

Perpetrator Trauma, Empathic Unsettlement, and the Uncanny: Conceptualizations of Perpetrators in South Africa's Truth Commission Special Report

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Abstract: A fixed and reductionist 'image' of the perpetrator in filmed media is one with which audiences are all too familiar, whether consciously or not. This article uses perpetrator trauma theory, empathic appeals, unsettling, and the uncanny to explore the South African television programme Truth Commission Special Report in order to illustrate the ways in which the broadcast challenged or reified the conception of perpetrators as 'monsters'. This will be exemplified through an analysis of several segments from the programme as it covered the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in transitional South Africa, and particularly its amnesty hearings of apartheid era perpetrators.

Keywords: perpetrators; documentary; South Africa; truth commission; trauma

Introduction: The Image of the Perpetrator

Referring to the intense public scrutiny of perpetrators in modern society, Saira Mohamed asks: 'Has this staring yielded any greater understanding?'¹ The fascination with perpetrators, she asserts, has led us to place them in boxes, categorizing people as 'cruel sadists', 'true believers', or 'pliant conformists', and thus objectifying and individualizing them rather than allowing our encounter with them to provide any kind of enlightenment. This is especially problematic in documentary projects within transitional or post-conflict settings, in which a fixed image keeps the subjects – the perpetrators – stuck in the conflict, rather than allowing them to become dynamic actors in a setting of reconciliation.

This leads to questions of how filmic narrative around perpetrators acts as a canvas onto which we (using 'we' in reference to audience or viewers), according to Mohamed, project an unambiguous concept of morality, particularly after conflict, and how we place our sense of self within this construction of morality. Mohamed's claim that the tendency of media is to be reductionist and static in its representations of perpetrators is the starting point for this examination of the perpetrator within documentary television in transitioning political contexts, utilizing episodes of the South African Broadcasting Corporation's *Truth Commission Special Report* as a case study. In what ways did this broadcast's investigative documentary framework either

1 Saira Mohamed, 'Of Monsters and Men: Perpetrator Trauma and Mass Atrocity', *Columbia Law Review*, 115 (2015), 1157-1216, (p. 1161).



support stereotypical conceptualizations of perpetrators, or allow viewers to critically engage with the label of perpetrator in the South African context? Though there have been several theoretical approaches developed in order to glean an understanding of perpetrators, this study turns first to perpetrator trauma to uncover a wider understanding of the perpetrator experience of conflict in a way that breaks down problematic victim-perpetrator binaries. Acknowledging that a perpetrator may have also experienced a form of trauma creates space for potential empathic connection, though still with a critical distance, which is what unsettlement will refer to within my discussion of Dominick LaCapra's concept of empathic unsettlement.² This has the potential to be a politically and socially influential practice in transitional contexts. If viewers are able to move beyond simply 'staring' at perpetrators, and instead respond to perpetrator narrative with self-reflection, justice is more than retributive; it can also become transformative. Lastly, this study's inclusion of the potential for viewers to experience the uncanny brings a necessary critical lens to this discussion by acknowledging the challenges of perpetrator representation within the wider 'post-conflict' landscape, even if a complex narrative is achieved. The three theoretical lenses of perpetrator trauma, empathic unsettlement, and the uncanny will provide a framework for exploring perpetrator representation within several segments of the widely watched South African television programme, *Truth Commission Special Report*, and to contemplate the role this award-winning programme may have played in relation to South Africa's transitional justice process.

SABC's *Truth Commission Special Report* and the South African Context

Often, as audiences scrutinize perpetrators that go on trial literally or figuratively, 'one person becomes a stand-in for all of the perpetrators connected to the same tragedy, and the world stares, hoping to grasp how this nightmare, this stain on humanity, could have happened'.³ In a sense, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) allowed South Africa as a whole to put Apartheid-era perpetrators on trial, and the media coverage became the window into that trial for the majority of the population unable to attend hearings in person. Media became a primary tool in shaping people's perception of the transitional process and of the perpetrators who engaged with it. However, the media could not cover every amnesty or human rights violation hearing, so those individuals whose stories made the cut into the hour-long weekly broadcasts, radio announcements, or press releases became the face of the perpetrator. In particular, the South African Broadcast Corporation's (SABC) television series

2 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 78.

3 Mohamed, pp. 1160-61.

Truth Commission Special Report acted as a key news source and informed a majority of South Africans about the happenings of the truth commission.⁴ The show aired between 21 April 1996 and 29 March 1998, with an average of 1.1 to 1.3 million people tuning in each week for the first year on air, and an average of 510,000 people tuning in during its second year.⁵ Three quarters of its eighty-eight episodes focused on the amnesty hearings and their corresponding perpetrator narratives and delved in further with interviews and investigative journalism. The influence of the programme and its visual staying power calls for investigation of whether the narrative was able to move beyond these metaphorical images and into a wider understanding of perpetratorship in the Apartheid era.

It is essential to situate the image of the perpetrator within the socio-historical realities of South Africa. Apartheid was a system introduced in 1948 that lasted until 1994, characterized by racial segregation and gross inequality and maintained through particularly oppressive and brutal policies of economic, spatial, and physical violence. On macro and micro levels, the state was founded on structural violence, giving way to the argument that all those involved in statutory mechanisms – and those who were beneficiaries of its inherent structural violence – were perpetrators of this violence, in addition to those who were involved in the physical violence that became part and parcel of the system. It was the breadth of violence, and subsequently, the number of victims, that led to the development of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to deal with the past during South Africa's transition to democracy. South Africa was tasked with addressing five decades of Apartheid (which was informed by centuries of colonialism) in which a majority of people were either perpetrators, victims, or both. Retributive justice simply would not have had the capacity to address such high levels of violence. Through the process of the TRC, the commission had to define what 'perpetrator' meant (which will be discussed), and the media then played an integral part in communicating that to the public. By examining the conceptualization of 'perpetrator' in the South African transitional context, we can seek to better understand the implications of that label in societies grappling with institutional and structural violence. We can also attempt to gain insight into how that conceptualization contributes to a wider understanding of conflict actors and what comes next for them, as well as for the people who must continue to interact with them in a day-to-day capacity beyond media representations. These insights can be theorized through perpetrator trauma, empathic unsettlement, and the uncanny.

4 Annelies Verdoolaege, 'Media Representations of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and their commitment to reconciliation', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17:2 (2005) 181-199, (p. 196).

5 Gunnar Theissen, 'Object of Trust and Hatred: Public Attitudes Toward the TRC', in *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Did the TRC Deliver?*, ed. by Audrey Chapman & Hugo van der Merwe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 191-216 (p. 202).

Perpetrator Trauma as an Entry Point

Perpetrator trauma will act as a conceptual grounding through which to justify the need for a dynamic representation of perpetrators, particularly in transitional or post-conflict settings. Scholars of perpetrator trauma assert that ‘perpetrators can experience their crimes as trauma.’⁶ Although the occurrence of psychic suffering as a result of *committing* a crime is not often addressed in trauma scholarship,⁷ it is a necessary consideration. Judith Herman’s vital work *Trauma and Recovery* explores trauma after violence, in which she examines former soldiers as an example of a traumatized community. Though she does not refer to it as perpetrator trauma, this choice speaks to the possibility that being a perpetrator of violence does not preclude an individual to traumatization. After large-scale conflict, as large numbers of perpetrators reintegrate – often without addressing their trauma – it can cause stagnation in the process of reconciliation on a societal level.⁸ Addressing trauma is necessary ‘if perpetrators are to distance themselves from an earlier implication in deadly ideology and practices.’⁹ This is particularly poignant when considering Robert J. Lifton’s claim that the experience of extreme trauma creates two selves; the ‘second self’ is able to adapt to the situation at hand, and ‘enables a relatively ordinary person to commit evil’.¹⁰ Even beyond that, for perpetrators, the doubling allows what Lifton calls the transfer of conscience. The conscience of the second self becomes ‘associated with the group, with the sense of duty’, allowing the perpetrator to adapt to evil while avoiding guilt.¹¹ If the transfer of conscience is allowed to continue into a post-conflict context, there is little chance for perpetrators to distance themselves from the group that has become the holding space for their guilt or general response to trauma.

These two selves appear throughout Morag’s formulation of perpetrator trauma as it is represented within film; she discusses ‘the five crises of perpetrator trauma’, which are manifestations of what she terms the perpetrator complex. The perpetrator complex refers to tension between guilt feelings (motivated by narcissism and looking backwards) and sense of guilt (motivated by victims and looking forward) as experienced by the post-traumatic perpetrator.¹² This is a type of doubling of the self in that only one – the sense of guilt - carries true feelings of conscience, if we

6 Mohamed, p. 1162.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 1165.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 1165.

9 Raya Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir: Perpetrator Trauma and Cinema* (London: IB Tauris & Co Ltd, 2013), p.13; LaCapra, p. 79.

10 Robert J. Lifton, ‘Understanding the Traumatized Self: Imagery, Symbolization, and Transformation,’ in *Human Adaptation to Extreme Stress from the Holocaust to Vietnam*, ed. by John P. Wilson, Zev Harel, and Boaz Kahana (New York: Plenum, 1988) pp. 7-31 (p. 29).

11 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

12 Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir*, p. 131.

define conscience as driven by moral righteousness. In the films she analyses, Morag postulates that these doublings, and the tensions between them, manifest themselves as five specific crises: the crisis of evidence (the gap between the horror and the evidence of such); the crisis of disclosure (the concealment which takes place within the narrative); the crisis of gender (power relations within the moment of perpetration and in dealing with it after the fact); the crisis of audience (an absence of an imagined supportive community); and the crisis of narrativization (the gap between the identity of the perpetrator before inflicting violence and in the testimony of the violence).¹³ Each of these crises is representative of epistemological gaps between the perpetrator's understanding of their own identity and the testimony that then binds them to the label of perpetrator. The inclusion of these tensions in film perhaps draws viewers into a space where the source of said doubling, which Lifton claims is the experience of extreme trauma, can be addressed.

Grappling with perpetrator trauma is also necessitated through Herman's assertion that traumatic events destroy the ties between individuals and community;¹⁴ if perpetrators are continually isolated from wider society, there is less potential for them to distance themselves from their past actions and ideologies. Because of this, it is in the best interest of perpetrator and society for perpetrator trauma to be recognized as a potential reality and to respond to it appropriately. Recognizing the humanity of perpetrators also begins to break down any reductionist perpetrator-as-monster image that may exist; this also hints at the idea that any person could be capable of such acts, an important note as this study moves into theorizing empathic unsettlement. It must be emphasized that trauma and victimhood are not synonymous; an individual can be traumatized without being a victim. However, perpetrators are certainly not always traumatized by their acts either. That it also not to say that those labelled as 'perpetrator' cannot also simultaneously hold the label of 'victim'. Within the discourse around perpetratorship in South Africa:

[D]uring the deliberations of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, three major theoretical transformations emerged and played a significant role in human rights discourse: first, each category defined by the Commission (victim, perpetrator, bystander, beneficiary) was examined independently of the others; second, the main categories (victim and perpetrator) were considered hetero- rather than homogeneous [...] and third and consequently, the victim-perpetrator binarism was broken, opening the possibility for interchange between the two categories.¹⁵

13 Raya Morag, 'Perpetrator Trauma and Current Israeli Documentary Cinema', *Camera Obscura*, 27.2 (2012), 93-132 (p. 98).

14 Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 3.

15 Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir*, p.12.

In legitimizing this type of thinking, the TRC has firstly recognized that binarisms such as good and evil and labels such as perpetrator are all discursive constructions. Secondly, by dismantling these labels' perceived exclusivity, the TRC has given credence to perpetrator trauma as a possibility, identifying the fluidity and overlap within each of these experiences. This is instrumental in the transitional setting because 'the systematic study of psychological trauma [...] depends on the support of a political movement';¹⁶ the political currency given to these concepts by the TRC creates a space in which to explore them.

That being said, South African scholarship has seen only a small amount of consideration regarding perpetrator trauma within the already wanting wider field of perpetrator studies. Most notably, Pumla Godobo-Madikizela has produced a comprehensive body of work on trauma, memory, and forgiveness, of which a cornerstone is her largely empathetic view of notorious Apartheid assassin Eugene de Kock, based on a series of personal interviews she undertook with him during his incarceration.¹⁷ Otherwise, perpetrator trauma has appeared as an honourable mention within South African focused research, but never as a theoretical backbone.¹⁸

Morag claims that despite developments in understanding the complexities of perpetratorship (one of which is recognizing perpetrator trauma), these developments have not yet reached the sphere of cinema research in any great depth.¹⁹ Morag's is one of the few scholarly approaches to the interactions of these labels within film and media representation. She posits that the interaction of perpetrator trauma and cinema happens through several different pathways: one that is particularly relevant to this case study is in the similarities of courtrooms and documentary, both of which are part trial of the perpetrator (as previously highlighted), and part performance,²⁰ each led by narrative and the contextualization of that narrative. Some of the stereotypical narratives that appear can be seen outlined in Don Foster's overview of the South African media's portrayal of perpetrators during and after the Apartheid era in the *Theatres of Violence* chapter, 'Popular Representations of Perpetrators'. He focuses on stereotypes of perpetrators that continually surface in media portrayals, while problematizing what he calls these representations' 'silences, their formulaic entries, or their sensationalist and sentimental portrayals'.²¹ Within this problematization,

16 Herman, p. 9.

17 See Pumla Godobo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died that Night: A Story of Forgiveness* (Claremont: New Africa Books, 2013).

18 See Mohamed; Morag; Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

19 Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir*, p. 3.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 144.

21 Don Foster, 'Popular Representations of Perpetrators,' in *The Theatre of Violence: Narratives of Protagonists in the South African Conflict*, ed. by Don Foster, Paul Haupt, & Marésa de Beer (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2005), pp. 27-54 (p. 52).

Foster subtly calls for a more sophisticated lens through which to view perpetrators in order to deny the audience the ability to distance themselves from what tends towards a collection of reductionist caricatures.

Representation & Empathic Unsettlement

In order to scrutinize 'the image of the perpetrator', it is necessary to identify the orality around the image that either shapes or challenges its fixed-ness, as Saira Mohamed argues we perceive it. Orality in this context refers to the narration around the image, as well as the editing and framing which structures how the story is told. This also allows consideration of how orality around an image contributes to the categorization that Foster identifies and problematizes. Edward Hees challenges the idea of a fixed image at all when he calls it a 'naïve realist assumption that the image can stand alone as a true, correct, image', and calls for further analysis of not only the image, but the forces that shape it, going on to state that it is necessary to:

create a scepticism in relation to that image, to what it shows, and what it tells—and ultimately to encourage a move into the analysis and interpretation of what it is the image wishes to show or tell, with the emphasis now on the telling, or the construction of meaning.²²

Ideally, this construction of meaning around the image of the perpetrator is one that provides a greater understanding of the structures of violence at play, which creates a pathway towards a potential empathic connection with the perpetrator, and even a certain degree of learning for the audience.²³ The relationship between contextualization and the message imparted is why Hees's emphasis on the telling and construction of meaning is a linchpin for discussion around complex perpetrator narratives. Hees's word choice in asking 'what it is the image wishes to show or tell' is important to deconstruct. The metaphorical 'image' of the perpetrator (though also tied to its literal appearance in media formats such as television broadcast) is the focal point of this study, which, according to Hees, means that the core of this study is asking what story the perpetrator representation is trying to tell. This in itself becomes complex because it is often a story with many authors, including the subject (perpetrator), but also likely includes the journalists, producers, and editors who make editorial decisions surrounding it. Context also matters, and the image is altered when the narrative is told via an interview, a courtroom testimony, or through the third-person; this study

22 Edwin Hees, 'Proteus and the Dialectic of History,' in *Marginal Lives & Painful Pasts: South African Cinema after Apartheid*, compiled by Martin Botha (Parklands: Genutgig! Publishers, 2007) pp. 89-103 (p. 93).

23 Mohamed, pp. 1159-1160.

does not have room to unpack all of these influencing factors, but they should be kept in mind throughout the analysis. Edwin Hees posits that recognition of the structural factors of violence, which comes through said contextualization, is essential in order to empathize with a perpetrator.²⁴ In turn, this helps to break down the victim-perpetrator binary that is pervasive in much of the orality around perpetrators.

It may seem counterintuitive to seek learning from the representation of a perpetrator of violent crime and human rights abuses, but Susanne Knittel argues otherwise: 'the idea that something could be learned from people such as Eichmann or Stangl [famously treacherous Holocaust perpetrators] may seem unsettling, but perhaps a certain degree of unsettlement is exactly what is required to shake visitors out of a distancing, even complacent idea about the past'.²⁵ Knittel discusses this learning in terms of physical sites of memory and documentary exhibitions, and more specifically, Holocaust sites. Though Knittel does not address filmic representations of perpetrators in this context, this particular conceptualization of unsettlement seems quite pertinent when applied to media representations. Because memory itself is intangible, perhaps the abstraction of a site of memory can be expanded beyond related physical spaces. As Knittel also argues, a 'site' of memory as encapsulated in cultural representations such as a documentary series has reach beyond physical space; viewers of the media become 'visitors' to a more metaphoric site of memory in a way that is able to transcend spatial and temporal constraints that are placed on something like a museum, exhibition, or memorial. This removal of boundaries on the learning that Knittel calls for at physical sites is partly why media has such potential to harness transformative power.

The unsettlement that Knittel identifies is essential in 'post-conflict' scenarios, where many viewers may also be beneficiaries. A beneficiary refers to a person who was not directly involved in crime or violence, but who helps to keep oppressive regimes in power.²⁶ Knittel's concept of unsettlement is a literal one, which allows viewers to reflect on the situation at hand as well as their own positionality in relation to it. This unsettlement can also be related to LaCapra's more specific concept of empathic unsettlement. The core of this intellection is that the individual who is listening to a trauma testimony responds empathically, while still being reflective about the difference between the trauma itself, the experience of the narrator, and the experience of listening to that trauma, thus recognizing the separation between self and other.²⁷ LaCapra only discussed this in relation to empathy with a victim, but based on perpe-

24 Hees, p. 93.

25 Susanne C. Knittel, *The Historical Uncanny: Disability, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Holocaust Memory* (New York: Fordham University, 2015), p.168.

26 Mahmood Mamdani, 'The Truth According to the TRC,' in *The Politics of Memory: Truth, Healing, and Social Justice*, ed. by Ifi Amadiume and Abdullahi An-Na'im, (London: Routledge, 1994) pp. 176-183 (p. 181).

27 LaCapra, p. 78.

trator trauma theory paired with the breaking down of the victim-perpetrator binary, Knittel argues that we should apply LaCapra's empathic unsettlement to perpetrators as well.²⁸ A complex and dynamic perpetrator narrative that invites empathy should ideally allow the listener or viewer to experience the narrative while feeling unsettled but still identify with the narrator or subject. It maintains a slight distance between 'us' (the viewer/listener) and 'them' (the perpetrators), while still subtly insisting that any of us would be capable of these actions and that, in view of the larger structures within which this trauma took place within and the potential for beneficiaries, some of us might actually be culpable. This ensures that documentary coverage of conflict and post-conflict settings does not become an unattached and didactic practice, but rather inherently includes us as viewers and often even implicated in the system or its legacies. This is one of the ways in which media may be able to work as a tool for transitional justice in and of itself.

Challenges of Perpetrator Representation in Media

Though empathic unsettlement between perpetrators and viewers of perpetrator narratives may allow for consideration of structures of violence, there are still several challenges to keep in mind when discussing perpetrator testimony. Sibylle Schmidt takes a critical look at perpetrator testimony, breaking the discussion into what she calls the testimony's hermeneutic and moral problems of trust, truth, and authority. She does so in order to suggest how to 'giv[e] and receiv[e] [...] testimony as a social practice',²⁹ and to hopefully be able to move beyond these challenges. Schmidt's understanding of trust in testimony says that in order for testimony to have any sort of value, the listener must approach it with a certain level of trust in what the speaker offers; without trust in the testimony, there is nothing to be learned from it (as Knittel suggests we perhaps should), and the practice becomes irrelevant. Trust in perpetrator testimony is particularly risky, as they have something to gain from telling their story in a particular way, especially in a context such as an amnesty hearing. However, Schmidt also notes that 'testimony is not a piece of information which we assess independently, but a sort of dialogue with normative social implications'.³⁰ This was certainly true within the TRC's amnesty process, as it took on outside research and considered victim testimony in an attempt to ascertain whether the perpetrators were telling the truth in its entirety. Albeit, Schmidt also identifies two types of truth: internal and external. External truth refers to the facts of how the incident happens, while

28 Knittel, p. 131.

29 Sibylle Schmidt, 'Perpetrators' Knowledge: What and How Can We Learn from Perpetrator Testimony?', *Journal of Perpetrator Research*, 1.1 (2017), 85-104 (p. 90).

30 Schmidt, p. 91.

internal truth refers to the inner experience of the event.³¹ While the TRC focused on external truths, it inadvertently shed light on internal truths as well, which is what the *Special Report* broadcast was able to expand on in some of the perpetrators' cases. Though internal truths are fallible in terms of historical record, they can elucidate 'social and psychological truths' of the perpetrators and allow consideration of not only the truths that are shared, but also what is silenced.³² Lastly, Schmidt discusses authority, stating that accepting a testimony authorizes it, and thus, empowers it. She does not assert this as an inevitability, but instead notes it as something to be aware of as researchers – and in this case, media practitioners – dealing with perpetrator testimony and re-presenting it to an audience.

Media scholarship has also noted that films which foreground the narratives of perpetrators in order to provide a more complex understanding of them have the potential to minimize engagement with the wider context of the violent act. Macarena Gómez-Barras's analysis of documentary portrayal of the female perpetrator in Abu Ghraib argues that whether intentionally or not, focusing on a perpetrator and being reductionist about the victim (which is an issue in and of itself that will be further discussed later) individualizes violence rather than delves into the larger scale issues at play,³³ such as the structural and institutional factors that influenced the violence. This is problematic because, as already identified, acknowledging structural issues also creates the possibility for the empathic connection and unsettlement that are necessary for complex perpetrator narratives that lend themselves to moving through larger scale conflict.

Wendy Hesford's discussion on representational violence widens Gómez-Barras' critique of individualization to say more generally that 'survivor narratives often get caught up in discursive practices (legal, religious, and therapeutic) that further individualize violence and trauma and in doing so prompt passive empathy or judgement from viewers rather than a stance of critical witnessing'.³⁴ This can happen with perpetrator narratives as well. The use of individual stories as examples to prove a point risks creating the perception that 'such violence becomes about a few "bad apples" as many have commented, rather than pointing at the broader institutional violence at work'.³⁵ In South Africa's transitional era, it has been argued that both the media and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission fell into this trap, and the intentional individualization within both trial and performance became problematic for perpe-

31 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

33 Macarena Gómez-Barras, 'The Female Perpetrator', in *A Companion to Contemporary Documentary Film*, ed. by Alexandra Juhasz and Alisa Lebow (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2015), pp. 524-535 (p. 525).

34 Wendy Hesford, 'Rape Stories: Material Rhetoric and the Trauma of Representation,' in *Haunting Violations: Feminist Criticism and the Crisis of the 'Real'*, ed. by Wendy Hesford and Wendy Kozol (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001) pp. 31-46 (p.17).

35 Gómez-Barras, p. 525.

trators as well as victims.³⁶ This speaks to the possibility that these singular narratives can, at times, be more detrimental than helpful to the cause of finding empathic connection with perpetrators.

Despite these challenges, allowing perpetrator narratives is necessary. When presented in a way which prompts critical empathy for perpetrators (paired with unsettlement as LaCapra envisaged), it first acknowledges the reality of perpetrator trauma and subsequently allows an understanding of perpetrators as dynamic actors capable of change, both of which are needed within successful reconciliatory processes. Additionally, because empathic connection is not without circumscription, there remains room for both empathy and critical consumption of these narratives. This is essential because the potential for empathic unsettlement to cause audience reflection on culpability is a positive step in moving away from the fixed image of perpetrator, unravelling the binaries of 'us and them' and 'victim and perpetrator'. It is these grey areas that make transitional processes possible at all and necessitate complex perpetrator-focused narratives despite the challenges it entails.

Perpetrator-Focused Media in South Africa and the Uncanny

In 1990s South Africa, intense media involvement in the transitional process³⁷ arguably created a high risk for sensationalizing perpetratorship, and thus reified a negative and fixed image. The structure of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission itself became performance-based, a national stage on which victims and perpetrators were expected to showcase their pain. The performance of perpetrators included, as Desmond Tutu said, to 'have to confess publicly in the full glare of television lights that they did those ghastly things'; Tutu went on to say that to have to confess in that setting is 'pretty, pretty tough'.³⁸ However, at the time, it was not taken into account that the media involvement and the concept of mass witnessing in general may have only offered another 'spectacular' way to deliver testimony, rather than prompting unfettered

36 Martha Evans, 'Amnesty and Amnesia: The Truth & Reconciliation Commission in Narrative Film', in *Marginal Lives & Painful Past: South African Cinema after Apartheid*, ed. by Martin Botha. (Parklands: Genutgtig! Publishers, 2007), pp. 256-286 (p.274).

37 Verdoolaege, p. 181; Graeme Simpson, 'A Brief Evaluation of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Some lessons for Societies in Transition.' (Cape Town: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 1998), 1-36; Brandon Hamber, Thhoki Mofokeng, and Graeme Simpson, 'Evaluating the Role and Function of Civil Society in a Changing South Africa: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a Case Study', Paper presented at *The Role of Southern Civil Organisations in the Promotion of Peace*, DHR Seminar, hosted by the Catholic Institute for International Relations London, 10 November, 1997. <<https://www.csvr.org.za/publications/1715-evaluating-the-role-and-function-of-civil-society-in-a-changing-south-africa-the-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-as-a-case-study>> [accessed 8 December 2018]

38 Cited in *Long Night's Journey into Day: South Africa's Search for Truth and Reconciliation*, dir. by Frances Reid and Deborah Hoffman (Iris Films, 2000).

truth-telling.³⁹ The weekly television broadcast series *Truth Commission Special Report* was the most widely consumed media coverage of the truth commission at the time, and it was within this investigative documentary format that there was space to delve beyond just the testimony of those who came forward looking for amnesty, and included interviews with both perpetrators and victims, as well as investigation into the fuller picture.

This fuller picture is certainly helpful in creating the space for empathic connection and unsettlement as previously outlined; however, the other side of this deeper representation of perpetrators through documentary format is in creating an uncanny experience of trauma for viewers who were victims. Freud defines the uncanny as 'that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar'.⁴⁰ The fear stems from viewing or experiencing something that lies between the familiar and the unfamiliar, so that it becomes unplaceable. The way in which the uncanny surfaces in the structure of the TRC in general, and as is then represented (and re-presented) in *Special Report*, is the familiar view of seeing white people, men in particular, utilize the statutory system in place at the expense of people of colour. Though Apartheid had ended and the black-led African National Congress was now in power, there is familiarity in the way that the white perpetrators were again able to use the system to their benefit. Under the Apartheid state, most white South Africans were overtly benefitting from the systems of oppression in place; under the truth for amnesty model in the transitional period, Apartheid-era perpetrators were able to yet again exploit the system by telling the truth about the crimes they had committed, and many were able to come out without legal consequence. This was all while victims, a group made up of majority black South Africans, were arguably left with little sense of justice and certainly no material reparations.⁴¹ Under the guise of 'the new South Africa', watching the TRC unfold via media representations such as the *Truth Commission Special Report* provided a potential experience of the uncanny for viewers, particularly victims, who agreed with the critique that truth was traded for justice. This also seems to assert that the uncanniness will not end after the broadcast does; the original trauma remains, it was repeated through the uncanny experience of viewing perpetrator testimony as a part of the amnesty clause, and thus the same trauma became built into the new system. Perhaps *Special Report* and other perpetrator-focused media is but a time capsule of the first appearance of the uncanny after Apartheid and its traumas, and for some, the experience of living within 'new South Africa' is the continued experience of perceiving the space they are in to be 'at once

39 Evans, p. 258.

40 Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 1-2.

41 See Mahmood Mamdani, 'Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC)', *Diacritics*, 32.3 (2002), 1-59; Mamdani, 'Reconciliation without Justice', *Southern African Review of Books*, 46 (1996), 3-5.

familiar and strange, safe and threatening, “mine” and “not mine”;⁴² speaking to the general failings of South Africa’s transition in dismantling the structural inequalities that were a hallmark of the Apartheid era. Through the TRC’s particular approach to reconciliation, perpetrators were able to again be a part of a system, albeit a different one, that causes trauma and thus, had the potential to be retraumatizing. Then, the uncanny experience caused by the media portrayals of perpetrators may have worked to reify the conceptualization of the perpetrator as monster in the eyes of the victims, whether victims of direct violence or structural violence, regardless of how complex a perpetrator portrayal managed to be. This issue begs the question of whether it is possible to work through perpetrator trauma without minimizing the victims’ trauma or causing retraumatization through the uncanny. Schmidt addressed this in her consideration of perpetrator testimony, identifying that the authorization of the perpetrator as a witness may simply be a re-enactment of authoritarian violence. She concludes, however, that though it is a moral issue that is certainly faced, at its core it is a methodological problem;⁴³ though the uncanny and thus re-victimization is possible, it does not cause us to call for avoidance of perpetrator testimony, but rather a critical stance in both mediatizing it and witnessing it.

Perpetrator Representation in *Truth Commission Special Report*

An analysis of two episodes from SABC’s *Truth Commission Special Report* will utilize the concepts of perpetrator trauma, empathic connection, unsettlement, and the uncanny as lenses to assess whether the investigative documentary series was able to move into a successfully complex image of the South African perpetrator by the standards that this framework has established. After problematizing binarism and static images of perpetrators, and identifying the fluidity of experiences between labels in conflict settings, the analysis is able to move into an examination of the discursive concepts within documentation and representation in which investigative documentary primarily deals. This will be explored almost entirely through hermeneutic and textual analysis, with some reference to how the content is framed through editing.

Truth Commission Special Report Episode 24

Segment 2

Episode 24 begins with a focus on the amnesty application of Brian Mitchell, a convicted killer of what is known as the Trust Feed Massacre, in which eleven Inkatha

42 Pramod K. Nayar, ‘The Postcolonial Uncanny; The Politics of Dispossession in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*’, *College Literature*, 37.4 (2010), 88–119 (p. 89).

43 Schmidt, p. 100.

supporters – mostly women and children – were killed while at a night vigil, an action partially carried out by Mitchell.⁴⁴ At the time of the amnesty hearing, he had served five years of a thirty-year sentence, reduced from what had initially been a death sentence. The segment provides a background of Mitchell's involvement in the police force, the political perspective on why this killing was carried out, and ends with an attempt to showcase a changed man. It calls Mitchell's story 'the story of hundreds of white South African men', referring to his joining of the police force at age eighteen, where Mitchell stated that he 'was fed and accepted a particular view of the world', referring to white supremacy and a state and church justified separation of races, ideologies which he claims to recently have cast off. The rhetoric used in the segment around Mitchell as well as within the clips of the hearing itself puts blame on the structure that Mitchell found himself in, particularly within the South African Police. He essentially claims to have not known any better, and that he was simply listening to, believed, and acted upon what superiors told him. He is painted as a pawn in the system, inherently casting some blame for his actions onto the wider structures of violence he found himself in. This portion capitalizes on the prospect that empathy can be created if we see the wider structures that violence sits within, as Hees asserts is possible,⁴⁵ lessening the amount of blame that viewers are able to put on an individual perpetrator.

The coverage on Mitchell then includes information on the consequences he has faced for his crimes, such as becoming estranged from his son; this is done perhaps in an attempt to humanize him by presenting fatherhood as a tenet of his identity. However, this is a bit more unsettling, because this narrative showcases that Mitchell has been punished or somehow suffered for what he has done, while also creating a discomfort for viewers about the difference in scale between the loss of life that he caused and the loss of relationship he experienced.⁴⁶ This unsettling also points to the crisis of narrativization, which as Morag states, 'reveals the unbridgeable gap between pre-war identity and the perpetrator's confession',⁴⁷ with Mitchell's unbridgeable gap being that of being a father to one child, while also a murderer of others, thus indicating what is perhaps Mitchell's doubling of self and thus, perpetrator trauma.

In the most direct call for empathy, the segment turns to Jann Turner, a *Special Report* correspondent. Jann Turner's positionality as the researcher and reporter gives credence (though tenuous) to her statement that after her hour-long interview with

44 *Truth Commission Special Report*, Episode 24, prod. by Max DuPreez (South African Broadcast Corporation, 20 Oct 1996) section 2, 01:15.

45 Hees, p. 93.

46 It is also important to recognize that 'it is not possible to speak of comparison in any simple sense in relation to traumatic experiences: such partially unassimilated or missed experiences cannot be identified or equated' (Craps, p. 19). Regardless, Craps argues that a comparison between personal tragedy and a collective trauma like the one seen in *Hiroshima mon Amour* and here in Mitchell's testimony still creates unease in viewers.

47 Morag, *Perpetrator Trauma*, p. 98.

Mitchell, she felt that she had ‘glimpsed a sincerely changed human being behind the face of this mass killer, a man who eight years ago had no regard for life, and for black lives in particular. A stint on death row and five years in jail has clearly given him time to reflect on what put him there’,⁴⁸ referring most immediately to his actions, but also to the wider structure he found himself a part of, and at its largest level, the ideology that informed those actions and structures. The ideology of white supremacy – and particularly supremacy of Afrikaners – was extremely emphasized within the years that the National Party was in power, and was also deeply rooted within South Africa’s Dutch and British colonial history. This segment continually attempts to inculcate that it was this context which informed the worldview and prompted the choices of Mitchell and many young men like him.

In Mitchell’s amnesty hearing and the clip which is used as the summarizing statement to this *Special Report* section, Mitchell states that he is desirous to make amends, though he recognizes that may not be possible, seemingly experiencing the crisis of audience that Morag defined.⁴⁹ A representative from the victims’ council brings a response from the community of Trust Feed, which stated that the community members may ‘try to forgive’, on the condition that Mitchell becomes involved in the reconstruction of the community that he destroyed when he murdered eleven of its members. However, in the short interviews that *Special Report* goes on to show with members of the community, it is clear that not all victims are sure that he will be able to give enough to restore his wrong, or that they will be able to forgive. It is as if they have learned a lesson from the uncanniness they had experienced as Mitchell gave his testimony and received amnesty, realizing that he would walk free and return to his life, while their lives would remain marked by the loss he caused.

This overarching call for empathy, though surely done in attempt to serve the national mission of reconciliation through the reintegration of perpetrators that we have identified as necessary, becomes problematic in this segment due to the fact that the victims’ counter-narrative is thirty seconds long, as opposed to nine minutes of Mitchell’s own narrative. In their thirty seconds, the victims express concern over the fact that they still might not be able to forgive because they fear nothing in their community will change. This short portion on the victims’ perspective hints at the uncanny experience that some viewers may have had while watching his testimony and during the coverage that followed, but nonetheless, the overall sentiment that this segment seems to promote is of Mitchell as a protagonist. It remains up to the viewers whether they believe the narrative that Mitchell was an unwitting pawn of the system and is now a changed man, or if he has simply utilized the truth-for-amnesty model to escape his prison sentence. These two competing sides highlight the

48 *Truth Commission Special Report*, Episode 24, section 2, 07:30.

49 Morag, *Perpetrator Trauma*, p. 98.

nuances of perpetrator representation in documentary media, leaving the viewers somewhat unsure how they should feel about Mitchell, meaning that if anything, this segment highlighted the complexities of his character, and at the very least achieved the breakdown of victim-perpetrator binary that the Commission hoped to do itself. However, the segment did not necessarily achieve it without falling into the trap of minimizing victim narratives and subsequently opening the possibility of evoking uncanny experiences.

Segment 6

The last section of episode 24 discusses five former Vlakplaas⁵⁰ commanders and operatives, all of whom at the time of airing, were days away from their amnesty application. Their amnesty hearing gave evidence for over 40 murders and implicated several other state leaders. This section focuses on an interview between journalist Max du Preez and Brigadier Jack Cronje, conducted in Afrikaans. Cronje speaks about wanting to put the past behind them and reconcile, and to do so, will tell the whole truth. He praises the commission for its work and encourages others to come forward; many policemen did apply for amnesty in the wake of top commanders such as Cronje doing so. Cronje puts blame on those who gave commands, but he himself is 'not ashamed of being a policeman, but is ashamed to work for a system that is forsaking us',⁵¹ an interesting statement in that it infers that he is not remorseful for the crime itself, which, though not a requirement for amnesty, seemed to become expected within the perpetrator narrative at the TRC. This also points towards a doubling of the self, in which Cronje was able to put his sense of guilt into the group, rather than have to hold it himself, indicating the experience of perpetrator trauma per Lifton's understanding.⁵² Cronje also states that he believes that people of colour would understand that he simply worked for a system that was inadequate and for that he is sorry. Du Preez presses him on what he means by 'sorry' – Cronje maintains that he is sorry for the victims and their families, particularly because 'they did not fight in the war'. He ends with another call for members of security forces to come forward, and offers help doing so for those who need it.⁵³

Like the segment on Brian Mitchell, Cronje attempts to divert the blame from himself and onto the state. However, the discourse used in this segment is very different from that of Brian Mitchell; there is no promotion of any particular rhetoric *about* Cronje. From an editing perspective, Cronje's interview stood on its own, without

50 Vlakplaas was a secret branch of the apartheid Security Police; known as a death squad, it was made up of a small group of elite assassins.

51 *Truth Commission Special Report*, Episode 24, prod. by Max DuPreez (South African Broadcast Corporation, 20 Oct 1996) section 6, 33:05.

52 Lifton, p. 29.

53 *Truth Commission Special Report*, Episode 24, section 6, 33:05.

commentary or moral assessment of the situation like the one that was so blatantly provided for Mitchell by Jann Turner's statement. The audience is left to sit with what Cronje says; perhaps this is an attempt to leave the case open ended due to the fact that at the time of broadcast, the former security operatives at hand had not yet had their amnesty hearing. Regardless, the stark comparison between the presentation of Mitchell and Cronje's narratives leaves us much more suspicious of Cronje, given only his words with no other direct indicator from the broadcast of what our reaction should be.

In terms of the uncanny, it could be argued that this segment with Cronje carried less of a trauma-inducing approach for viewers than the framing of Mitchell's case, which, as discussed, directly suppressed victim perspectives that were clearly also present and available for documenting. This segment's approach simply provided Cronje's perspective as a perpetrator without necessarily giving credence to what he said in a way that would have disenfranchised the other side of the story and could potentially induce an uncanny experience. However, the uncanny could have been prompted in another way by the fact that the interview was spoken in Afrikaans, a choice which would certainly make the entire interaction seem less positive, if not violent, to some viewers. This could have been compounded by his apparent lack of remorse, and again when he says 'they would understand', referring to 'they' as the entire oppressed population of people of colour. With this statement, he silences people not through physical violence, but by speaking for them, possibly invoking an uncanny experience metaphorically rather than with exactitude. However, for other viewers, hearing his interview in a shared language might make him more relatable, prompting empathic connection. These considerations show that Cronje's segment was much less straightforward than Mitchell's in trying to convince the viewer of a specific narrative, and prompts much less empathic connection; however, it does showcase the complexity of his character in a way that, at least, does not allow definitive categorization.

Segment 3

Episode 24 also includes brief coverage on the confession by the Stellenbosch Dutch Reformed Church to the TRC. The church was seen as the 'theological backbone of the National Party' [the white party of the Apartheid state]. The leaders of the Stellenbosch congregation willingly came forward to confess that they as an institution did not speak out enough against the injustices in their society. The clergy testified that any time they spoke out against such injustices, it was done with timidity,⁵⁴ and no action against injustice was ever taken. They also made confessions on a more personal level; Dr. Bethel Muller, the former head of the Stellenbosch theo-

⁵⁴ *Truth Commission Special Report*, Episode 24, prod. by Max DuPreez (South African Broadcast Corporation, 20 Oct 1996) section 3, 11:32.

logical department stated that ‘the Bible says that if I allow something to happen to my brother that which is an injustice, then I’m also part of that action, and then I must also account to God’. The church outwardly recognized that though they as an institution did not participate in direct physical violence, their theology had justified the structural violence that led to it. They did not speak against the violence and benefitted by being an institutional ally to the state and its leaders, many of whom were members of the church and this particular congregation. The church’s confession to the TRC is one of the few examples of an institution or organization that recognized and apologized for the violent status of being a beneficiary. The inclusion of this unlikely form of perpetratorship – an indirect perpetrator – is a contrast to the image that is cast by the likes of Brian Mitchell and Jack Cronje. In that sense, it is perhaps the most unsettling of them all, as it forces viewers to ask themselves in what ways their inaction was allowing or even assisting in the perpetuation of violence, fracturing the stereotype of perpetrators as monsters. However, it could be said that the segment also backpedals on some of this progress by seemingly closing the gap caused by the crisis of narrativization per Morag’s formulation of the perpetrator complex (and thus, trauma) assimilating the experience of bystander/beneficiary too easily to allow a redemptive narrative that does not actually address the underlying ethical and political issues. Though this segment may evoke unsettling self-reflection, it also accommodates viewers who might squirm at the discomfort of unsettling and self-reflection on their beneficiary status when it simply accepts the apologetic testimony at face value and moves on. This is not to say that the complex structural violence that occurred was not dealt with in the TRC, or later on in the institutional hearings, however, this segment’s coverage of it was unsettling but superficial.

Truth Commission Special Report Episode 57

Segment 3

Segment 3 focuses on police torture and includes clips of testimony from the amnesty hearings as well as interviews garnered by *Special Report*, in which three former policemen describe their methods of torture. The narratives of Warrant Officer Paul van Vuuren and Vlakplaas operatives Joe Mamasela and Tokkie Bezuidenhout were each prefaced by a still frame of Jeffrey Benzien demonstrating the Wet-bag torture method, overlaid with a caption informing viewers of who the individual was and who the specific torture methods were used on, paired with ominous instrumental music. Each policeman’s narrative was between thirty seconds to one minute long, with no context to the description of torture besides the still frame and text as introduction. The first clip shows van Vuuren’s description of torture within his amnesty hearing; the text introduction refers to him by his nickname, ‘the Electrician’, due to his use of electric shocks as a method of assault. He describes the use of electric

shocks, oxygen deprivation with a gas mask, and physical attack against ANC activist Scheepers Morodu. He presents these occurrences in a list-like way. The use of his nickname evokes the perpetrator as myth and monster, in which his singular identifying feature is the action he took as a torturer. This feeling is very much supported by the rattling off of inhumane deeds, with no apparent remorse or emotion. It must be noted that this segment decidedly did not include any other portions of his amnesty hearing, in which van Vuuren may have had the opportunity to express remorse or explain his role and situation beyond the exact moments of his horrific deeds. Additionally, his listing of torture methods in gruesome detail may have had more to do with the formula expected of amnesty applicants' testimony than with his actual feeling, but this clip suggests otherwise.

In Joe Mamasela's interview, he describes the torture of Siphon Hashe, Qaqawuli Godolozzi, and Champion Galela, all who were tortured and killed. Mamasela's interview is done using a close-up camera shot, and you can see his slight grimace as he shakes his head and recounts how the activists were 'savaged' and 'brutalized'. He goes on to say, 'it was terrible. I've never seen anything like that in my life; it was blazing hell on earth'.⁵⁵ Mamasela speaks of it all as if he was watching, and identifies another Vlakplaas policeman, Gideon Niewoudt, as a direct participant in this. It is unclear if Mamasela physically took part or not, possibly exhibiting the crises of both evidence and disclosure as he avoids using words which indicate any personal responsibility. This paired with his seemingly horrified reaction to the terrors for which he was present (or may have participated in) gives viewers some sense of his experience of perpetrator trauma, whereas Paul van Vuuren's is harder to find. In cinema, close-up shots are often used to evoke empathy, as viewers are able to be more attuned to the thoughts and emotions of the subject.⁵⁶ This is interesting because within the wider societal context and the context of *Special Report* in its entirety, Mamasela is known as a prolific murderer and torturer for Vlakplaas. But he was also an askari (a term which refers to a member of the ANC or other racially-based political group), who switched sides to join the Apartheid police.⁵⁷ Despite his horrific deeds, perhaps it is the askari positionality that calls for empathy and informed the framing of this segment, as it was not uncommon for askaris to take on that role after being captured and tortured themselves.⁵⁸ This context in turn also breaks down ideas about

55 *Truth Commission Special Report*, Episode 57, prod. by Max DuPreez (South African Broadcast Corporation, 20 July 1997) section 3, 20:05.

56 Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and Spirit of Film* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), p. xxxiii. Originally published as *Der sichtbare Mensch* (1924) and *Der Geist des Films* (1930).

57 Karen Maughan, 'Mamasela says 'no regrets' about not applying for amnesty in TRC,' *eNCA*, 16 April 2016. <<https://www.enca.com/south-africa/mamasela-says-no-regrets-about-not-applying-amnesty-trc>> [accessed 8 December 2018]

58 See Jacob Dlamini, *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*. (London: Hurst Publishers, 2015).

exclusivity between roles of perpetrator and victim and very clearly showcases how perpetrator trauma might come about, allowing for empathic unsettlement.

The last police torturer they show is Tokkie Bezuidenhout; he is introduced as the 'Tube Specialist' of Vlakplaas as he describes 'the tricks of his trade'. His interview is also done using a close-up shot as he describes with hand motions and re-enactments of the breath of his victims, how he would suffocate people to death using a car tube. Bezuidenhout calls this process 'very simple' – this seems to say to the viewer that it was not just very simple for him in a physical sense, but on an emotional or moral one, as well. The close-up camera shot does him no favours as his eyes widen in an unreadable expression while he describes his victims' moments of death; paired with the infamous still frame of Benzien as introduction, his expression could be read as excitement. Similar to the other two police in the segment, the segment gave no space for wider context on Bezuidenhout as a person, his experience in the police, or his experience in apartheid South Africa, allowing viewers to easily reduce him to simply the 'Tube Specialist', a fixed and sadistic image.

Despite the slight nuances that could be interpreted (if the viewer has background knowledge) within Mamasela's interview, this segment on torture unapologetically falls into the reductionist view of perpetrators as monsters. It leaves little room for understanding of potential perpetrator trauma or empathic connection; the only crisis which seems to appear is the crisis of evidence. This particularly appeared in van Vuuren and Bezuidenhout's narratives, in which the perpetrator does not confront 'the epistemic dynamics of horror' despite the evidence of horror.⁵⁹ Although this is one of the five crises of the perpetrator complex which likely indicate a doubling of the self in response to perpetrator trauma, this segment does absolutely nothing to draw on that in a way that prompts empathic unsettlement. It also enables greater possibility for viewers who are victims to experience the uncanny, especially considering Schmidt's argument that authorizing testimony without critical context can re-enact authoritarian violence.

Segment 4

Immediately following the segment on police torture and its highlight reel of the monstrous parts of perpetrators, the tone shifts completely in the fourth segment's coverage of a face to face meeting between victims and perpetrator. Liezl Ackerman and Gillian Schermbrucker are survivors of a massacre on St. James Church in 1993 that killed eleven people, including Ackerman's mother, and wounded fifty-eight. They speak with Gcinikhaya Makoma, who is one of the three men who carried out the attack. The meeting consists of each side sharing their own perspectives, experi-

59 Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir*, p. 131.

ences, and asking questions that they have wanted to ask for the four years since the attack.

Ackerman and Schermbrucker ask about Makoma's motive, particularly because the election date had already been set at the time of the attack. He speaks to the brutality of the apartheid system and particularly to his experience of police violence. He then speaks about his role in APLA, the military wing of the PAC, and that it was his role as a soldier that informed his attack. His acknowledgement of the multi-layered systems of violence that he was subject to gives viewers and his victims better understanding of the context of his decisions and actions, prompting empathy in that sense. He also states that he knew even at the time that what he was doing was wrong, and that 'there is no one who have a right to kill anyone', but that he felt he had to because of his organization's greater agenda, an agenda whose methods he says he now questions.⁶⁰ This perhaps indicates perpetrator trauma in that his violence was prompted by a larger group belonging and obligation; this also indicates a doubling of the self in which the conscience is held by the group rather than the self. Makoma's statements about the violence that he experienced and about his role as a soldier seemed to remove blame in a way that the two girls acknowledge, even agreeing that 'soldiers must follow orders'. However, Makoma never directly says that he is sorry, and uses justificatory war rhetoric throughout the conversation that never quite addresses the question that was posed to him, which was why this attack occurred after the peace talks and the election date was set.

Ackerman speaks to the humanization that occurred for her during this meeting; at the end, she says 'I am glad I met you [...] I can now relate to you on a human, person to person basis and not just a figure', though she also says she cannot say right now if she forgives him. This may prompt viewers into softening towards Makoma and others who are seen to be victims of the system turned soldiers, and into an empathic connection; if his direct victims are able to see his humanity, then so might we, while also noting that empathy does not then require forgiveness. The broadcast's shift of narrative from the monstrous image painted of the (white) policemen to this more dynamic representation of (black) Makoma, which very clearly engenders empathic unsettlement, raises questions about the biases of the broadcast in terms of its choices in representing those from different racial or political backgrounds. This would be in stark contrast to the TRC, which decidedly did not differentiate between these backgrounds in naming and trying perpetrators. That being said, whether the broadcast was intentional about this is a question which only the producers might be able to answer.

60 *Truth Commission Special Report, Episode 57, section 3, 22:00.*

Implications for Perpetrator Representation

SABC's *Truth Commission Special Report* exemplifies the multiple ways in which an investigative documentary framework can both challenge and reify the fixed images that come with the label of 'perpetrator'. It did so by often recognizing perpetrator trauma to create space for some form of empathic connection, as well as through the provision of stories which caused unsettlement and prompted reflection on a wider definition of perpetratorship. In these ways, the broadcast may have been able to harness a more dynamic understanding of the experience of perpetratorship than the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was able to do on its own. The commission was held back by the structure required of testimony presented to the Amnesty Committee, whereas the investigative documentary format, though still formulaic, had the ability to include further interviews, background information, research, and footage. In this way, it is likely that the documentary series may have acted as an informal addendum to the statutory transitional mechanism of the truth commission, lending itself to the social processes of transition both for perpetrators and for viewers.

Despite the successes of the broadcast in presenting a more complex perpetrator narrative, at times, *Truth Commission Special Report* also falls into typical shortcomings of perpetrator-focused media. Firstly, this appeared as reductionism of the perpetrator, which does not support the humanization and enable the reintegration that is necessary in transitional settings; this happened in the broadcast most often through lack of contextualization. Secondly, this appears as individualization of the perpetrator, which does not address the structural issues at hand, *and* can take away from the victims' narrative to create a potentially uncanny experience; this occurred when the focus on a perpetrator narrative caused subsequent suppression of the victim narrative, either through placing some sort of value of truth on one story, or through lack of balance of victim and perpetrator perspective and screen time.

It is important for media consumers to be aware and critical of these issues so that we do not fall into 'accept[ing] the relationship of objectification' as Mohamed believes we inevitably will.⁶¹ This is especially pivotal for societies moving out of conflict, as intentional media coverage paired with a critical gaze can allow perpetrator-focused documentary to go beyond being informative, but to also have the potential to be transformative. Perhaps in its ideal form, documentary film and television coverage of perpetrator narratives can still capitalize on the desire to objectify that brings audiences to view these narratives in the first place, while not individualizing the experience to a degree which discounts critical, complex, and empathic engagement with the trauma of both the victim and the perpetrator, and the structural violence behind it. Though *Truth Commission Special Report* certainly did not hold this balance

61 Mohamed, p. 1161.

within every individual episode, when taken as a whole body of work, the broadcast did manage to show both the humanity and the horror of perpetrators. It successfully dismantles the fixed image of perpetratorship that is so injurious to post-conflict progress, and forces viewers into the critical self-reflection and unsettlement that is absolutely necessary in transitional settings.

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