

The truth and reconciliation commision



Andrew Haw201002686History AssignmentTopic 7The TRCThis essay will look critically at the ANC and NP submissions to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (here after referred to as the TRC) with a view to determining how accurate these documents were in revealing the true story of South African History. To start with one must look at the Mandate of the TRC. This will serve to prove that the writings could have been manipulated to down play infractions of human rights. Next one must consider the documents themselves which will help to show that there are discrepancies in the story and finally one must look at the forgotten points of view. While this has little bearing on the documents one cannot have an accurate picture without everyone's point of view. The TRC was mandated to uncover the truth of the sufferings of all the people under the Apartheid government. But, there were a few problems with its mandate that could allow the relative parties to manipulate the truth.

The first and most important problem was the Mandate. Richard A. Wilson says that the TRC was mandated to deal with gross violations of human rights, torture, murder etc. it did not deal with the more mundane enforcement of the Apartheid system like forced removals, separate amenities and Bantu education.

This meant that the TRC dealt mainly with the major incidents and not with everyday matters. (Page 34 the politics of truth and reconciliation in South Africa. Cambridge University press 2001. Print) this meant that both the ANC and NP could skip over the intricacies of the day to day violence that was seen in the latter years of Apartheid. This one feels will have some bearing on what both parties will have included in their submissions to the TRC.

The evidence of these omissions is in the parties submissions. The NP does not at any point go into the pain and hardships that the people faced during Apartheid other than the major catastrophes that they inflicted on the people. The Sharpeville Massacre and Soweto schools uprising are mentioned in brief but it mainly tries to hide the government's involvement in these and other violent actions but rather focuses on the good things that the government did.

Mr. De Klerk quotes many statistics that show that the Apartheid government rather than oppressing the masses sought rather to improve their quality of life; According to the statement they built schools and hospitals, houses and infrastructure. (Page 8 submission to the truth and reconciliation commission by Mr. FW De Klerk, Leader of the national party. South African Justice Department. 1997.

Web) He does not mention here that they were substandard and not maintained. This paints a picture more of a benevolent government rather than the oppressive, rigid and unjust government that it truly was. With this in mind one must now look at the violence that the nation was ravaged by. Mr. De Klerk suggests that it was the ANC that caused the violence to escalate. He explains that the opposition was threatening the government and in desperation the government had to turn to violence. It was the SACP that said, 'The people of South Africa, led by the South African Communist Party, will destroy capitalist society and build in its place socialism'; The transition from capitalism to socialism and the liberation of the working class from the yoke cannot be effected by slow changes or by reforms as reactionaries and liberals often advise, but by revolution.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-truth-and-reconciliation-commission/>

One must therefore be a revolutionary and not a reformist.??? (Page 12 submission to the truth and reconciliation commission by Mr. FW De Klerk, Leader of the national party.

South African Justice Department. 1997. Web) It was this statement, Mr.

De Klerk states, that made the government realize that they must fight to protect themselves and their governance through violence. However, later he counters this by claiming that the government actually sanctioned very little violence but that the violence was perpetuated by the security forces independently saying that ??? The Security Forces had to operate increasingly within a framework of states of emergency, far-reaching security legislation, underground activities and unconventional strategies. They had to give operational interpretations to broadly framed decisions, aimed at firm and effective action against insurgency.??? (Page 12. submission to the truth and reconciliation commission by Mr. FW De Klerk, Leader of the national party. South African Justice Department. 1997.

Web) that statement suggests denial. The government while not directly responsible obviously did not stop the violence. This is a lie of omission and creates strengthens the argument against the truthfulness of this statement. It seems while the government does acknowledge that its rule was unjust it does not claim full responsibility for any of its actions. However, one cannot pretend that the NP was entirely responsible for the atrocities of the past. One must also consider the ANC??™s part in this. In contrast to the NP??™s statements the ANC does take some responsibility for its actions but wholly it blames the NP for the escalation in violence. For example the ANC allows

that civilians may have been harmed but justifies this by saying that ??? But the risk of civilians being caught in the crossfire when such operations took place could no longer be allowed to prevent the urgently needed all-round intensifications of the armed struggle.

??? (Page 6 African National Congress Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission 19 August 1996 The ANC. Web) This does help one to see that the ANC was fairly transparent and truthful. However the ANC blames the NP for such acts as necklacings were carried out by agents of the Apartheid government masquerading as ANC supporters. (page 8 African National Congress Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission 19 August 1996 The ANC.

Web) While this is possible neither party has provided any substantial evidence to prove or disprove this. Thus one cannot take this as anything but an assumption. So what do these statements establish In fact one can see that they do very little except point fingers at each other. Neither party claims responsibility for escalating the violence and both parties base there accusations on very little evidence. However, to find the truth we must look at all sides of the event.

Neither party mention the Colored nor Indian South African view points on Apartheid but view it mainly as a conflict between Black and White. The only mention in either of these documents of this omission is found in the NP??™s statement. It simply states that both these race groups were simply politically sidelined. But what about the stories of District Six A largely colored community. These are not included and so we see that the both

parties have not told the full truth and so cannot give us an accurate story of the South African past. Both parties also fail to provide the female side of the argument. What did the women go through What was there side Fiona C.

Ross states that ??? For the most part women described the sufferings of men.??? (page 17 Bearing witness: women and the Truth and Reconciliation commission in South Africa. Pluto press. 2003) Why were the women who supported the ANC and the NP??™s stories not mentioned in the statements Once more we see that the ANC and NP did not paint an accurate picture of the past.

In conclusion. The TRC through its own failure presented both parties the opportunity to manipulate the truth. Both parties took full advantage of this and as such have provided statements based mainly on assumptions and poor evidence designed to mislead people and distort the picture of the past. It can be argued that both parties were as accurate as possible.

But one feels that they have both omitted important facts and sides of the story that may well have provided a more accurate picture of our tragic and violent past. Archbishop Desmond Tutu sums it up very well, he states that the TRC offers ???... a road map to those who wish to travel into our past. It is not and cannot be the full story; but it provides a perspective on the truth about a past that is more extensive and more complex than any one commission could, in two and a half years, have hoped to capture.??? (page 148 commissioning the past: understanding South Africa??™s Truth and Reconciliation Commission Witwatersrand University Press.

2002)BibliographyAsmal, Kader et al.

Reconciliation through truth: A reckoning of Apartheid's criminal governance. 2 ed. 1997 United Kingdom, David Philip Publishers. Print African National Congress Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 19 August 1996 South Africa. African National Congress Archives.

WebChubb, Karin; Van Dijk, Lutz. Between anger and hope: South Africa's youth and the truth and reconciliation commission. 2001, Johannesburg. Witwatersrand university press. Print. Christie, Kenneth, The South African Truth Commission.

2000 United Kingdom. Macmillan press ltd. Print De Klerk, FW. submission to the truth and reconciliation commission by Mr. FW De Klerk, Leader of the national party. 1997 South Africa. Department of justice.

WebPosel, Deborah; Simpson, Graeme ed. Commissioning the past: Understanding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 2002 Johannesburg.

Witwatersrand University. Print Ross, Fiona C. Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. 2003 London.

Pluto press. Print Wilson, Richard A. The Politics of truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State. 2001 Cambridge. Cambridge University press. Print