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# The transformative role of the media in the formation of virtuous citizens: A contribution to reconciliation in a post-apartheid South Africa

## ABSTRACT

*The significant role that the media played during the apartheid years in South Africa is staggering. Abundant evidence suggests that, during those years, the print media served as instruments for propaganda, for the apartheid regime, while the Argus group, for instance, exposed the atrocities and human rights violations of the same regime. However, 24 years into democracy, what is the role of the media in a post-apartheid South Africa, where citizens still suffer from the ghosts of apartheid, the continued human rights violations, racial discrimination, and related issues that make it seem as if South Africa is “irreconcilable”? This question will be addressed by drawing from a recent study conducted by the author that has demonstrated the role of newspapers in moral formation as a positive perspective on the media in the process of reconciliation. The author argues that the print media play their role through their articulation of a good society, through regular reporting on issues related to reconciliation, which can be regarded as an exercise in vigilance to help their readers identify, and address immoral behaviour that may impede achieving reconciliation. Through such reporting, the audience could become virtuous people that will serve as assets in the process and journey for reconciliation in South Africa.*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of democracy in 1994, there have been too many reported human rights abuses in South Africa. In some instances, this reflects negatively on the country's journey towards reconciliation. Human rights violations, in terms of racial discrimination, ethnic conflict, and inequality, have been commonplace in South Africa since 1994. The aforementioned perpetuates, even after the operations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which, with some successes, unfortunately, did not bring such incidents to an end. This reflects poignantly on the long road that still lies ahead for South Africa in terms of reconciliation. Nelson Mandela believed that the human rights atrocities, which, in part, also emerged as a result of the apartheid history in South Africa, could be resolved. He suggested that, in a post-apartheid South Africa, where racial or ethnic conflicts exist, there is a need for an "RDP of the Soul", the "need to build the moral and religious foundations of society", and to "strengthen the moral fabric of society" is imperative.<sup>1</sup>

In pursuit of "moral regeneration", the role of parents, role models, schools, and religious communities is of paramount importance. Vosloo (1994) observes that moral formation takes place where role models, examples, heroes, saints, martyrs, significant adults (all inspiring figures) play a key role in guiding people through such processes of moral formation, providing direction, motivation, and inspiration. However, as will be the premise of this article, the media – South African newspapers, in particular – will be crucial in establishing a human rights culture in South Africa, and in serving as an agent for moral formation as part of the process and journey towards reconciliation. The media might not understand their role as such. This article will, therefore, explore the ways in which this could happen, in order to strengthen the role of other role players.

The African National Congress (ANC) released a statement on the complicity of the media with the apartheid regime, in terms of human rights violations:

we believe the South African media played other (broader) roles during the apartheid era, and we believe these roles need to be examined. This examination is vital if we are to understand our past, to bring about reconciliation, and to broaden our understanding of basic freedoms ... South Africa needs a watchdog media, not a lapdog media. The African National Congress believes the Truth

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1 The former president, Nelson Mandela, referred to this in his speech in parliament on the world's religions, Cape Town, South Africa, December 1999. See <https://parliamentofreligions.org/parliament/cape-town-1999/nelson-mandelas-speech-1999-parliament-0>

and Reconciliation Commission can play a significant role in helping us to understand the role of the media in the past, which in turn can shape our understanding of the role of the media in the future (ANC 1997:2)

The Chief Whip of the ANC in parliament again raised this sentiment in August 2017, which *The Independent* online newspaper presented under the rubric “Mthembu calls for media truth and reconciliation commission”. The newspaper report refers to Mr Jackson Mthembu who called for “the formation of a media truth and reconciliation commission (TRC)” that will provide the media the opportunity to confess and apologise “for its role in human rights atrocities committed during the height of apartheid”. *The Independent* newspaper online, further reports:

Mthembu accused mainstream media houses of having been complicit in the acts of the apartheid regime to exploit, and to discriminate against the black majority. He said that the media did this by turning a blind eye to the atrocities of the apartheid regime, instead of exposing its wrongdoings.

It is apparent, in the view of the ANC and the Chief Whip, that there exists “pockets” of disappointment and discontent from some quarters in South Africa in the media for the negative role they played in contributing to, and at times escalating the number of human rights abuses and violations during the apartheid years, which caused a vacuum for national reconciliation.

However, to exclusively regard the media as an agent of division, conflict, and human rights abuses and violations is to do an injustice to the immense capacity that the media possess to steer processes of reconciliation. Krabill (2001:1) cites the words of the then Deputy Chairperson of the TRC, Advocate Alex Boraine:

Without coverage in newspapers and magazines, without the account of proceedings on TV screens and without the voice of the TRC being beamed through radio across the land, its work would be disadvantaged and immeasurably poorer.

This article is thus based on the premise that the media can play an enriching role in South African society, as asserted by Boraine. It interrogates this role by assessing recent (2018) and available data on the concrete role that the media can play in processes of reconciliation.

The author starts with a brief discussion on the relationship between moral formation and reconciliation. In this section, the author succinctly discusses how moral formation can assist with reconciliation in South

Africa. This is followed by a brief discussion on the conditions for moral formation based on the work done by Vosloo (1994), and subsequently a discussion on recent research (2018) that reflects on the concrete ways in which the media can contribute towards moral formation. This information will then be used to reflect on concrete ways in which the media can assist in reconciliation and as an agent of moral formation. It is, therefore, a question not only of how the media play a role in moral formation, but also of how the media contribute to the broader discussion on reconciliation in South Africa. It will become evident in the discussion on the role of the media in moral formation and reconciliation that the media have a very limited role to play among other role players such as the church, the community, the education system, parents, families, and role models. The author will reflect on this, so as not to overly romanticise the role of the media in reconciliation. This will be discussed in the last section of this article, in which more questions will be raised than answers.

## 2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MORAL FORMATION AND RECONCILIATION

What is reconciliation? Koopman (2007a:97) defines reconciliation in terms of Pauline thought as “*hilasmos*” which has to do with “the expiation of wrongs, and stumbling blocks to atonement”, but also as “*katalassoo*” which refers to “harmony in the relationship with the other”. In concise terms, he states that reconciliation is “a life of embrace of the other, and the expiation of the stumbling-blocks to that embrace, namely sin”.

Though Koopman refers to those stumbling blocks as “sin”, they might also be described as an act of moral wrongdoing that hinders “embrace” and reconciliation, and creates further strife, tensions, separation, and divisions. That kind of behaviour (immoral, sinful) and attitudes lies at the heart of a need for moral character. What kind of person should I be? This is an appropriate question in a post-apartheid South Africa, where individuals have reason to hate, judge unfairly, discriminate, and exclude. In light of a rift between two parties, whether individual or group, there can be various ways to solve the issue, as well as conditions that can lead to the easing of tensions, and the removal of enmity. In this way, the change of character, as proposed by the former statesman in the opening paragraph, is crucial. Ackermann (1996:49) argues that “apartheid was a perfect system for creating apathy by its many mechanisms which prevented contact with people”. Therefore, the author argues that one of the virtues the media allow their audience is to internalise respect for the other and embrace the other through mediated contact.

In his recent work, *Reconciliation: A guiding vision for South Africa?*, Conradie (2013) refers to the complexity of reconciliation, especially in terms of victim and perpetrator relationships. He argues that, at times, the victim can also be the perpetrator, and vice versa. Besides this complexity specifically to the reconciliation process in South Africa, he also raises the issue of justice as an integral part of reconciliation. He argues that reconciliation has become a contested term, because of an understanding that justice is a separable entity of reconciliation, whereas it is inherently part of the process and should be conceptualised as such. He addresses the issue of restitution and ways in which this could be achieved. Baron (2015) subsequently addressed this in that the focus on the TRC process in South Africa, in the pursuit of reconciliation, should have included “remorse and repentance”. Burton (2013:87) responds to Conradie’s work on reconciliation and accentuates the issue of “learning to listen to others”:

Therefore a prerequisite for seeking reconciliation is to develop a process of learning to listen across all sectors, creating opportunities and mechanisms for greater knowledge of self and of others. Being heard and understood, being truly seen and known, is a deep human need. It is the only way to transform toxic relationships.

Her suggestion would find concrete expression in the ways in which the printed media allow their readers to appropriate such a skill through their reports.

In terms of how reconciliation can be achieved, Van der Borght (2018) also argues that we need to seek resources within our own religious traditions. In his attempt to offer some solution for national reconciliation in South Africa, he argues that the Christian churches themselves have not contributed positively to the process of reconciliation in South Africa. He also argues that, instead of retracting from processes because of their “past track record” and guilt,<sup>2</sup> which the author also places some newspapers’ reporting under apartheid, they should enter into a process of rediscovery of their contribution within their own tradition. This would be crucial, especially in light of MacIntyre (1981) who argues for the retrieval of the tradition of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and others who would argue for the formation of good character in an attempt to address immorality in society. In Van der Borght’s suggestion, the churches would do well in this regard. However, the author argues that the media can be another role player in the formation of virtues that would enhance reconciliation in South Africa.

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2 See also Kritzinger’s discussion as one of the reasons why some White churches do not respond to immorality, and become voiceless, because they would be feel “guilty”.

There is a need for the formation of moral character and virtues that enhance the aspect of “embrace” and “reconciliation”. This can be either the change of moral character of the victim, the perpetrator, or those who are observing such tensions. The opposite would be to follow the Kantian approach that focused on the categorical imperative and making the right decisions, which is the outcome of the Enlightenment project, according to MacIntyre (*After virtue* 1981). However, South Africans need a moral character that is practised and lived during seemingly “irreconcilable” situations. Through their presence, they can invariably create an atmosphere that enhances reconciliation. In reference to the above, this article will address national reconciliation in South Africa, through being moral individuals. Koopman (2007b:107) argues, in another contribution, that in building a human rights culture, “we need right humans”. This article will advocate that such kind of human beings, who “embrace” others, are desperately needed, if we envisage a reconciled country. However, it is crucial to understand the work of Koopman from the wells that he draws. He and other ethicists draw from the work of scholars who argue for the return of an ethics of virtue. This tradition argues that it is not only important to ask what a good society is, what is right or wrong, but primarily also what is a good person. Character and moral formation become an important task. The resurgence of such a conversation began with the work of MacIntyre (1981), who argues that there should be a retrieval of the tradition of Aristoteles and Thomas Aquinas that emphasised the training of virtues within communities. Hauerwas followed in this tradition and argued that the basis of these communities should be the story of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> The Dutch theologian, Johannes van der Ven, is a final example of someone who furthered the tradition of the training and education of good character. He addressed this in his work *Formation of the moral self* (1998). He identified a few ways in which moral formation takes place, namely discipline, socialisation, moral transmission, moral education, and moral clarification. These scholars provide a good framework of the work of training of moral character that was adopted by various theologians in South Africa. For example, Koopman and Vosloo (2002) build on the tradition of virtue ethics to develop their scholarly work on the South African context.<sup>4</sup> Conradie’s (2006) work *Morality as a way of life* identifies the conditions for moral formation that will be used in this article to discuss the role of the media.

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3 He was criticised by some scholars, who argued that his proposal would advocate sectarianism.

4 At least two South African doctoral dissertations emanated as a result of his work: N.C. Philander, *Sosialisering as modus van morele vorming in die kerk*. Unpublished thesis, University of Stellenbosch (2008) and H.C. Jack, *Dissipline as modus vir morele vorming*. Unpublished thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2007.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this article, the author selected four South African weekly newspapers (*The Sunday Independent*, *Sunday Times*, *Mail & Guardian*, *Rapport*), and assessed the rhetorical strategies that each used to report on government corruption in 2016. Government corruption served as a case study on the role the media could play in moral formation. The author selected all government cases of corruption, from which he chose the four most reported cases of corruption by the four newspapers during the year, namely the building of President Jacob Zuma's homestead at Nkandla; the corrupt relationship between the Gupta family and state officials; the corruption at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), and the corruption reported at the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA). The author collected in total 342 reports on corruption, assessed each newspaper's reports, and compared the reports between the four newspapers.<sup>5</sup> The author adapted Lawrie's (2005) rhetorical model of analysis and assessed the rhetorical strategies that each newspaper used. This enabled the author to un-earth the role the print media play in moral formation. The author used a moral issue such as corruption to assess, in terms of the newspapers' reporting of these cases, in what way their reporting can contribute to the task of moral formation and reconciliation in South Africa.

### 4. THE ROLE OF PRINTED MEDIA IN MORAL FORMATION

The author wants to frame the media's role in terms of moral formation. Therefore, it is critical to discuss how moral formation takes place and what conditions should be met for it to take place. In this regard, the author refers to the list provided by Conradie (2006:77) on a degree of consensus between virtue ethicists in terms of what is needed for moral formation to take place. These conditions are as follows:

- Where virtues are rooted in a more comprehensive vision of the good life, of a good society.
- Where virtues are usually embodied and carried through narratives, through paradigmatic stories.

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<sup>5</sup> Individually, the *Sunday Times* had 107 cases, *The Mail & Guardian* had 99, the *Rapport* had 69, and *The Sunday Independent* had 67 reported cases in 2016.

- Where such paradigmatic stories are conveyed by “communities of character”, namely groups, traditions and communities of people who live with integrity, honesty, and loyalty.
- Where conversion, transformation, and discipleship are necessary for those who participate in such “communities of character” (this also requires a long, intense, and often painful process of moral formation).
- Where regular exercises, rituals and (spiritual) disciplines are the context within which virtues can be internalised.
- Where role models, examples, heroes, saints, martyrs, significant adults (all inspiring figures) play a key role in guiding people through such processes of moral formation, providing direction, motivation, and inspiration.
- Where friendships (in various ways and forms) are crucial to sustaining people on this road of moral formation.
- Where credibility is born from the concrete practising of central convictions and virtues; such credibility eventually serves as the criterion for whether or not moral formation took place.

The above conditions for moral formation are not all relevant to the media. The author will, therefore, draw from a research study that outlines the role the media play as a basis for a discussion on the media’s role in reconciliation. The results will be discussed through what emerged as part of a study of four South African weekly newspapers’ reports on corruption between 1 January 2016 and 31 December 2016. The study showcases specifically the role of the print media in moral formation – in relation to the conditions outlined by Vosloo (1994).

## 5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The research reveals that the newspapers in the study reported frequently, but also placed issues of immoral behaviour on their front pages, therefore ensuring that their readership was constantly aware of immoral behaviour.<sup>6</sup> They also placed a particular emphasis on the effects and impact that such immoral behaviour has on the life of ordinary citizens. This may discourage and deter their readership from engaging in such behaviour.

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6 In the conditions listed by him, Conradie (2006:77) argues that moral formation takes place “where regular exercises, rituals and (spiritual) disciplines are the context within which virtues can be internalised”.

The media presented graphical information to make their readers aware and to expose the moral issues in question. They also provided their readers with an opportunity to live vicariously through others<sup>7</sup> and afford them an opportunity to reflect on issues of morality.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the media play a role in ensuring that their audiences become not only aware but also more vigilant and alert, which could increase their response(s) to such acts, by developing repugnance toward such behaviour, and a change of their attitudes and behaviour.

The media not only (in terms of the above) make audiences aware of moral issues, but also position their readers to judge on moral issues. Prinsloo (2007:212) argues that this is one of the functions of media texts. The media invite their readers to

symbolically enter the inner sanctum of belonging by sharing the ideas and their orientation. The text is a product of a range of semiotic decisions that act to position the reader. It invites the reader to adopt one position and, at least implicitly, reject another.

Rossi and Soukup (1994: 209) also argue in a similar vein that the media shape the readers' "early perceptions of good and bad" as well as "constitute a new, separate and powerful dimension of that (moral) formation".

In relation to the above, the media position their audience and allow them to identify and associate with values that are important for moral formation.<sup>9</sup> This was specifically reflected in the way in which some of the newspapers reported on the moral behaviour and lifestyles of public leaders and keeping them morally accountable.<sup>10</sup> They, therefore, positioned their readers to differentiate between showing respect for such leaders, but also to keep those leaders accountable, should they fail in their moral duties and responsibility. This might instil values of equality, moral accountability, and obligation in their readership, since such leaders are held to be as responsible as the remainder of society and are encouraged through the media's vigilance to uphold their moral duties about the society they

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7 Kendall (2003:119) refers to this in his list on how media contribute to the change of behaviour. He argues that the media do so by informing their audiences about events; introducing them to a wide variety of people; providing their audience with a wide variety of viewpoints; making them aware of products and services; entertaining, and by living through other people's experiences.

8 Hoekstra *et al.* (1994:212-233) argue that the media serve as "distinctive sources for moral reflection".

9 Conradie (2006:77) argues that moral formation takes place "where virtues are usually embodied and carried through narratives, through paradigmatic stories".

10 See perhaps the *Mail & Guardian's* placing of the President continuously on its front pages.

serve. The media's vigorous reporting on such powerful figures might also inspire other members of society to blow the whistle on people in power and authority as well as other public officials in government departments and institutions. This may result in the internalisation of such values in shaping the audience's moral character and motivate readers to act in circumstances that require responsible ethical leadership.

The research reflected on how the media also go to great lengths to demonstrate the strong stance that certain individuals took against immoral behaviour. The reporting on such moral courage might inspire the readers to be vigilant and courageous.<sup>11</sup>

The media's reporting reflects that it posits a particular vision of how a good society should function, and therefore, subsequently reports exactly on those instances that would endanger such a vision.<sup>12</sup> The media in South Africa reflect the kind of society and values that are envisioned in the South African Constitution. In this study, it became clear that the newspapers focus on issues in South Africa such as the unequal distribution of resources, poverty, and slow economic growth as some of the root problems for immoral behaviour. However, it should be noted that the research is clear that not all media focus on the same values or elements that are needed for South Africa to enhance a human rights culture. However, all their reports did, in general, reflect the media's commitment to the moral values enshrined in South Africa's Constitution.

It is also evident that citizens have their preferences in terms of which the media are aligned to their ideological position. This is evident in terms of the circulation figures of the selected newspapers in the study during 2016. Although the results show that there is a narrow gap between the ideologies of the studied newspapers, the difference in ideological positions could still be spotted in some instances. It is, therefore, also fair to argue that, in terms of issues of immorality, the various media's audiences might think differently on specific moral issues.

It is evident that the newspapers, at times, send mixed messages on issues of moral behaviour.<sup>13</sup> This confirms, to some extent, that the

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11 Conradie (2006) argues, *inter alia*, that moral formation takes place because of the presence of role models within communities. He observes that moral formation takes place where role models, examples, heroes, saints, martyrs, significant adults (all inspiring figures) play a key role in guiding people through such processes of moral formation, providing direction, motivation, and inspiration.

12 See also Conradie's (2006:77) condition on "a vision for a good society" for moral formation.

13 For instance, the author noticed that, while the one newspaper focuses essentially on the corrupt nature of the individual, the other focuses on the circumstances that allowed corruption to take place.

media are at times seeking sensation (see also Verdoolaege 2005:182). For instance, this research shows that, while a particular newspaper focuses on one prominent, public individual and his corrupt behaviour, the same newspaper will, in its next edition, argue that the readership should have sympathy with such an individual in terms of his family background. Presenting his family history with such detail evokes feelings of sympathy from the readers. This should not only be viewed in terms of sensation-seeking, but also in terms of the critical issue, namely the immoral behaviour of that individual that will “fade” away in the midst of pertinent and atrocious evidence of immoral conduct. This and other similar cases serve as examples of how the media can easily jeopardise a golden opportunity to take a strong stance in their reporting on such immoral conduct. This will subsequently limit their role to maximally contribute to the formation of moral persons.

## 6. THE NEWSPAPERS’ ROLE IN RECONCILIATION

The previous section discussed how the media can be an agent of moral formation. In this section, the author argues that, in doing so, the media, through their role in moral formation, are contributing to the reconciliation process in South Africa.

Reconciliation in South Africa addresses the atrocities of the past, due to “immoral behaviour”, through immoral judgements, which undermine the human rights and dignity of South Africans. If we do not address issues of morality, we will never be able to succeed in reconciling South Africans. However, it is not only the decision-making processes, or because South Africa claims to have one of the best constitutions in the world which upholds and respects human rights, but it is also about building and forming virtuous citizens. In ethics, the questions are always raised: What are good/right decisions? What is a vision for a good society? We focus on the central question: What is a good person who embodies the values needed for reconciliation? The media have such a role to play.

The media can play the role of building and forming virtuous citizens when they make audiences aware of issues of conflict, racial discrimination, and prejudices that exist in various parts of South Africa. Reporting on these issues can give South Africans an idea as to how far the country has journeyed in terms of national reconciliation and the extent of the future journey. The media should not only make readers aware of issues of reconciliation, but also position their readers in such a way that they can judge on issues, events and occurrences, and the behaviour of citizens that are endangering the project of reconciliation. The media

should, therefore, position their audiences in such a way that they will also have to “judge” in a moral, responsible way on issues of reconciliation in South Africa, in terms of how they present the cases about “race”, “class”, “identity”, “gender”, “ethnicity”, “culture” and other issues that are related to the broader discourse on national reconciliation.

Behaviour and actions that have the potential to curtail reconciliation should be reported on regularly, in order to make South Africans vigilant. Through the use of metaphors and various rhetorical strategies, the media can allow their audiences to understand those “stumbling blocks” that prevent South Africans from embracing each other, irrespective of their diverse backgrounds and (racial and ethnic) identities. The study suggests that the media are intentional in terms of their rhetoric. Given this, the media should be intentional in terms of the role they could play in issues of reconciliation. In doing so, the media will be able to urge their audiences to change their attitudes and behaviour and become citizens who embody those values that are needed for reconciliation. The consumers of media will become sensitive to how they treat each other, as they will become the kind of persons who would work tirelessly and effortlessly but also intend to bring about reconciliation through their embodiment of reconciliation.

Botman (1996:38) refers to the “metaphorical locking devices” in which those who supported apartheid would refer to certain issues as too “sensitive”, too “delicate”, and “emotional” to talk about, so that they can close the debate and not allow others to ruminate and ponder on such kind of conversations and stories about the “stumbling blocks” that hinder embrace. In terms of Botman’s argument, it is clear that even the horrendous stories need to be told, as such cases, type of material and narratives are important for the healing of a broken, fractured, divided nation. Though being sensitive in presenting graphic details of events, the media may not only shock their audience, but also provide them with a deep sense of understanding of the state of affairs and journey towards reconciliation in South Africa. In this way, the media will indeed give South Africans sufficient space for discussion on the realities facing the moral fabric of society. This is important so that the media develop a collective moral consciousness in forging national reconciliation. These stories, through media institutions, are necessary for South Africans to understand and reflect on their role, as a collective, in sustaining the vicious system of apartheid. In this way, the media create a space, in which individuals will also be challenged to change their behaviour and create a new reality – a reconciled South African nation.

The media could play a role in helping members of society associate themselves with certain values that would also be crucial in the

embodiment of reconciliation within a national context. In making people aware of the challenges and issues that hamper reconciliation, the media constantly remind all South Africans of their collective accountability in what transpired in South Africa. Ackermann (1996:50) asserts in this regard: “Accountability requires awareness”, which is the opposite of “apathy, the opposite of being uncaring and uninvolved with one’s neighbour, being out of the relationship”. Through the audience’s exposure to what occurred, and is still happening in the country, they become more sensitive towards the “other”,<sup>14</sup> reflecting on their prejudices, and they are challenged to move beyond the borders of their perceptions of reality of the other towards an understanding of what it means to be human in this world.

Ackermann (1996:50) argues that, in the process of reconciliation, we cannot only be accountable and faithful to the values and vision of the communities from which we come but to the vision of South Africa as a whole. Mangcu (2008:16) argues for “blackness beyond pigmentation”. Similarly, Mbembe (2008:147) refers to a new “black solidary”, after the 1994 negotiations that “will be rooted in a moral commitment to racial reconciliation and equal justice for all”. He adds:

Freedom for black South Africans will be meaningless if it does not entail a commitment to freedom for every African, Black or white.

The media is well positioned to present issues and stories that would forge such a new moral identity and character. We need such kind of individuals, people who will look beyond their pigmentation and who will care for the justice of all. The media could, through their reporting, fill such a role and build moral individuals.

Through reporting on “paradigmatic stories”, which embody those virtues needed for reconciliation, the media would not only inspire but also allow audiences to internalise those virtues that are needed for reconciliation. Paradigmatic stories would include the everyday, meaningful stories to which the readers would relate, in order to make sense of their own context. Conradie (2013:30) raises the issue of storytelling and the establishment of common memories for healing the memories in victim/survivor relationships.

Victims and perpetrators and those who thought they were innocent bystanders, now realize their complicity, and have an opportunity to participate in each other’s humanity in story form (Botman 1996:37).

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14 This includes the “significant” as well as the “generalised” other.

The media should, therefore, not hesitate to report on public and political leaders who do not further the agenda of reconciliation.<sup>15</sup> If the media vigorously and courageously report such stories, this will surely enact the kind of virtues of respect and tolerance that are needed for reconciliation. Recently, the media reflected their commitment, in their reporting, to issues of reconciliation. They reported on the premier of the Western Cape, Mrs Helen Zille's tweets on colonialism, as well as on the leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), Mr Julius Malema and his inflammatory comments that were widely argued to incite racism when he referred to the song "Kill the Boer!".<sup>16</sup> These are some examples of ways in which the media can contribute in terms of exposing the "stumbling blocks" and create an opportunity for their readership not only to reflect on such issues, but also to act in a morally responsible manner.

It is also evident that the media have a choice to decide what they want to place on the front pages, and how many times they will focus on a particular story, and how they will construct the logic of each story and event.<sup>17</sup> The aforementioned forms part of the media's rhetorical strategies. Whether for better or worse, the media should understand their role in the country's journey towards reconciliation. They should, therefore, show their moral commitment in how they report on such stories, events and incidents that are curtailing the national reconciliation project. Newspaper journalists should increase their reporting on such issues, place such reporting on the front page and provide good reasons as to why South Africans should "embrace" one another, against the narrative of "racial discrimination", "strife" and "conflict" among racial and ethnic identities in South Africa. Their regular focus on such issues will be crucial for the development and formation of moral and accountable citizenship.

It is also crucial that the media allow their audience to envisage the negative impact when South Africans ignore or do not take reconciliation seriously. The media's reporting should indicate the political, economic,

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15 Conradie (2006:77) observes that moral formation takes place where role models, examples, heroes, saints, martyrs, significant adults (all inspiring figures) play a key role in guiding people through such processes of moral formation, providing direction, motivation, and inspiration.

16 See the article by news24 at <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Malema-charged-over-kill-the-boer-20100310> and <http://ewn.co.za/Topic/Helen-Zille-colonialism-tweets>, for the media's reporting on Zille's tweets on colonialism.

17 In the author's (2016) analysis of the four newspapers for instance, the *Sunday Times* would have the most (17) front page reports on corruption, while the *Rapport* the least (seven), qualitatively some would refer the president itself that is corrupt, while others would focus on the circumstances surrounding the corruption. Moreover, some would focus on the personal impact of corruption, while other would exclusively focus on the systemic impact of corruption.

and social consequences.<sup>18</sup> The audience needs to see, through reporting, the negative impact that “racial conflict” and discrimination, as well as human rights abuses, have on the future of the country.

The media should not simply report on the negative stories and incidents and “blow-up” the issues (in its quest for sensation) in such a way that it hampers reconciliation. They should place such stories within the broader context of the vision of a multi-racial, multicultural and non-sexist society as enshrined in the Constitution.<sup>19</sup> This will allow citizens to strive towards such behaviour, become people who embody the values of the Constitution, and act as agents of a human rights culture.

The media’s sensation-seeking as a marketing and business strategy can have negative implications for those exposed to such reporting, and derail the process of reconciliation in South Africa.<sup>20</sup> Verdoolaege (2005:182) reflects on such incidents in terms of how the media would focus, during the operation of the TRC, more on the perpetrators than the victims. Verdoolaege refers to the (broadcast) media's focus more on prominent figures such as F.W. de Klerk, and perpetrators such as Eugene de Kock, thus emphasising the tactics of torture, and the way he and others ill-treated the victims. He argues that presenting such graphic

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- 18 In some of the headlines on the corruption of the president, the *Mail & Guardian* does not provide any context than only to state that the president is guilty. See especially the reports in the selected newspapers on the Guptas and their corrupt relationships with State officials, including the president, that were published during the course of 2016. However, in 2016, The *Sunday Times* associates corruption with negative consequences (Van Onselen 2016/02/7:4). These affect people in government who occupy high profile positions and were part of the alleged corruption at Nkandla and who, as a result of this, forfeited their jobs. The newspaper refers to individuals such as Geoff Doidge, Max Sisulu, Bogopane-Zulu and Siviwe Dongwana. The *Sunday Times* also associates the ANC’s poor performance during the local elections in 2016, especially among the middle class, as closely linked to the alleged corruption at Nkandla (Hunter 2016/08/7:5).
- 19 The author’s rhetorical analysis reveals that the four newspapers focused mostly on certain individuals’ wrong conduct and organisation, while it would ignore others. See, for instance, the *Mail and Guardian*’s reports in the year: 24 reports relating to the Nkandla case, of which seven (7) feature on the front page of the *Mail & Guardian*. I offer merely a glimpse of the way in which the *Mail & Guardian* reports on the case on its front page and provide a general sense of the emphases. The following is reported: “Zuma Inc crumbles”; “SABC protection stripped, fightback in NEC, Cabinet, Max Sisulu: Zuma must go” (*Mail & Guardian* 2016/10/7:1); “Zuma’s hit list” (*Mail & Guardian*, 2016/08/26:1); “It’s payback time. JZ, you’re on your own” (*Mail & Guardian*, 2016/07/1:1); “Accused Number One” (*Mail & Guardian*, 2016/05/6a:1); “Speared by the nation” (*Mail & Guardian*, 2016/04/8a:1); “Concourt klap: What next for JZ?” (*Mail & Guardian*, 2016/04/1:1); “Watch your back, JZ” (*Mail & Guardian*, 2016/03/4:1).
- 20 In this case, I specifically refer to the *Sunday Times*, in 2016, that reported on the allegations of corruption against the president, but also focused in other reports on some of the reasons why society should not judge him harshly.

detail to the audience (broadcast on the South African TV screens) made the TRC process come across as a “theatrical representation”. However, if the media were to report on issues by fairly representing all races, sexes, ethnicities, cultures, and religions in South Africa, it could cultivate, in its readership, a “multi-” perspective and approach towards the South African situation characterised by division, racial and ethnic conflict, prejudices, and discrimination.

## 7. IS THE MEDIA’S ROLE SUFFICIENT FOR RECONCILIATION IN SOUTH AFRICA?

This section provides some final remarks in terms of the limited role that the media can play in the process of reconciliation.

It is evident from this research that the media play a significant role in the process of reconciliation as an agent of moral formation. The media play their role by articulating a good society, by regular reporting on issues related to reconciliation, which can be regarded as an exercise in vigilance that will help their readers identify, and address immoral behaviour that may be “stumbling blocks” in achieving reconciliation. Through such reporting, the audience will become virtuous people who will serve as assets in the process and journey towards reconciliation in South Africa.

In conclusion, it is important to reflect on some of the limitations of the media’s contribution in terms of moral formation. It is crucial to make the point that the media cannot act as role models and as communities of character, although they reflect on such communities and individuals in their reporting.<sup>21</sup> The media can only act as a role model of vigilance in exposing immoral behaviour. Therefore, it should be noted that the media are one of many players and agents of moral formation.

The author has argued that each media outlet/entity and its management have their own ideological positioning. Their role in reconciliation should always be viewed with caution. In a previous study, the author showed that newspaper editors and management have their own biases and that they report and focus on perspectives that they want their readers to know. One of those contrasts in the newspapers’ reporting is the way in which *The Sunday Times* appeals to the readers to have sympathy with the then president, Jacob Zuma, in terms of the allegations of corruption at Nkandla. When they focus on his relatively poor family, *the Sunday Independent* would take a strong stance, and even place a rubric on its

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21 See the list provided by Conradie (2006), earlier in this article.

front page, in big, bold letters, “APOLOGY NOT ENOUGH”. This is one of the many examples that show that not one of the four newspapers takes the same stand on issues. However, it should also be mentioned that this is not always too obvious, but a closer, analytic reading of the rhetoric employed enables one to unearth the different ideological positionings. However, newspapers have their own biases. The findings of this study support such a view – that the newspapers might also be involved in aligning themselves politically, and in supporting certain factions within a specific political party.

With this bias in mind, it is appropriate to argue that it is not possible that one media institution’s reporting on an event or case relating to the discourse of reconciliation is comprehensive and the “only” truth to be told on the matter. This is reflected in the results of the recent study on four newspapers’ rhetoric and reporting, which show that the media have a role to fulfil in moral formation.<sup>22</sup> It indeed showcases how the media did not report, in the same depth, breadth, and emphasis on a particular issue or person – which is also often noted in reporting on issues related to reconciliation. Therefore, the author argues that the media should be intentional in their reporting on issues of reconciliation and not leave such issues to “chance”. This will play a role and influence how South Africans will perceive and internalise issues of reconciliation, including racism, classism, ethnicity and identity issues, and how reconciliation will become embodied. As stated earlier, this is not easy to address. Audiences should be cautioned, in this regard, that there are indeed “other” realities besides the ones to which they are exposed, in terms of their preference when it comes to different media reports. The audience should also be conscious and cautious of the media’s primary business function – to sell their stories – and accept that the media are not always committed to enabling reconciliation. Therefore, the audience should be critical and aware that a particular media institution does not have the whole “story” or is not always sharing the “complete” picture. Readers should be sensitive, not to base their conclusions on one specific media report. Rather, they should read reports on events and incidents from various angles and expose themselves to different media reports. In the journey towards reconciliation, readers should be cautious about reading widely and critically in terms of the consumption of events and issues, presented by the media, that would have a direct effect and impact on South Africa’s reconciliation journey – but also how they will think, act, and embody reconciliation.

Rather than physical contact, the media provide “mediated” contact between victim and perpetrator. This is crucial, and might be one of the

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22 See my doctoral study (Baron 2018).

limitations of all forms of media and their contribution in the national reconciliation process. Not only what one sees through the media has an impact; but more is needed than the media can provide – the physical contract of people from all races, cultures, identities. The South African TRC provided such a platform, but it should be continued through “inter-” and “intra-” contact, in order to forge a new national non-racial, non-sexist and united society.

Finally, it should be emphasised that the media’s role does not guarantee what was argued in this article, because to be simply aware of moral issues and immoral behaviour and to take a certain position on such issues do not mean that citizens will act.<sup>23</sup> However, the possibility that an intentional media, who through the ways outlined in this article, can produce human beings that would embody those virtues that enhance reconciliation, is enough to take the positive role of the media seriously.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This article focused on the positive role the media can play in the formation of virtuous citizens who will embody the virtues of reconciliation. These individuals will enhance a spirit of reconciliation in the day-to-day spaces in which they find themselves. The media are forming the citizens in this regard, through their regular reporting, their vision of a reconciled society, through instilling vigilance, and sharing, through paradigmatic stories, the kind of virtues that are needed in order to reconcile the country in the aftermath of human rights violations and abuses, but specifically in South Africa, from racial, ethnic, and cultural conflicts and tensions.

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23 Lawrie (2005:126) wrote on rhetoric and observed that a speaker (represented by the newspapers in this case) cannot predict whether his or her readership will take action or respond to a particular message: If anyone were ever to understand human motivation fully, that person would be in a position to manipulate other people at will. Perhaps it is fortunate that our understanding is limited and that our fellow human beings are always able to surprise us by confronting us with problems for which we have no ready-made solutions.

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