over, whether it be the news or newspapers. She echoes sentiments put forth by the other mothers when she asks why their children had to be killed instead of arrested or something more humane. Dr. Boraine asks Mtsingwa whether she ever found out exactly what happened to her child and she responded by saying, "But now I didn't ask because I had too much misery at that time, because of the illness of my grandchild. So I didn't really have all - all the power or the energy to go and find out because I was already drained." At the inquest that Mtsingwa and Ngewu were taken to, there were no translators and Mtsingwa did not know what was going on and she is still murky about the circumstances of her son's death. She asks the Commission for help because her son was supposed to help support her and provide her with money.

Mtsingwa's testimony corroborates the testimonies of the other mothers and further highlights how many Black women were left destitute without their sons to help support them. This testimony also highlights how many families were left in the dark about the lives of young activists. Mtsingwa did not know her son was part of the ANC, he kept this a secret to keep her safe, and therefore she did not ever think he would be targeted by the police. Her discussion of looking for her son and losing her grandchild also illustrate how draining and upsetting the process of looking for a missing child was. To deal with two family deaths in such a short amount of time was very traumatizing for her and she states at the beginning of her testimony that she feels feverish and struggles with memory.

Eunice Thembiso-Heideveld (Cape Town)

On the day that she lost her son, she was working in town. As she was leaving early in the morning for work her son came to her house and asked for 2 rand, which she gave to him because she wanted to help him find work. He insisted on walking her to the train station that she took to work but she did not want him to take her because she went alone every morning. He insisted that he take her to the station and eventually they left the house together, this was the last time she saw him. While she was working her boss came in and told her there were Russians in Gugulethu that killed seven kids. That night, her daughter turned on the TV and they saw Jubulani's body. They began arguing, her daughter was insisting it was Jubulani while Thembiso said it couldn't be because she saw him this morning. She was especially distraught because the news only showed her son's body, not the others. She states that what made her cry and what was making her cry during the testimony was the fact that the police were treating people like animals. She states her son was treated even worse than a dog, he was treated like an ant. She states that she has been suffering since the incident, she gets treatment every month and must take pills otherwise she loses her memory. She follows up by saying, "The pain that [indistinct] - I would like to say some more, something has really disturbing me now, this is something that took me to Court. If the Courts - when they called somebody's name they would laugh, now we wouldn't know what they were laughing at us or who else, we didn't even have companions with us." She says she struggles to support her son's three children and wife who often don't have money to send the kids to school. She says she is living a horrible life because she lost her husband in 1987 after he was taken by the police and her daughter is missing as well.

The trauma that Thembiso has had to endure at the hands of the apartheid state is expressed very clearly in her testimony. She has lost people in her family in at least three separate instances. The amount of loss that she had to endure is indicative of the brutality of the apartheid government and is further proof that every Black person was actively harmed by the previous regime. Like other mothers, including mothers who testified with her, her trauma manifested as memory loss. The story of the inquest in Wynberg regarding the death of Jubulani and the other sons also illustrates how the state worked at every level to keep Black communities disadvantaged. By not understanding anything that was happening in court there was no way for these mothers to even attempt to dispute the charges against their sons and they also were left in the dark and had no idea the circumstances of their sons death. The fact that Mtsingwa found out about her son's death from watching TV and not from anyone actually taking the time to inform her, is deeply traumatizing and paints a picture of how disposable the lives and feelings of Black people were at this time.