Stories on Karima Brown, Sophie Tema, Ferial Haffajee and Joyce Sikhakhone by Sarita Ranchod.

HERSTORIES CELEBRATING PIONEERING WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNALISM
On the day of our interview, Karima Brown, Executive Producer of SABC radio’s flagship current affairs programme AMLive, is in her ninth year at the SABC where she has spent the bulk of her career producing AMLive and Midday Live. Her first interaction with the SABC was as a studio guest on Afrikaans radio station Radio Sonder Grense (RSG). After the Interview Kenneth Makatees suggested she try her hand at being a radio producer, and so began her love affair, almost by chance.

Prior to joining the SABC Brown had been working in local government and urban policy research. Much of her work focused on faith-based communities and their responses to democratisation and change. “In some cases the constitutional changes sweeping the country did not speak to the conservative values of some of our faith-based communities. I worked on addressing these changes within these communities,” she said.

As an anti-apartheid activist in the Cape Youth Congress (CAYCO) during the turbulent 1980s she was involved in community and underground media initiatives on the Cape Flats. Through these activities Brown met journalists like Zubeida Jaffer, Rehana Rossouw and Mansoor Jaffer, who all showed her that media could be used as a strategic site of struggle. “At that point I could never have imagined one day working at the SABC, which was anathema at that time,” she says.

She joined the SABC as a radio producer in 1995 to assist with coverage of the first democratic local government elections. When Brown began her journalistic career at Radio Sonder Gense, the station was trying to recreate itself from being widely perceived as an instrument of apartheid government policy to one that proactively sought “to include the voices and perspectives of Afrikaans-language speakers who had been excluded from the airwaves.”

“I joined the SABC at an exciting time,” says Brown. “They were prepared to take on the contradictions of change. There was a great deal of debate and disagreement between the older people and the newer people. Part of the SABC was open and prepared to be a platform for debates in the country,” she recalls.

She moved from RSG to AMLive on May Day 1997, “when John Maytham, Charles Leonard, Ferial Haffajee and Hein Marais were the super-producers of the time. SABC was the flagbearer for changing things around at the SABC,” she says.

“This was an opportunity for me to work as a producer in English, my first language,” Brown credits John Maytham for giving her her “first break as an on-air producer” by asking her to stand in for a colleague for two weeks. “I took to it with a passion and found out that this is what I really do like. I love the adrenaline of live programming.”

Brown says most people lack an understanding of what goes into live producing. There is always a team of extremely hard-working people behind a presenter. “As executive producer I’ve always known the responsibility to lead was mine. It’s no joke phoning a cabinet minister at 6am saying not only do I want to interview you this morning, but I want to interview you about what is in today’s paper.” Brown says her area of journalism is often rendered invisible since it cannot be seen. “It is heard and it is mediated through a presenter. If a presenter rattles off a number of impressive statistics, know that there was a team behind that,” she says.

Of her recent experiences Brown says, “John Perlman has been incredible to work with. He is one of the best in the business.” At Sue Valentine’s departure, Brown was promoted from senior producer to executive producer of AMLive. As executive producer of the SABC’s premier current affairs programme it has been part of her responsibility to “hold on to old audiences and build a black audience, more reflective of our country”.

One of Brown’s proudest personal achievements at AMLive is the introduction of a regular HIV/AIDS slot. “We are the only national current affairs programme with a dedicated, weekly AIDS slot. This slot makes HIV/AIDS a national issue and goes beyond the sensationalism of reporting AIDS, by looking at all the ramifications of this pandemic, whether it be the politics of HIV/AIDS, matters of treatment, testing or research.”

Another programming achievement she notes is the inception of the After Eight Debate – a concept she developed together with John Perlman. It is through this programme that the SABC has an innovative partnership with the Mail & Guardian to enable the continuation of the day’s debates online. “This programme allows for people from all walks of life to engage in all aspects of life on this continent,” says Brown.

The increasing “dumbing down” of South African media is a threat to the future of quality in South African media, Brown says. “Reducing to dumb down and insisting on quality programming is an ongoing challenge. Quality programming costs money because there are research costs; there are costs of conducting interviews. We want our journalists to be in the field – not conducting all their interviews by telephone. And we have to fight to retain quality in broadcasting,” she states emphatically.

Like other media, the public broadcaster is under increasing pressure to make ends meet. A simple solution is “to open the lines.” While this approach can increase ratings, it impacts negatively on the quality of programming output. “Even though the SABC is not an entirely commercial entity, there is constant pressure from advertisers to get presenters to read their advertisements, for example,” she says. Brown commends the public broadcaster’s commitment to ensuring that control “cannot be bought” by ensuring editorial independence and editorial values consistent with the Constitution.

Brown is particularly proud of the strong team she has helped build at AMLive. “We have a diverse team with producers from all nine provinces. Our diversity informs our programme output which I consider to be a feat,” she says. “Our unit has been transformed from a predominantly white, male to a much more representative team without compromising standards or programming suffering.” Brown states firmly.

Asked for her evaluation of South African media 10 years into democracy “Our media is battered,” she says referring to the many instances of South African media being caught in ethically compromising positions in the last year. The increasing jirorisation of newsrooms and the concomitant lack of skills in newsrooms leave our media vulnerable to powerful interest groups pressuring journalists be biased “Because so many journalists are passionate about our democracy we have to guard against taking sides and aligning with certain interest groups. Journalists, because of their powerful position in our democracy are prone to being labelled as patriotic or unpatriotic, as left or ultra-left, or as forwarding a DA agenda,” she says.

“What our media need are editors with backbone, professional journalists who stand by their stories, and a media that acknowledges the big gaps in training, in better writing, in checking facts better.” An inevitable effect of the ongoing juniorisation of newsrooms is that “we find there are stories lacking context, lacking a sense of history and understanding. There is value in wisdom and insight, and sadly this is often. In the race to break stories, many younger, less experienced journalists display an absence of understanding and context,” says Brown.

Why journalism as a career? “I found my passion in it. It’s exciting to be a journalist. It provides an opportunity to pursue your curiosity, and to satisfy that curiosity. It allows me to enter worlds I would not ordinarily have access to. It enables me to enlarge my own world, and to make our world a better place.” Brown says she has come to love “the pressure of a deadline, the creative process involved in making good media and the adrenaline of it all”.

Asked about the position of women in newsrooms and being a senior woman in a newsroom, she says the notion of women having a common agenda in the newsroom is a false one premised on the general notion of women having a united agenda. While Brown supports the principle of women’s advancement, she notes “women are not automatic allies. As a feminist I do not presuppose that other women have the same agenda. I have seen women in the newsroom – being bossy and throwing authority around. That kind of behaviour displays neither leadership nor strength. To assume that because we are of the same gender we have the same positions or agendas is naive,” says Brown.

Our understandings of transformation and change needs interrogating: “These are not static, and to think of transformation and change as referring to race and gender only, is a limiting approach.” At the SABC I work with people from rural areas, of different sexual orientations, from different class and linguistic backgrounds. All of these things define who we are.

She highlights labelling and boxing as one of her challenges of working in media. “While I am not religious, the fact that I have a Muslim name makes people assume I have a particular position on Palestine or the US,” she says, as an example of how narrow and limiting unfounded assumptions are.

After nine years at the public broadcaster, Brown is preparing to take up a new challenge: moving to the Independent Newspapers group as political correspondent responsible for the presidency, government and the civil service. “I felt it was time to move. When I came here I knew very little about radio, I understood the political changes in the country and the kinds of stories that needed telling. Now I want to be able to write better, to interact more with my own thoughts. I am excited about moving to the written medium.”

Brown has a 13-year-old son, who she says does not enjoy reading. “Perhaps through working with the written form I will find the magic formula to get my son excited about reading. In the context of all the technology surrounding us, I feel it is important to emphasise the importance of reading and writing, and there’s nothing like a good old newspaper.”

At the conclusion of our interview I feel inspired. I have met a mind that is alive and thinking. I think about her move to the written word and the writing that this mind in interaction with itself could produce. I am reminded of Brown’s words: “There is value in wisdom and insight, and think that today I have met a wise and insightful woman, whom I look forward to reading.”
After completing matric in 1963 she applied to work at the then Bantu World newspaper as a cub reporter. At that point there were no schools for black people to train in journalism, and so training was by necessity on the job. Sikhakhane says.

“Things like balancing the responsibilities of home, family and child-rearing, mitigating against women’s advancement in newsrooms. "And the long hours and late nights do not help," she adds.

Sikhakhane says South African media have a long way to go before they can claim to being representative of the country’s demography. “We don’t realise how far we have come,” she continues.

The editor at the time agreed to give me a six-month trial period. I was made a permanent member of staff. Her male colleagues arranged that I would land up being a prostitute. My mother cried about my decision to become a journalist,” she tells of her most useful journalistic training ground: "I would often get home at 2am after waiting for the sub-editor to approve a story, and then waiting for transport to get home. The company did provide us with transport for those hours. The trains were rough. Sometimes walking to the train in the morning, one would have to jump over corpses. Crime was very high, and murder rates were high," she recalls. And now? I ask. "When people say crime in South Africa is high now, I think it has always been that way. I grew up in such an environment.

Alcohol was indeed the downfall of many journalists, and the newspaper had not employed a woman for the weekend drinking spree and hand her the rest of their wages. “The wives would collect the money from their husbands; but still she refused to attend one of the tribal universities open to African people at that time.”

After her six-month trial period she was made a permanent member of staff. Her male colleagues arranged an “initiation or graduation” for her at a shebeen in Alexandra where she was “baptised with beer and brandy.” I got home around midnight and my mother thought her worst fears had been confirmed,” she laughs.

At that time working in journalism was a great challenge for a woman. Patriarchy dominated in the newsrooms and it was certainly hard work for women, noting the late hours of the job as a particular challenge. “I would often get home at 2am after waiting for the sub-editor to approve a story, and then waiting for transport to get home. The company did provide us with transport for those hours. The trains were rough. Sometimes walking to the train in the morning, one would have to jump over corpses. Crime was very high, and murder rates were high,” she recalls. And now? I ask. “When people say crime in South Africa is high now, I think it has always been that way. I grew up in such an environment.

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Sikhakhane says South African media have a long way to go before they can claim to being representative of the country’s demography. “We have only just started,” she says. In concluding my interview with Sikhakhane, I ask her what was happening in the country then.

“It was the 1960s. The Rivonia Trial was happening and my male colleagues were not very interested.” It was the disinterest of her colleagues that provided Sikhakhane with the space to cover the stories of women in the country. By this stage some of South Africa’s best journalists had left the country while others were banned or restricted. And the ones who were left seemed to be going through a period of decadence. “They didn’t care about themselves for shelter. I wrote about the families of political prisoners, and what it meant to live under apartheid restrictions. I wrote about the lives of Winnie Mandela and Albertina Sisulu.”

For the courage of her writing Sikhakhane was detained under the Protection Against Communism Act spending 18 months in solitary confinement. “I nearly went mad. I attempted suicide but didn’t have access to the necessary materials, I was in total isolation at Pretoria Central, then Nydlronse Prison. At 6am we would be given a bucket of water. Another bucket was provided for urinating and defecating. I slept on a mat on the cold cement floor of a narrow cell with light on all the time. All that I could think of was getting out. I was interrogated about what I had been writing about. The security police wanted to know who I thought I was, writing what I did,” her voice resounding with pain and a quiet dignity.

Sikhakhane was arrested along with 22 others including her colleague, photographer Peter Magubane. “Fortunately we had good lawyers like George Bizos and Arthur Chaskalson. We won our case but were redetained immediately, this time under the Terrorism Act. We won again but were now faced with banning orders and restrictions.” Upon her release from prison Sikhakhane met up with Steve Biko and Barney Pityana and became part of an underground nucleus providing leadership to the soon to be banned South African Students’ Organisation (SASO). The World

In the context of an increasingly repressive state, she fled South Africa in 1973 in an escape planned by the ANC. Her escape route took her through Mozambique, Swaziland, Germany, Tanzania, Britain, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Later on I wrote a book called Window on Soweto recounting my experiences of growing up in Soweto, working in newspapers and my experiences of prison and exile.” The book, published by British Defence and Aid, was banned in South Africa and the proceeds went to pay the legal fees of political prisoners.

“I was in exile for nearly 20 years and mostly worked for the ANC doing environmental scanning in the Frontline states.” In between her ANC work she held media positions in various Frontline states working for the English service of Radio Mozambique, writing radio plays and learning the skills of broadcasting, and as senior journalist for The Chronicle newspaper in Zimbabwe. In 1987 however, her job at The Chronicle came to an end because of her involvement in the ANC.

Of her experiences in exile, Sikhakhane says she found Zimbabwe most fascinating because of its “cultural and linguistic similarity to South Africa and its history of colonial rule.” While in exile she had the opportunity to make documentary films, something she continues to do still. She has made a documentary on Samora Machel with a Canadian filmmaker and a documentary about Zimbabwe on the occasion of 10 years of independence, called Zimbabwe – The New Struggle. During this time she also completed an Honours degree in political economy with the Open University, United Kingdom.

Sikhakhane returned to South Africa in 1995 and was deployed to the Department of Intelligence; but still she was drawn back to the media, and spent some time at the SABC as a bi-media (TV and radio) news editor. She recently took a two-year break from the Department of Intelligence to work with Elizer Sisulu doing research and conducting work with Insiku’s award-winning biography, A South African Love Story, on the lives of Walter and Albertina Sisulu. Sikhakhane also had an opportunity to put her documentary filmmaking skills to use when she worked as executive producer of the film version of the Sisulu book. This busy woman is currently wrapping up a manuscript for a book about the life of Albertina Sisulu.

Commenting on the state of South African media 10 years into democracy, Sikhakhane says: “We do not realise the amount of freedom we have in terms of free speech.” And the matter of women’s advancement in South African media? “While there are many women in the South African media now, still only a handful are editors. The media is still dominated by men.

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Concerned about the future of African language media, Sikhakhane sees potential for Internet-based news to be presented in African languages.

In concluding my interview with Sikhakhane, I remember Ruth First who also combined activism and journalism in the search for truth. I am left feeling grateful that apartheid’s monsters spared this pioneering woman journalist’s life, and that she has lived to continue telling her multiple stories.
Ferial Haffajee, editor of the Mail&Guardian, says she has never wanted to be anything other than a journalist. “At primary school when we would be asked what we wanted to become, my answer was always ‘journalist’.”

Haffajee says her choice of career was inspired by her love of reading and writing. While at Christian Botha High School in Bosmont, Johannesburg, which she describes as “a poor school, with progressive and dedicated teachers” she worked on the school newspaper and “got a feel for print.”

After completing matric she was accepted to study journalism at Rhodes University, but her parents could not afford the cost of sending her away to study. Instead she went to Wits University where she read African Literature and English, and also tried to fulfill her mother’s dream of her becoming a lawyer by taking a law major.

While a student at Wits she had made up her mind: “The Weekly Mail was the only newspaper I wanted to work at. I’d heard Anton Harber speak at Wits when the newspaper was launched, and decided that was where I wanted to go.” After completing her BA degree this quietly determined and focused woman applied to the Weekly Mail’s training programme and was accepted onto their one-year training programme.

She started at the Weekly Mail in 1991, which she says, “feels like yesterday,” but says, “I was a different person then, and the Weekly Mail was a different newspaper”. Unlike the current situation, when she joined the Weekly Mail training programme “there was a lot more money for training and I was part of a large intake of trainees”, she says.

After completing the one-year training programme she was recruited as the Weekly Mail’s labour reporter and general news hand “This was the beginning of a complete love affair for me. I could write about my interests. There were no limits imposed on me. Covering labour issues struck a chord with my personal life, as both my parents were clothing workers and had always belonged to trade unions.”

Haffajee left the Mail&Guardian for three years to try her hand at broadcasting at the SABC, but returned in 1996. She later also worked at the Financial Mail, but once again “came home” to the Mail&Guardian.

Recalling formative on-the-job experiences, Haffajee says: “At the Weekly Mail I can’t point to any one particular mentor, as so many people were supportive of my work. The entire workplace was geared towards training young people. If you had a smidgeon of talent, there were many wings under which to be nurtured.” Having said that, Haffajee adds that she did some of her most exciting writing under the guidance of Charlotte Bauer; while Barbara Ludman had the particular skill of “honing the ‘I’ writing of many young journalists into professional writing.”

Drew Forrest, now one of her two deputy editors, taught her the ins and outs of labour reporting. She notes that it is odd that one of her mentors now works as her deputy editor, but says the Mail&Guardian is a space able to work within the challenges of their history and times.

Throughout our interview colleagues wanting her advice intermittently interrupt us. She deals with the interruptions with a calm kindness, promising that she will be there as soon as she can. I get a sense that this woman takes everything in her stride. I cannot imagine what would throw her off balance.

Since Haffajee’s editorship of the Mail&Guardian the paper has visibly sought to increase its women sources and women writers, receiving praise from media monitoring organisations for rapid progress in this regard. Haffajee credits her abiding interest in gender issues to Pat Made, the respected Zimbabwean feminist, journalist and media trainer. “Pat was one of the first people who drew my attention to the importance of capturing ordinary voices, to understanding politics and inequality through the eyes of ordinary people. She taught me how to do it.”

Of her experiences as a woman in the newsroom, she says she has been “lucky to work in an enlightened space like the Mail&Guardian. It has always been a gender-conscious space in which debate is vigorous.”

Haffajee’s experience includes time at the SABC — posing more challenges in terms of gender issues. “When I joined the SABC – in addition to inheriting a racist past – it also had to confront a legacy of gender inequality. Of the old guard, the senior people were male. I entered at the cusp of change.” Haffajee mentions broadcasting veterans Amina Frense and Sylvia Vollenhoven as senior women she could look up to while at the SABC.

While she loved the adrenaline of producing radio, Haffajee jokes that she “didn’t have a voice for radio” and realized she loved writing most. But, she says: “The SABC is ultimately the place to go back to. If you want to effect change in society, if you want to change voice and change perspective, if you want to make women’s voices heard, the SABC is the place to do it.”

Her experience at the Financial Mail introduced her to “an entirely different world” where she learnt that the business and economic networks are still very much male. Praising the strong women-led team at the Financial Mail, Haffajee says: “While women run the Financial Mail, the audience and style of business is still male,” pointing obliquely to the fact that more women running newsrooms does not by necessity lead to more gender equitable coverage.

Of the personal gender considerations of being a woman working in the media, Haffajee mentions that her first marriage could not withstand the strain of her being a journalist. At the time she worked at the SABC where work would start at 7am. And how does one find balance in journalism? “It is a passion and you live it. That is not easy.” She notes that employers are however becoming increasingly flexible – with more opportunities for women to work as freelancers or on contracts that suit their lives. “If employers thought laterally there would be a lot more space for women to make arrangements that work for them.” But, she cautions that the increasing flexibility of employers has a lot to do with “the cost-cutting era” where work can be done more cheaply from home.

Commenting on the state of South African media 10 years into democracy, Haffajee says, somewhat despondently: “We are not in a great space. There is a lack of quality and depth in South African journalism at present. It shouldn’t take only an hour to get through the Sunday papers.”

She argues that this lack of quality and depth impacts on the gendered nature of coverage. “There is a lot of short-cutting taking place. Gender-sensitive reporting is not about Women’s Day supplements or women’s pages. Gender-informed coverage needs to be much more considered and long term than at present.”

Haffajee observes that some of the women’s magazines are doing excellent work when it comes to engendered reporting and writing, but that newspapers and other media are lagging. “At the Mail&Guardian we are trying hard to make gender less self-conscious, to ensure that gender perspectives are included in a cross-section of the newspaper.” On progress made in this regard, she says: “We are doing well, but it will take a while to get it right.”

A gender perspective, she argues, should inform how one chooses a freelance, which economists are quoted, who is featured and on which page, who speaks on the budget. Asked about accessing women as sources and as experts, she says: “I have access to various networks of women and I make use of those, but to be frank, it is not always easy. It is often easier to get hold of Iraj Abedian than a woman economist.”

And the significant media attention her appointment as editor of the Mail&Guardian has garnered? “It is wonderful to be so celebrated as a woman editor, but it is sad that after so long there are so few of us.”

At the end of the interview I am left with the sense of a quiet, focused and determined woman who goes about her chosen task and on which page, who speaks on the budget. Asked about accessing women as sources and as experts, she says: “I have access to various networks of women and I make use of those, but to be frank, it is not always easy. It is often easier to get hold of Iraj Abedian than a woman economist.”

And the significant media attention her appointment as editor of the Mail&Guardian has garnered? “It is wonderful to be so celebrated as a woman editor, but it is sad that after so long there are so few of us.”
Getting hold of veteran journalist Sophie Tema is not easy. Whenever I call her to make an appointment, she is at the prison where cellular phones have to be switched off. We miss each other numerous times, and when, at last, we do speak, it is late in the evening. She seems to have time for everyone and everything.

After quitting journalism, Tema started an NGO called the Learn and Earn Trust, which aims to rehabilitate prisoners by focusing on life skills, handicraft skills and HIV education. At the Lesotho Prison, inmates are also being trained in home-based care to take care of terminally ill prisoners. This is where she now spends most of her time: in medium and maximum security prisons working “with hardened criminals”.

Asked how she made the switch from journalist to prison worker, Tema says she resigned from her job as journalist at City Press in 1993 to take care of her mother who was ill. After her mother’s death she decided to quit journalism. A factor that influenced her decision was that in her experience, women were not promoted. “After nearly 30 years in journalism, I was not promoted to anything more than journalist. I realised this was a waste of time,” she says without remorse.

And how did she end up working in prisons? She was watching television one day and heard the then Minister of Correctional Services speaking about the desperate need to rehabilitate prisoners. In that moment, Tema, who had never set foot in a prison before, realised that this was what she needed to do. She subsequently started working at Modderbee Prison doing life-skills training. “I designed a life-skills programme that the prisoners could identify with, that made sense in the contexts of their daily lives. I realised that applying a US approach would have no relevance or impact on their lives. I needed to design something that spoke to their reality and it has been a great success,” she says.

Since working at Modderbee Prison, word has spread about her work and she was approached by a number of other prisons, including the Johannesburg Prison where she works with women inmates. Tema says the biggest challenge of what she does is that while there is great need for this kind of work, there is a desperate shortage of funds. She often finds herself covering travel costs out of her own pocket.

Judge JJ Fagan has also appointed Tema as an Independent Prisons Visitor, which means that she can go into prisons to listen to the experiences and complaints of inmates and has the authority to take up their problems and ensure they are sorted out.

Asked about how she came to be a journalist, Tema says she had wanted to be a lawyer. When her father heard this he told her he did not approve because “lawyers have to lie to earn a living”. She then asked her father what he would like her to do and he replied “journalist”. Tema says at that time it was completely unheard of for a woman to be a journalist.

After her father’s death in 1962, Tema got a job as a telephone operator at the English-language, Afrikaans-owned and -managed newspaper for Elethu Mirror, in Johannesburg. Tema notes ironically that she got the job because of her proficiency in Afrikaans, which she perfected while attending an Afrikaans-medium mission school in the Free State.

There were only four journalists at Elethu Mirror, and in her time answering the phone, Tema would write up “snippets, laughter columns and a bit of gossip”. She once accompanied a journalist to a beauty contest where he proceeded to get drunk. “The following day he was too babalaas to write his piece and asked for my help. I wrote the story, it went down well and I had proven myself, she recalls, with good humour.

Tema says her male colleagues helped her a great deal and respected her as a woman and as a journalist. “They could not do anything to elevate my status. Those decisions rested with management and management would always promote a white woman over a black woman,” she remembers.

When her colleague Humphrey Tyler became editor of The World newspaper, he remembered her contribution to Elethu Mirror and asked her to join him at The World to work on the women’s pages. Tema joined him but wanted to do more than the women’s pages and started working on “hard news”.

It was her experience with Hector Petersen on 16 June 1976 that brought her to prominence. On 15 June 1976 a young girl delivered a letter to Tema advising her of a planned march by students to Orlando, Soweto, against Afrikaans as the medium of school instruction. “On 16 June 1976 I went to Naledi High School where the march was planned to begin. The students had left and were already in Mofolo. I was with a photographer from The World, Sam Nzima. We went on to Orlando West and while driving around the area we came across a boy carrying another little boy in his arms. A little girl was running alongside them. I jumped out of the car and told them to get in. We rushed to the clinic, but by the time we got there he was already dead.”

Asked about her reaction to what she saw on that fateful day in South African history, she says: “The little boy was wearing a jersey like my little boys. My motherly instinct kicked in. I thought this could be my child, or my friend’s child. How would I feel if I’d sent my children to school and learnt they were shot dead? I put myself in the shoes of the mother. Imagine finding out your child is not in school, but dead on a cold slab in a morgue.”

The World was banned in 1976 and then relaunched as the Sowetan by the Argus newspaper group. Tema continued to work for the newly formed Post and Weekend Post. In 1980 she was offered a job at the Rand Daily Mail and worked there until its demise. She then moved to Business Day and while there was offered a job at City Press where she stayed until finally quitting journalism.

Tema says of her experiences of working at the Rand Daily Mail: “Journalists, black and white, were trying to build a unified situation in the newsroom, I can’t complain that I was made to feel out of place. Our white colleagues tried their best to make us feel at home, to make us feel a part of them.”

Black journalists always had a “problem with management who would make decisions about promotions and could make life unpleasant. There were no promotions for black women and the highest level a black man could rise to was news editor,” she recalls. Tema adds that black journalists’ salaries “could never compare with what the white journalists earned, and that black women journalists were in turn paid less than black male journalists”. I am left wondering how “unity in the newsroom” could be promoted in such a vastly inequitable space. I also note that Tema tells me all of this without a trace of bitterness. She has clearly made peace with her experiences in journalism.

Now, spending most of her time in maximum-security prisons, she says the inmates treat her with respect. “I often feel safer inside a prison than outside.” Of her experiences of working with prisoners she says: “I feel like a mother towards them, working with her children.”

Tema’s “motherly instinct”, viewing situations through the lens of “mother”, giving and making time for others, made it possible for her to do some of her best work in journalism. “It is this humility and compassion that she now brings to the work of rehabilitating criminals.”