

GOBODO-MADIKIZELA: How do you feel now mama at this moment as you speak?

MRS KONILE: I don't feel better. I don't know. I just don't know. I just feel that I have palpitations. I don't know how I feel.

GOBODO-MADIKIZELA: Could you tell us a little about Zabonke's child? Where is she [*Zabonke's child*] and how old is she?

MRS KONILE: As for him, he is here, he is old now. He is doing standard eight. His age is the same as his father's because he is ten years [*laughter in the background*] I don't know if it is his father's years, or somebody else's years.

GOBODO-MADIKIZELA: Is mama trying to say that the child's years is the same as when his father died.

MRS KONILE: Yes. [*with emphasis*]

GOBODO-MADIKIZELA: All right, we understand you mama. We thank you. Mama my last question is [*pause*], how does mama feel, how do you feel?

MRS KONILE: No, you can just ask . . .

GOBODO-MADIKIZELA: My last question mama: if you would meet the people [*pause*] that injured your son, what message would you give to them?

MRS KONILE: Ohhhhh! [*with a low voice*] No I don't know, I won't be able to speak to them. [*long pause, deep breath*] because they left me in this, what they did is, I was just left in this condition that they put me in because, I don't know what to say or what they should do to me or what they are supposed to do it is for them to see to what they should do to me because I don't know, I'm supposed to do because I have nothing. I—, I—, I—, I— have just given up everything. I don't know what I would do to them. [*pause*]. There is nothing that I know [*with a low voice*]. I can just thank them for what they — they — what the-y had given me but there's nothing that I can do to them, no, nothing.

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The rock

Right from the time that Nosisi discovered that Mrs Konile came from Indwe, she suggested, 'I think Indwe has a story. I'm not sure what, but I seem to remember something.' In a subsequent discussion session we exchanged information.

The word 'Indwe' means 'Blue Crane'. The small town, named after a river that flows half a kilometre east in the Stormberg region, with Queens-town its nearest big town, lies sandwiched between the old Transkei border, the old Thembu location and the toes of the Drakensberg mountains. The river close by formed the border between the Cape Colony and Emigrant Thembuland during 1847 and 1883. After the Thembuland rebellion in 1880, several thousand people were driven out of Thembuland and the area was annexed to the Cape in 1883. For 300 years, the borders around Indwe were contested, changed and reinforced by, among others, the Gcaleka (who lost most of their land after the cattle killings), the politically favoured Mfengu, the politically influential Thembu, the Boer farmers, the white British settlers, the British government, the apartheid government and its homeland puppets.

Antjie found that the Truth Commission report quoted police statistics suggesting that a third of all necklacing and burning incidents over a period of five years occurred in the Eastern Cape — an average of 54 per year. In view of a massacre that occurred in Queenstown in November 1985, the

Truth Commission found that 'the state and the homeland authorities in the Eastern Cape displayed total disregard for the lives of those engaged in protest action against their policies . . . deadly force was used'.

It is in Indwe that a rock pinned Mrs Konile down. She describes the incident three-quarters of the way through her testimony. The death of her son, his burial far away from where she lived, was in the past. In the official Truth Commission transcript she describes her homeless life back at Indwe:

After that [*the funeral*] I was so miserable. I had no where to go, I wanted that house, that shack, it was very difficult. Something told me to go and pick up coals, it was on a Thursday. I was knocked down by a rock, and this big rock hit me on my waist. I tried to move so that I can get some air, it was at eleven at that time, but they could only get me out of that rock around 5 pm.

When I woke up, I felt like I was just getting out of bed. And there was a continuous cry that I could hear. It felt like I was going down – down – down. When I looked, I was wet – wet – wet – I was wet all over the place. I asked for water, they said no we don't have water. I said – I was talking to one of the women who was with me. I said please – please urinate on a plate so that I can drink, she did and I – then regained consciousness, I woke up.

When I was awake they put me into a van and I was taken to hospital. The doctors said to me I must just go away, I must go back under those rocks where I was before, I am no-one – I am nothing, what is ANC, what is ANC.

The three of us shared the feeling that this paragraph, in particular, was strange and hard to comprehend. The retranslation had answered many of our earlier questions and so we decided to see what three individual readings of the above paragraph, each from a different discipline, would bring us.

Reading in terms of narrative

I [*Anjie*] now knew that much of what was previously incoherent about Mrs Konile's testimony could be explained through the material fact that she lived in Indwe. This invited an exploration of her testimony in other ways than merely focusing on perceived inconsistencies and incoherencies.

The 'new' knowledge allowed a much freer exploration of the text. I decided to go back to the official English transcript because it contained a dreamlike incoherence that I wanted to explore within the new information that we had.

In addition, my interest in this particular testimony was not simply in its logical incoherence. In my head Mrs Konile's testimony exists with the precise intonation, pauses, cadences, tiredness and rhythm with which it was delivered by the female interpreter. Mrs Konile's testimony spoke to me through my sensibilities of sound and the final incomprehension-ness of poetry. So although we now had a better translation on paper, and her original voice on cassette, Mrs Konile existed for me in the voice of the interpreter.

Narrative structure

The task of the Truth Commission's Human Rights Violation Committee dictated the form of victim narratives. The beginning of a testimony usually consisted of some biographical detail, leading to the middle part about the circumstances and content of the violation. After clarifications, the desire and/or needs of the victim would be established, upon which the commissioner who was chairing that specific evidence, would conclude the interaction. (The problems this structure created for finding the 'truth' have been well explored by scholars such as Richard Wilson, Kimberly Theidon, Andre du Toit and others.)

Being the last of four mothers to testify, Mrs Konile found herself in a complex narrative situation. She had to deliver her own personal narrative within the framework of four broader narratives: personal, communal, regional and national. Firstly, her testimony had to give voice to her personal experience and grieving out there in Indwe. We can assume that she had certain personal expectations of how and what she would like to present.

Secondly, her testimony formed part of those of the mothers of the Gugulethu Seven. We can assume that the other mothers expected from her that her testimony should fit in, verify and broaden theirs. For example, Mrs Miya remembered the following last detail about her son:

[. . .] he said mommy but I want to accompany you to the station. I said no [. . .] I've been going to work at this time of the morning every – every year, but you never accompanied me. [. . .]

I said to him look turn back I don't want you to accompany me.

But then he insisted he did accompany me and up to NY59 [...] He wanted to still go on with me but I told him no turn back. That was actually the last time I saw him.

Thirdly, her narrative formed part of the Western Cape hearings on human rights violations. The Gugulethu Seven incident was selected by the Western Cape Truth Commission office to form part of its very first hearings as emblematic of what happened in the region. Fourthly, her narrative formed part of the bigger narrative 'gathered' by the Truth Commission in order to arrive at a national picture 'as comprehensive as possible' of the wrongs of the past. Mrs Konile was probably meant to form part of what Geoffrey Bennington called the 'narration at the centre of the nation: stories of national origins, myths of founding fathers, genealogies of heroes', all those things providing a country with a history, a boundary and a name.

Mrs Konile was not, however, very successful in steering her story within this four-tiered context. She chose to tell her personal story in a particular cultural and metaphoric way that sat strangely among the other narratives where the mother was supposed to become 'the custodian of the collective memory of the fallen hero'. She did try to link herself to the other three mothers ('We were four mothers, then we were told to go to the mortuary'), but her experiences with the goat and rock led to some awkward moments during her testimony. On the video footage the other mothers could be seen making restless movements while looking away from her. Mrs Konile also did not project a sense of innocent-victim versus brutal-state, and she did not acknowledge the purpose of the Truth Commission or mention the political significance of her son's death. Therefore, we could say that she did not manage to produce a story fulfilling regional (Western Cape) and national expectations.

Characteristics of oral narrative

'Oral narrative', says Isabel Hofmeyr, 'is largely shaped by the prerogatives of oral memory and its need to create mnemonic systems' as core images to enable the narrator to fulfil his or her task. The mnemonic systems may include 'a plot that is more episodic than climactic [...] and the use of

formulaic images through which story segments can easily be retrieved'. In the four Gugulethu Seven narratives presented to the Truth Commission, there were indeed obvious mnemonic or core moments that were narrated by more than one mother:

last contact between mother and son (Ngewu, Miya, *not* Konile)

hearing of the news of the death (all four talked about it)

seeing son on television (Ngewu, Miya, Mxinwa, *not* Konile)

identifying the body in the mortuary (Ngewu, Miya, Konile)

funeral (all four talked about it)

inquest and harassment (Ngewu, Miya, Mxinwa, *not* Konile)

As we can see, Mrs Konile missed out on three of the most important core moments: last contact between mother and son, seeing the incident on television and the inquest and further harassment by police. Not having had access to three powerful core moments must have influenced her testimony in significant ways. With her rural background informing her sense of the purpose and style of storytelling, she must have been acutely aware that her own narration was in danger of not doing justice to her own and her group's experience and expectations. I want to argue that she used the rock incident to affirm the other mothers' stories, while simultaneously using it to strengthen and foreground the severity of her own suffering.

Richard Wilson reminds us that seemingly irrelevant information is often a key event upon which whole segments of the narrative hang:

Sometimes they can seem quite bizarre and expressive of states of extreme psychological dissonance. They are the personalized symbols upon which the structure of the narrative hinges and emotional associations tend to pivot.

By skilfully using storytelling techniques, Mrs Konile linked her story neatly to the core elements of especially the testimony of Mrs Miya:

Mrs Miya

*saw son live
at station
his clothes
last words of son to her
television
harassment*

Mrs Konile

*saw son dead
at mortuary
bleeding body
last words of son to policeman
rock
urine*

Between a rock and a hard place

The television news broadcast of the killing of these seven young men provided the main core moment of the Gugulethu Seven incident. As we have pointed out before, the SABC's news footage came to 'brand' the Gugulethu Seven hearings and featured prominently in two documentaries about the Gugulethu Seven. It was also used to 'set the scene' at the investigative hearings into the Gugulethu Seven where Mrs Konile testified for the second time about seven months later.

The broadcast itself must have confronted Mrs Eunice Miya, Mrs Cynthia Ngewu and Mrs Irene Mtsingwa with a bizarre mix of horror and what I would identify as post-modern elements: sitting in front of a television seeing your dead child used as a prop in a staged killing that was presented as 'reality' – it was news, on television, had footage and was therefore 'true'. Many clues might have warned them that the whole incident had been staged, except that the young men, their sons, although used as props in a make-believe event, were really dead. Mrs Konile did not see the news broadcast because she didn't own a television set; her poverty and isolation rendered her doubly deprived.

So how could she effectively bring her suffering in rural isolation across to this Truth Commission audience? How could she explain her marginal house-less, television-less life in isolated Indwe? How could she convey that her life had become part of the margin itself?

Isabel Hofmeyr suggests that the fantastic resides at the centre of oral memory. I want to suggest that within the small space for narrative negotiation left to her by the other three testimonies, Mrs Konile had no choice but to

resort to a technique of the fantastic in order to do justice to her part in this group testimony. She created her own core image. She used the rock of metaphor and fantasy to do justice to her very different experience, while, at the same time, strengthening the main narrative of the mothers.

While the other mothers could move around looking for their sons, she was pinned down by a rock. While they were catching trains, leaving at specific times such as 4.20 a.m., she was pinned down by a rock – specifically from eleven until four o'clock (translated by the interpreter as five), she said. While the other mothers were attending an inquest where Afrikaans was a noise in their ears, she was hearing a continuous cry, lying under the rock. While they were safe and sound in their houses, she found herself begging for urine. While they were involved in commemorating their sons as political heroes, a doctor was taunting her, 'What is ANC? What is ANC?' Identifying the rock as a core image, opens up the metaphoric quality of this scene. The poetic rhythm and words capture her despair and loneliness like few other sequences in the broader Gugulethu narrative:

And there was a continuous cry that I could hear.

It felt like I was going down – down – down.

When I looked, I was wet – wet – wet –

I was wet all over the place.

I asked for water, they said no we don't have water.

I said – [...] I said please – please urinate on a plate

so that I can drink, [...]

I am no-one – I am nothing, what is ANC, what is ANC.

I am not suggesting that Mrs Konile was imagining these things or was making them up in a competitive spirit so that her listeners could 'travel h(er) imaginative and emotional landscape', but rather that she was clustering particular incidences together in order to form her own core moment in her own narrative of desperate isolation and poverty. Instead of the television moment, Mrs Konile put forward her life immobilised by a rock.

But was there really, physically, a rock?

Even if there were places for elderly women to dig coal in Indwe, where would a boulder big enough to pin a person down, come from? But, of

course, that was the wrong question. Mrs Konile focused excessively on the rock as it became the expression of her state of 'extreme psychological dissonance'. The image of urine flowed directly from this. Urine comes from the orifices. The orifices were often regarded as the most marginal parts of the body – where outside and inside converged. According to Mary Douglas, anything oozing from these vulnerable points – blood, milk, urine, faeces – was transgressing the boundaries by making them messy and smelly. And Freud argued that 'man' was being socialised to be revolted by the ejections from other peoples' bodies. In several human rights violation hearings victims testified how warders and police often urinated or defecated on detainees in order to humiliate and torture them.

Begging to receive the rejected fluid of another body, Mrs Konile was saying, 'I'm so marginal, so rejected, devastated, give me urine to drink, let me make humiliation, devastation and torture part of myself. Let me internalise my completely destroyed-into-degeneration life.'

But we should also bear in mind that it is in the first place her *thirst* that puts her in need of liquid, any liquid. According to John and Jean Comaroff, thirst is sometimes a key signifier of affliction in black religious communities:

[*It*] connotes dissipation by means of very general images of physical depletion, images that imply an imbalance in relations between person and context . . . [*To be thirsty means to be*] desiccated by the disruption of the regular, fluid interchange between one's being and the world.

Mrs Konile desperately wanted the connection between her and her world to resume its previous flow. Although the world around her was wet (she used the word 'wet' six times in a row in the original text), she herself felt depleted and desiccated after her son's death:

I said please – please urinate on a plate so that I can drink, she did and I – then regained consciousness, I woke up.

By creating her own core images that had absolutely nothing to do with the Truth Commission's core image of being-the-mother-of-the-hero, Mrs Konile in the first place linked to and strengthened the testimony of her

fellow testifiers, but then, by 'diverting' to the rock scene, effectively undermined both the regional and national frameworks imposed on her by the format and expectations of the Commission hearings.



I could only have come to this reading after Nosisi and Kopano found the Xhosa testimony to be coherent and dignified despite some slippages in the simultaneous interpretation. The place name 'Indwe' removed all spatial incoherency and recontextualised the narrative. With this barrier out of the way, I could analyse the rock incident in terms of oral narration, which revealed such evocative and poetic beauty that my initial misgivings changed to empathy. The input from Nosisi and Kopano via translation, indigenous cultural and psychological practices restored the coherency, sensibility and dignity of Mrs Konile. It was only after this had been done that I could come to the awareness that her testimony was a narrative of exceptional power.

Reading in terms of translation and culture

We cannot understand Mrs Konile's testimony without the context of her socio-cultural background. Aspects that helped my [Nosisi's] 'reading' of her included Xhosa linguistic and para-linguistic information, such as repetition, direct speech, exclamations, crying, sighs and pauses.

Socio-cultural background

Mrs Konile is a mother from the rural areas and is clearly closely connected to a traditional way of life. This was reflected right through her testimony. In the original testimony we learnt that Mrs Konile wanted her son to be buried at home (that is, Indwe), but the security police refused because, according to them, he 'had bombs'. They resisted her request so fiercely that her son, Zabonke, was buried with the other members of the Gugulethu Seven in Cape Town.

It is important to note that after Mrs Konile had told the Truth Commission about the police's refusal of an Indwe burial, she used the following words, '*Kuabe ke ngoku ndiyancama . . .*' ('I gave up'). This emphasises

that not even a hero's burial with many comrades participating was more important to her than that he should be buried in Indwe. 'I gave up' happened not after her son's death, but after she was forced to accept his burial place.

Wanting to have her son buried at Indwe has crucial cultural foundations. To be buried near your ancestors is seen as a way of safeguarding the channel of communication between the deceased and the ancestors, and in this way the deceased person will be protected by the ancestors. For Mrs Konile, this would also mean that the bond between mother and child would be kept intact because she could visit her son's grave. Even more than that, her own bond with the ancestors would be maintained because she could access them through her son. Her unsuccessful attempts to get him buried at Indwe must have left her with a deep wound.

The words 'I gave up' illustrate her deepening sense of helplessness and powerlessness. Her only son, who was her main source of support, had been cut off from her. Symbolically, she was describing a huge loss that was much more than monetary – an unbridgeable rupture had taken place between her and the 'living dead'.

After the funeral Mrs Konile returned to Indwe. (This was not clearly indicated in the official English version of her testimony.) On her return, she found life very difficult. The loss of her son was compounded firstly by a disturbed relationship with the ancestors and, secondly, by the loss of her only financial support – even the house that he had left her seemed destined not to become hers. According to Willy Jansen, the misfortunes and complaints of women who are left behind as a result of death, war, migration or desertion seem to symbolise at once dislocation and poverty. Mrs Konile is no exception. The death of her husband left her a widow – but with a son. The death of her son left her destitute. The burial of her son in a far-away city left her without any recourse. Even access to a house became impossible. Her desperation is reflected in her halting words:

[...] a-ndi-akukho cebo, ndiyay' funa la ndlu, ela bala. Ndadedisw' umva
[...]

[...] I – I don't – there's – no plan – and I want that house, that site. I was
driven back [...]

Only black males in apartheid South Africa were entitled to own houses. This meant that the loss of Mrs Konile's son had plunged her deeper into poverty. She exclaimed, 'Eyi! Ak'senzima!' ('Eyi! It's very difficult!')

In the official Truth Commission version this exclamation is missing, an omission that toned down the severity of her plight. Her desperation became even more evident in her decision to go and dig for coal. We could say that she resorted to digging coal in order to sustain her sense of hope.



This reminds me [Nosisi] of a Xhosa folktale about an impoverished grandmother who was looking after her grandchildren, keeping them happy by telling stories while they were sitting around the fire. Since there were times when they had nothing to eat, she managed to sustain life by keeping a pot of water on the fire. The children would stay filled with hope that food was coming as they saw steam rising from the pot and gradually they would fall asleep.



In the case of Mrs Konile, her attempts to sustain a sense of hope seemed to have failed because instead of finding warmth, she got hit by a rock and lost consciousness. At this point in her testimony Mrs Konile started to cry, covering half of her face with a white handkerchief, but the official version did not reflect that she was no longer in control of her emotions.

Ndabethwa loo mini, kwakukwangolwesine. Ndabethwa litye, wabuy' umgodi. Kancinci, okokuba, mawungandigqumeleli. Wahlal' es' nqeni [...]. Ndabethwa, ngoleveni, ndakukhutshwa ... ngo ... fo emaxesheni. [crying] [...] Ndathi mabandiph' amanzi, kwathw' akekhw' amanzi. Ndathi mna, 'Tsho kweny' inkoskazi endikunye nayo apha nakula madoda, a-a-' Nda-ndathi kwamna, ndathi, 'Chama ndisele, uchamel' epleyitini, le sikhupha ngay' amalahle'. Ndasela, ndaqabu-u-u-ka. [pause, crying, sighing].

I was hit by a rock on that day, it was a Thursday. I was hit by a rock, the rock fell on me. I was nearly buried by the rock. The rock landed on my waist [...] I was hit at eleven and was recovered at 10 ... ur. [*crying*] I asked for water, they said there's no water. I said, 'Ask from one of the women who are with me and from the men out there.' I said ... I said, I said, 'Urinate in the plate that we use to dig coal with so that I can drink.' I drank, I recover—red! [*pause, crying, deep breathing*].

The rock seems to symbolise her sense of pain and powerlessness to the extent that in order to crawl out of her misery, she had to drink urine to regain consciousness. According to Xhosa culture and also confirmed by Mrs Konile later, urine is associated with healing.

In the original Xhosa version, Mrs Konile gradually regained consciousness, but then heard a persistent cry, 'Yho!Yho!Yho!' This cry seemed to symbolise her own pleas for help. She also mentioned that she found herself soaking wet; this obviously shocked her because she repeated it six times:

[...] ndathi ndawujonga, ndajonga ndimanzi, ndimanzi ndimanzi, ndimanzi, ndimanzi. Ndimanzi ndonke.

[...] when I looked, I saw that I'm wet, I'm wet, I'm wet, I'm wet, I'm wet all over.

This awareness of being wet could also be an indication that she had regained consciousness. In the official version this information was also missing.

The omission of quotation marks

After her recovery, Mrs Konile was taken to hospital, only to face a further challenge. In the official English version it seemed as if Mrs Konile herself asked in despair, 'What is ANC? What is ANC?' But from the original Xhosa tape, it became clear that the doctor, who chased her away, was told that her deceased son had belonged to the ANC (perhaps in an attempt to convince him to treat her?). In response, the doctor, perhaps scornfully, asked, 'What is ANC? What is ANC?'

Wath'ugqirha ma! ... ndi! ... Hambe! [*with emphasis*], ndiye phants'kwamatye kulaa ndawo bendikuyo. Bendingengom-nto yanto kakade, 'Yintoni iANC? Yintoni' uANC?'

When I arrived at the hospital, I was chased away by the doctor. The doctor said [*that*] !! Should! Leave! [*with emphasis*] I should go and hide under the rocks in that place where I was coming from. I am nothing anyway [*because*] 'What is ANC ... What is ANC?'

The official transcript did not indicate that Mrs Konile, in her retelling of her experience, was quoting the doctor. The lack of secondary quotation marks made readers assume that Mrs Konile didn't know what the ANC was. By adding the quotation marks the question was rendered differently: rather than a politically naive utterance from a distressed woman, it was restored as a question by a third party, the medical doctor.

This is an example of how incomprehension was created at different steps along the way towards the official translation. Mrs Konile told the story. The interpreter translated it without indicating either by voice, or by any other marker, that these words were spoken by the doctor. The transcriber also did not pick up on any difference so that the reader of the official transcript could not but assume that an ANC activist had a mother who didn't know what the ANC was.



The coal story, the episode of the rock and the urine were real manifestations of Mrs Konile's dire poverty, her sense of loss, helplessness and the state of despair that she found herself in. Since her son was her only source of support, the depth of her personal devastation seemed to know no end.

And this was the biggest obstacle that the official transcript presented: it effectively removed from the narrative the extent of Mrs Konile's poverty and her subsequent vulnerability. In contrast to the other mothers, Mrs Konile suffered extreme circumstances of poverty and despair, but these could only be picked up in her rural references, at the points in her testimony when she cried and in her cultural remarks. Hardly any of this manifested in the official English translation. The omitted information impacted negatively on Mrs

Konile's testimony. Instead of conveying her material poverty, she was rendered incoherent. In coming to grips with her testimony, we could not rely solely on the official translated version, but had to consult the original Xhosa version in order to arrive at more informed conclusions.

Reading of psycho-cultural rupturings

Unable always to follow Mrs Konile's testimony with ease, I [*Kopano*] found myself asking, 'Why could I not readily understand Mrs Konile?' This question sat at the heart of my engagement with her. This was the question that was always present whenever I read her words. To be honest, this is a question that always troubles me in engaging with African people when I fail to understand them easily.

In addition to *why*, I also asked *what* it was that I could not understand in Mrs Konile's testimony. What prevented me from readily apprehending her sense of things – her relationship with her son, the commissioners and audience, with herself? Was it because she was psychologically disturbed?

The answer to that was a negative; she did not seem to suffer from any recognisable psychopathology.

Was it because she was from a rural area or was it because she was an elderly woman while I was a younger man? Mrs Konile was indeed a typical woman of rural Xhosa background. This is important. Its importance became clearer, but not less complicated, as our work proceeded.

Badly concealed in my desire to apprehend the testimony of Mrs Konile was a terrifying sense of misunderstanding. I felt terrorised by my incomprehension because of what it suggested about a shared history of oppression, African culture and understanding itself. My incomprehension suggested that a shared culture is never enough to understand one another. Provoked by Mrs Konile's lack of being readily graspable, what could be retraced was what might be loosely called 'a psycho-cultural rupturing'. This rupturing staged the tear between the multiple truths of Mrs Konile and the truths recorded by the Truth Commission – indeed, between the psyche of Mrs Konile and the psyche of a body commissioned to hear her truth, and between one black person and another.

The Truth Commission acknowledged the problem of dichotomising truth into objective and subjective, and instead opted to differentiate between

four notions of truth: forensic, personal, dialogical and healing truths. If we accept these four notions, we can hear how Mrs Konile moved from the one to the other. For example, Mrs Konile says:

Ndabethwa ngoleveni, ndakukhutshwa . . . ngo . . . fo

[*It was eleven at the time, but they could only get me out of the rock around four*]

This should remain forensically under suspicion until we knew whether any of the women around her during the rock incident had a watch. But when it comes to the other kinds of truth, whether or not she was under the rock for about six hours was not the point really.

Entrancing confusion

Mrs Konile made the work of her audience and subsequent readers hard. Commissioner Boraine asked her to 'tell us where you come from, where you've been, about your family before you tell us what happened in 1986?' In our translation she responded:

[*a sigh*] I am Mrs Konile from Indwe. [*deep breath*]. I have three children. [*deep breath*] They were four including the one who was shot. [*deep breath*] They are girls and are all married [*deep breath*]. The only person I was staying with was my son. I didn't have anybody else. Their father died earlier. [*deep breath*]. And now it was my son and I, we were standing together [*in supporting the family*] – the two of us.

Note how Mrs Konile connects her deceased spouse with her son. In the official translation she says, 'The one I was living with was my son, because I didn't have a husband [. . .]'. She is not saying that she had children outside of marriage, but that her husband had died a while ago and that she is a widow. Even with this little bit of biographical information Mrs Konile makes it hard for us to follow her.

Let me insert a methodological point here. One of my co-researchers seemed to have no major problems in 'hearing' Mrs Konile. Nosisi's Xhosa

cultural embeddedness enabled her to access the way rural women talk. My other co-researcher, after some input from us, departed from what we could label 'a white place' and seemed also not to have further problems 'hearing' Mrs Konile.

In contrast to them, I had problems. For me there was both a familiarity and a stunning strangeness to her testimony. What did she mean by 'Something told me to go and pick up coals'? Was this a common way of talking among rural people? Or did it indicate that within her world, Mrs Konile oriented herself 'irrationally' by perceiving (rather than rationally, by judging); that her preferred mode of adapting was sensing and intuition (over thinking and feeling)? Similar questions were likely to be provoked by 'I woke up [*under the rock*], I felt like I was just getting out of bed'. It was inexplicable how getting out from under a rock could be like getting out of bed. How should we explain all the going down, the wetness, the continuous cry? To read Mrs Konile's truth literally did not deliver much.

These sentences had a dreamlike quality, an element of magic and hallucination. Was it indeed about magic elements in real life, the fantastical used to render the everyday explicable and liveable? The rock was at once literal, metaphorical and metonymic. It referred to and stood in for the burden of a reduced life and living without a son (and husband and daughters). It did not really matter that it did not make ready and immediate sense. It was one of the truths – Mrs Konile's personal truth. She went digging for coal because of her impoverished circumstances, was felled and covered by a rock, then released.

How should we explain with the necessary force such a trite, yet painfully material, fact of loneliness, poverty and suffering? This, it might be said, was another truth, where language became too common, and we needed to find other means of communicating.

Botho ke tiro: Living with the strange

We often assume that a story by someone who looks or speaks like ourselves will be easier to understand than a story by someone from a completely different culture. Although there are clear dangers to this assumption, it has serious grounds on which to exist. It owes its terrorising undertone to our

familiar history, including the historical racial-cultural positions found within South African disciplinary inquiry.

I suggest that history holds only a small part of 'salvation', and that culture on its own, too, does not imply understanding. We need to find other ways to examine the truth of testimonies. What ways could they be? Given our history, any attempt to analyse the past or the present by anybody who values intercultural understanding, must assume that a subject from another cultural group is both familiar and strange.

More significantly, though, I want to argue that *even* subjects from our own cultural group are both familiar and strange.

Let us then re-approach Mrs Konile's testimony. Let us seek in her story a personhood that was as habitual as it was estranged. It was precisely in how she went about telling us of her life in the curious way that she did, that the possibility of her psycho-cultural wholeness lay. It was out of her strangeness and ordinariness that we were able to resuture her self-in-culture wholeness, as well as her Xhosa-ness.

To paraphrase what John and Jean Comaroff said about the Batswana, I went and found again how *botho ke tiro*: how personhood was fabrication in progress. To rephrase A.C. Jordan on *ubuntu*, the task of the intellectual is to be an advocate for that which is strange. Strangeness is not such a terrifying thing. In spite of, or because of, the difficulty of following Mrs Konile, it was ultimately her elusiveness which achieved that point: that another person, regardless of her or his group or belonging, is always strange to some extent. Indeed, when looking at an 'African self', an intra-African-ness strangeness needs to be part of it. In the face of intransigent stereotypes fostering exclusivity, Africans need to re-accept that we have always been strange to one another. This should instruct us to be much more cautious about what we claim to know about each other, about what we say Africans are or are not, and what African culture is or is not.



'The African', says Achille Mbembe, stands for 'a headless figure threatened with madness and quite innocent of any notion of center, hierarchy, or stability', and is usually portrayed

as a vast dark cave where every benchmark and distinction come together in total confusion, and the rifts of a tragic and unhappy human history stand revealed: a mixture of the half-created and the incomplete, strange signs, convulsive movements – in short a bottomless abyss where everything is noise, yawing gap, and primordial chaos.

However hard to undo these perceptions and their effects, to give careful attention to an irregular or marginalised testimony that falls outside the 'norm' is a step towards liberating ourselves. These 'strange' testimonies underline the importance of refraining from 'un-strange-ing' the strange – to allow it to be strange – but within its original logical and coherent context. Accommodation of 'strangeness' would keep the spaces of tolerance open for many people emerging from contexts of conflict and estrangement. It could also provide an opportunity for the ideas, techniques and issues from non-Western communities to become part of intercultural exchange and genuine scientific innovation.

Besides, to ignore these oral narratives that had gathered their innate knowledge at the price of grief and death and were delivered before the Truth Commission at high emotional cost, boils down to a perpetuation of the former neglect that victims had been exposed to.



Mrs Konile expressed open delight when, during our visit near the end of our research project, we started quoting verbatim parts of the testimony she had delivered ten years ago. 'Am I really written down like that?' she asked.



In order to avoid Mbembe's accusation that recent academic output has rendered sub-Saharan Africa into a 'cloak of impenetrability' and a 'black hole of reason', it is important to deal precisely with texts that seem to beg these kinds of descriptions. The roots as well as the 'ground around the roots' of Truth Commission testimonies should be extensively dealt with before

submitting them to various theories. For example, we could have regarded the question 'What is ANC? What is ANC?' as sufficient ground for a whole series of political, existential, alienation and/or liminality theories, while the presence of quotation marks rendered it into a sceptical and/or nasty remark – something that rather forms part of what Lawrence Langer identifies as 'humiliated memory'. Remembering unspeakable humiliation 'recalls an utter distress that shatters all molds designed to contain a unified and irreplaceable image of the self'.

As we were doing research, we also kept deconstructing the so-called scientific basis of our research – not to make a point about deconstruction, but to make the point that it is difficult and complex to analyse texts from marginal communities and that it is dangerous to draw conclusions based solely on theories from dominant cultures or studies done on First World testimonies.

The audible original text was of overall importance. It allowed us to distinguish pronunciations, exclamations and other traces of high emotion. We could transcribe the Xhosa and contribute to a verification of the official translated text. All of this enabled us to analyse the official text with greater sensitivity and a more accurate focus that was not caught up in incoherencies. Using a 'clarified' version enabled us to arrive at a much clearer and more rounded 're-membering' and 'hearing' of Mrs Konile.

Kopano tried to verify whether Mrs Konile's strangeness was authentically hers or was she 'made strange' by the Truth Commission's framework, possible incompetent briefing and/or simultaneous interpretation. Only the original Xhosa version of the testimony could verify whether or not Mrs Konile was embodying the idea of Martin Heidegger as quoted by Mbembe:

The colonized does not exist as a self; the colonized *is*, but in the same way as a rock *is* – that is, as nothing more. And anyone who would make him/her express more finds nothing.

The original Xhosa version established that, despite some slippages, Mrs Konile's strangeness was entirely her own. She was coherent but strange. The second phase of this verification was to embrace the strangeness, because the self was a work in progress. Through Mrs Konile we are taught to advocate

for that which is strange. By accommodating strangeness, we contribute to the spaces, some first opened up by the Truth Commission, by articulating a nuanced South Africanness that speaks of tolerance and diversity.

7

The interpreters

Translators and interpreters are frequently treated as invisible and anonymous. The work of the interpreters of the Truth Commission has been particularly neglected in the sense that, to our knowledge, few studies if any have been done on the impact of the interpretation process on the indigenous languages or on the interpreters themselves.

When the Truth Commission decided to make use of simultaneous interpretation, the process was relatively new in South Africa. Despite a great need for interpretation in courts and psychiatric institutions, the process also has not been used again on that scale.

Interpretation is often confused with or considered to be one and the same thing as translation. Although both cut across cultural boundaries, the term 'interpretation' is quite accurate in describing what it attempts to do: when translating at speed, while listening, the version produced is closer to an interpretation than a translation.

Simultaneous interpretation means real-time interpreting and was first done in a courtroom setting during the Nürnberg Trials in Germany from 1945 to 1949. The Interpreters Office in the Southern District of New York describes the act of simultaneous interpretation as follows:

Speakers talk as they normally would while the interpreter listens to one language and reproduces the same content in another, lagging slightly

behind the speaker. All this occurs at the same time (hence the term *simultaneous*), with the voices overlapping. The speaker's voice is dominant and the interpreter speaks in a low voice, either in a whisper or into a microphone. [...]

Relatively few people can interpret simultaneously at a high level of accuracy (80% or better), regardless of their ability to speak the two languages in question. Simultaneous interpretation calls for concentration, mental flexibility, wide-ranging vocabulary in both languages, good diction, voice control and ability to deal with many stimuli at once.

Research has identified twenty-two cognitive skills that are involved in simultaneous interpreting. Current neurological research reveals that interpreting draws heavily upon both left-brain and right-brain functions.

Annette de Groot identifies the complexity of the act of simultaneous interpretation (or SI):

Many people would agree that SI is one of the most complex language processing skills ... because many processes need to take place at one and the same moment in time. The interpreter has to comprehend and store input segments in the source language, transform an earlier segment from source to target language, produce an even earlier segment in the target language, and cope with time pressure since SI is externally paced; the speaker, not the interpreter, determines the speaking rate. That SI is intrinsically demanding is illustrated by the fact that even experienced professional interpreters sometimes make up to several mistakes per minute, and that they usually take shifts of only 20 minutes maximum to prevent fatigue.

Our research into the testimony of Mrs Konile focused so intensely on interpretation that we participated in a Truth Commission interpreters' workshop held at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in April 2006. It formed part of a conference organised by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation to celebrate the establishment of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission ten years earlier. One of the panels, chaired

by Christine Anthonissen, consisting of Nosisi Mpolweni, Zannie Bock and Truth Commission interpreter Lebohang Mathibile, discussed interpreting and translation. Before the conference itself, on 18 April, a workshop was held at UWC with three of the Truth Commission's interpreters: Lebohang Mathibile, Kethiwe Marais and Abubakr Petersen. The discussion was led by Nicky Rousseau, a former researcher at the Truth Commission, and Anjie Krog, in her capacity as a former journalist reporting on the Truth Commission. The remarks – slightly edited – that follow were made at this UWC workshop.

General interpreting challenges

KETHIWE MARAIS: In 1980 I started doing translation work for the ANC. I was supposed to set up an [*underground*] distribution network in the area of Limpopo and Gauteng and the first thing that struck me was that if I wanted people to risk their lives with information, they needed to understand it in their own language. So I took all the information raw as it was, translated and then discussed it. We could even photocopy it in the mother tongues, because it was less dangerous for me and people understood better what they were supposed to do and what was contained in the pamphlets. Then I went to university to study social work and ended up in psychology. Again I realised that if you want to speak to the hearts of people, speak their language, and I continued to be involved with translation and have stayed with it ever since. When the ANC was unbanned, I got to do translating in my professional capacity, and in 1991 we organised our first training. I organised people from Switzerland to train us. That was how I got involved in the TRC. Theo du Plessis called me to work with him. He got the tender to provide the language service.

NICKY ROUSSEAU: I think the specification of translation services formed part of the [TRC] legislation and when the TRC was looking around a translation unit already existed.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: I always say an interpreter is born. You must have certain qualities. You must be able to speak fluently, you must be articulate, you must be able to work under pressure and think independently. But the

mere fact that you speak two languages fluently, does not mean that you could be an interpreter. You must be able to understand the nuances in these two languages, to understand the culture.

KETHIWE MARAIS: You must be able to multi-task. You hear in one language while you translate and talk at the same time in another language.

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: You can enhance your skill with training, but you must have an aptitude for it.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: Before the TRC started, Theo du Plessis, myself, Annalie Lotriet and others went to Antwerp to the school HIVT [*Hoger Instituut voor Vertalers en Tolken*]. Eric Hertog there gave us the exposure and some manuals. We stayed for four weeks. But it was an ongoing process of interaction and Eric came to South Africa to provide further training.

KETHIWE MARAIS: I went to Eric Hertog, but also to the Geneva school – we mixed all the ingredients and shared the difficulties. We were very excited about the challenge and wanted to do it well. The more difficult part was the emotional aspect . . . the emotions have to come through your own voice. How you do that and at the same time render the message accurately, was very difficult.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: Our training focused on interpreting. You still find people who think interpreters are translators. We do both the act of translation and interpreting, but we are oral. There is not the slightest chance for consulting a dictionary – you have to sit for eight hours and talk.

NICKY ROUSSEAU: You actually interpreted in the TRC, but what survived of that, is now [*in recent studies*] regarded, and treated, as a translation.

JEFF VERSCHUREN (Belgian observer): No, I disagree, it is an interpretation written down and not a translation. Everybody reading the transcripts realises that they are interpretations and not painstaking translations.

NICKY ROUSSEAU: There was a huge debate within the TRC about the transcripts – to what extent should they be edited? If an interpreter changes the famous CABWE conference into the Cowboy conference – should that be edited? Maybe change the spelling, but if you are moving into grammar, then it becomes unacceptable to make changes. Who should make those changes? I endlessly hear people say that there are mistakes in the transcripts, but the idea was never that they should be immaculate translations.

Vocabulary and style

KETHIWE MARAIS: We were the originators of the vocabulary of the TRC in the indigenous languages. There were no references and we could check and countercheck nothing. We just had to work [*things*] out as we were running. It was interesting how we handled difficult words. If there is a new word, do you work around the concept, or do you deal with the emotional side of it? No workshops for discussing, nothing.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: But with time the interpreters built up their own vocabulary and did their own glossaries. I encouraged that. For example, the term multi-lingualism – in Sesotho you don't have such a word, and I created a term, and today they use it as the term. Was there any discussion for journalists?

ANTJIE KROG: No, for example, there was no good word for 'perpetrator' in Afrikaans. The word '*oortreder*' was too light a word, we thought, so we used a description: '*skender-van-menseregte*' [*literally, 'violator of human rights'*].

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: I started with the amnesty hearings. We were given words of things that were to come up. But I had no former experience – I had a two-day blitzkrieg and then a crash course of two weeks and then was sent to Port Elizabeth. It took me about a month to interpret five minutes without a mistake, but I finally got there.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: Lots of taboos, of course. In Pietersburg there was this old man who testified about his torture and he was describing how the torture took place, unfortunately the interpreter was a lady. And the

commissioners asked him a question through the interpreter and he said, 'Oh my girl I'm not going to tell my story if I keep on hearing you here – I need a man to be able to speak freely'. The lady had to get out of the booth and I had to get in and then he felt comfortable and then I started to interpret about the torture, how they undressed him, smeared fresh butter on his pubic area, and the cuffs, but because I was there he was comfortable. There were some taboo words, some terms like penis, it's so simple, it's penis, like that, but you don't know where to begin to say penis in Sesotho. I interpreted it like it is. Sometimes people would come to me and say, 'You are very rude', then I would say, 'But listen, if you say private parts, my mouth is a private part, I want to call a spade a spade, it's a new thing happening and we have to work together on it.' I'm quite shocked that even today we cannot talk freely. It had to be accurate especially with the amnesty hearings.

There is a difference between you soil yourself and *jy gaan kak*. The second one is very harsh and the first one is soft. You have to say it as it is. In East London someone was talking – in his speech he used, '*Bliksem, ek gaan jou bliksem*'. And I interpreted it as 'I'm going to hit you'. And the judge interrupted and said, 'Sir, could you please interpret the word as it is, "I'm going to *bliksem* you", because it carries a meaning.' You would also keep the word *kafir*.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: You do get people who mumble when they speak and you can hardly make out what they're trying to say. You must remind them and ask the chairperson to say that they should speak into the microphone, please speak louder, or don't speak so loud, articulate properly. You get people who talk too fast and won't stop at anything. You have to devise a strategy to interpret those people because you cannot stop them – what I did was I would come slowly interpreting to them, leaving a lag time of about five to six words in between to leave enough time to formulate and so slow them down. You also get people who stutter, you have to keep pace with them, when they say I-I-I w-w-w-woke, you have to give lag time to hear out what they want to say.

KETHIWE MARAIS: Sometimes people were too distraught to really describe what happened, they were incoherent. Now you didn't want to mimic them with your voice, but you wanted to bring across that incoherence without

removing its integrity. So you tried not to be too clever with clever words, and smart concepts that did not come from this person. This person is distraught and you have to bring across how this person also feels in this whole matter. So that was difficult to handle as well.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: Especially during the graveyard shift after lunch, I don't know whether anybody was aware, but I devised a strategy of shutting down, of just shutting off. You know, just my head is working – a person would tell a very energised story, but I would follow with a monotonous yet very accurate voice, that was my strategy when storytellers testified. You found them everywhere – those who talked easily. You must remember that many people were very excited about the TRC. They didn't mind waking up at 5 to be at the hearing at 6, although they knew it only started at 9, just to get a glimpse of Bishop Tutu or the people there. So they were still very excited to tell their story after lunch, while the interpreters would be exhausted.

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: Some of the lady interpreters, when you got these long storytellers, and the interpreters were at the back with nobody looking at us, these girls were actually interpreting while doing their nails. Angie got to a stage that she could interpret while she was reading.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: It was very interesting. A specific lady, Pamela, she would actually pack her bag very nicely. As one of their teachers I'm very stern when it comes to booth behaviour. I tell my students, guys whatever you do, do not speak to anybody in the booth, only interpret. And I get so angry because the microphones are so sensitive and listeners do not want noises of pens and bangles and things, but this Pamela mastered the skill of packing her make-up bag – I would look at her and see she is now packing her bag, and I would try to hear a sound, but she would open her bag slowly without any sound at all, put lipstick on while interpreting perfectly and then put everything back. It was so amazing.

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: Lebohang taught us if you want to write something down use a pen, not a pencil, pencils make a sound. But then, don't click the pens. I would go into the booth and take the pens of others. You are not

realising you are making these noises. You also get bored, especially during the legal arguments.

KETHIWE MARAIS: Sometimes they play around with legalese and you have to respect that because they are trying to trick the other into something.

The first hearings

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: The beginning of the hearings was such a frightening experience. To go into a hall full of people. The booths were erected right in front. We have never done interpreting on such a big scale before, so you were bound to have adrenalin flowing. We sat in the booths and of course people were wondering: who are those people in the booths? Why are they treated like that, because remember, it was also the first time for South Africans to experience interpretation on that scale. Because everybody else had headphones you realised: should you make mistakes everybody will pick it up and they will see through the glass that it is you who is talking. Do these people know that nobody can do this 100 per cent accurately? But in the end it was the emotional aspect that we were not prepared for. When people broke down – you know interpreters are people too. We have emotions. In our training, no matter what, we were told to put a capsule around us – but we realised in the first week that it was not possible. We were interpreters, but we are emotional human beings above all else and so we broke down and cried. But that was the first week. As time progressed we gained confidence among ourselves. It was especially nice to realise that nobody would have followed the proceedings if we were not there. People hear interpreters talking and they are often taken for granted. With the Human Rights Violation hearings it was not like that – we were appreciated, we got confidence and felt strengthened. After a session we came together and said, 'Guys, which terms did you come across that were difficult? For example, "violations"?' Usually you know them and it comes so quickly. I translated from Sesotho into English, from Xhosa into English and from Afrikaans into English. It was from Sesotho into English that first week. When a witness spoke Xhosa there would be two of us doing the translation, taking over from each other.

KETHIWE MARAIS: The language used was determined by the witness. We would be told that this one is Sotho and then the witness would start in Xhosa. The logistics took a bit of time to be sorted out by the TRC but they soon learned.

ANTJIE KROG: I remember that very first day how the foreign journalists complained to John Allen, the head of TRC Media, that they could not understand the English of the woman who translated from Xhosa. And somebody said that the person who was actually the best Xhosa to English interpreter had just had a baby and was still breastfeeding. She would only join the TRC later. I think it was John Allen who said, 'Bring her, we'll find somebody to look after the baby.' The next day she was there in the booth and I remember there was one shot on the television, picking her up in the glass booth, breastfeeding while the tears were running down her cheeks onto the baby. It was a particularly traumatising day, with Tutu also crying. [As she was the interpreter of Mrs Konile's testimony], I contacted her to invite her to attend this workshop, but she no longer works in interpreting, has changed her name and when I tracked her down she point-blank refused to come and was even reluctant to talk about the TRC hearings. I asked about the baby and she said that the baby was a girl of ten years now. A happy girl, she emphasised.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: I know who you're talking about, she was very good. We encouraged interpreters not to interpret for longer than 30 minutes, because they were inexperienced in the beginning, but then they would continue for an hour, then break. And Abubakr would go for days. I recall days where Abubakr would sit in the booth for eight hours in the amnesty hearings. It would be very strenuous – it was very technical those amnesty hearings, just talking.

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: Later in the process there would have been four or five amnesty hearings going on at the same time in the country and there simply was nobody else. You could feel how you lose accuracy. When you start out in the morning it was fine.

ANTJIE KROG: I remember one of the interpreters bursting out of the booth after one of the very first sessions, saying, 'I have just broken every single rule taught to me by the Belgians.'

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: One time a man heard my interpretation and then said to the judge, 'Don't talk to that man (pointing at me in the booth); he said, 'talk to me'. He said, 'No I'm not talking to him, he's [*the interpreter is*] talking shit.' And I had to say, 'But sir, I'm only an interpreter, what do you want me to do? I take what you give me in Sesotho and I give it to the judge and I give what the judge says back to you.' It was a complicated story.

KETHIWE MARAIS: Yes, it was strange. People didn't care who was talking, they would look at you, the interpreter, because you were the voice and then they would want to fight with you as if you were interrogating them. And you try to explain that you are simply saying what the other person is saying, but they say no it is you that they hear.

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: It's difficult. Because someone would come to you afterwards and say, 'You said this: now explain to me what you mean'. And you know, it's difficult because you don't remember what you said, but they get angry and you have to explain, particularly to the older people, that you are just a conduit.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: The judge one day asked a question to an old man and said, 'Can you hear me?' And the old man said, 'No, I only hear a woman in here' (pointing to the headphones).

KETHIWE MARAIS: Somebody would say, 'I would like to hear you, but somebody else is talking in my ear all the time.'

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: The process was not explained to the audience at all, that listen guys, you are going to get headphones and the voice that you're going to hear is only interpreting.

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: Then there were times when the judge spoke in English and the survivor spoke in Sotho, so you would interpret in Sotho and somebody else would speak in Afrikaans and the lawyer would speak English. But in that person's ear, he only hears one language and one voice, and that is yours. So people were confused.

Emotional toll

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: There were times when somebody told a really horrible story and the listeners would hang on your lips and it was really gory stuff. They would look at you, you try to remain calm, to disassociate, because the parents, when they start crying and they look at you because it is you that they hear, you try to ignore them, because if you see they cry, you also want to cry, so you do something else and try not to look at anybody, because you cannot break down every five minutes because we all have to get through this.

KETHIWE MARAIS: It was also at times difficult to contain your anger. People would come and very calmly relate how they blew a person up, how they dissected the person, and you have to look down or close your eyes so that you don't see them and get annoyed with anger in your voice. They described it as if it were a picnic and your voice must portray that, but actually you want to say, 'It is a person you are talking about.'

ANTJIE KROG: We have found in the transcriptions that sometimes when the testimonies get emotional, the interpreting also seems sometimes to get inaccurate.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: Yes, because you start to sympathise. You begin to use energy and concentration to sympathise and that affects your product.

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: What I found is that you would speak softer. That was a product of not coming across as too harsh, you try to soften it a little bit. It is not necessarily inaccurate but an effort to make it less harsh, the auntie is sitting crying, you think you don't want to say it like it means nothing, you want to put it softer.

KETHIWE MARAIS: It is the emotional aspect. The Bheki incident was special because I knew him well and we were involved with the whole incident, so it was very difficult for me.

ANTJIE KROC: Was it you who interpreted the testimony of Bheki's wife? You know, I can hear that whole testimony in my head with your exact intonation. It is strange how many voices testified, but it is the interpreter's voice that stays with you. I remember during the first week walking into a café to buy cigarettes or something and then suddenly feeling completely overwhelmed with anxiety. And then I noticed one of the interpreters sitting there chatting to somebody, but that specific voice for me was already identified with trauma in my head. I couldn't bear hearing it in normal circumstances.



After giving key testimony to the Harms Commission about third-force and Vlakplaas activities, Dirk Coetzee feared for his life and fled to Lusaka. In May 1990 a walkman cassette player with an explosive device contained in the headphones was sent to Coetzee in Zambia. Coetzee never received the parcel but in February 1990 [sic] it arrived, addressed to Bheki Mlangeni, who was at the time part of the legal firm Cheadle, Thompson and Haysom. His wife, interpreted by Kethiwe Marais, who knew the family well, told the Truth Commission how they first went to see a film after he received the parcel.



MRS S. [SEPATI] MLANGENI: From there we went to a tea room where we sat down and he took out this parcel which had almost been unwrapped and there was a small box with cassettes, on one of which was written, **Evidence, Hit Squad.** He said he had received this parcel and one might see that there was no evidence here that they are talking about, probably nothing in the cassette. We then went home in a taxi. When we arrived there, he didn't even stay, I was undressing, as he connected the ear-phones . . . [witness very upset]

MS [JASMIN] SOOKA: Take your time.

MRS S. MLANGENI: I saw him connecting these earphones, he didn't hear me because the last thing I said to him was why didn't he connect it to the hi-fi, so that I could also listen. I don't even think he even heard a thing of what happened, what was in the cassette, within seconds I heard a big explosion, a big noise, I thought it was a gun. I ran away, I tried to get out of the window and then I couldn't get out of the window and I came through the door and the last thing I saw was him falling down slowly . . . [witness very upset]

MS SOOKA: Sepati do you want to rest a while, or do you feel you can carry on?

MRS S. MLANGENI: When I ran away I ran inside the main house and I was calling out. When I went to mum's room I don't know if I found her asleep because I was just shouting, I just said he was in the garage, in the garage and I started running away and one gentleman held me and I ran back home and police were there looking for a statement, I just saw two ambulances and I began to hope. I was confused, I thought he was also in one of those ambulances, when I went inside . . . [witness upset]

MS SOOKA: Stop for a while.

DR [ALEX] BORRINE: Mrs Sepati I think it might be a good idea for you to just spend a few minutes, there's no hurry, don't even think of starting, just sit quietly for a while.

MS SOOKA: Sepati, why don't you go and have a cup of tea in the meantime and we can take you back after tea? Rather take some time for yourself, okay? I think we'll take a tea break and we'll come back in fifteen minutes.

Sepati, I'm not going to ask you to go over what happened because I think it's very very painful for you, but you've come to the Commission to tell your story and we'd like to hear from you about what you want the Commission to do for you.

MRS S. MLANGENI: With regard to my issue, the person who did this has been found. I want this person to come out, and this person is already on trial, it's Eugene de Kock, what I'd like the Commission to find out from him, I'm not clear how Bheki's name got involved as a sender of the parcel.



LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: You could refuse to do a testimony, we encouraged people to say that, if you felt you were too emotionally involved, but it was not always possible – if such a person then leaves me alone in the booth and I'll have to work alone the whole day – it is strenuous. So everybody just went on. You interpret but when you get out of that booth you have forgotten. You are just a pipe transporting these messages. You only remember the parts that you heard while waiting for your turn. Those that you actually interpret you cannot remember afterwards. The stories I remember today, are the ones I read in the TRC report and then as I read them I remember, but not reliable detail. At the same time, and this is strange, it had a profound effect on everybody. So you were actually not a conduit. I remember a mother was separated from her daughters, she was in one room and her daughters in the other, she could hear them crying, they shot one, and she heard only three cries, then she heard only two, and she mentioned them by name as she recognised the cries, so the last shot went off, and she said, 'And I gave up.' I get nightmares about that. I still see her.

KETHIWE MARAIS: Other role players were debriefed but not us.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: But we found ways to let it out. We would sit in the bar and buy beer and drink brandy...

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: It was like we were all in this together. We will handle this. You know people were not afraid to say, 'I couldn't sleep last night, I had nightmares,' and it would be okay. There was no way in which you could get away from it and say it doesn't affect me. We knew that we were all affected.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: I found the perpetrator stories difficult to interpret because, remember, we could tell when people were lying or telling the truth. We knew when they were lying through their teeth and they were here to try to evade something. The victims spoke from their hearts and they came prepared sort of, I'm going to tell it just like it happened, so it was easier to interpret, but the perpetrators were always difficult to interpret.

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: Here was this perpetrator describing something that you wouldn't dream of doing and here you are saying this is what 'I' did to this person! It was even more difficult to have the person to whom these things were done to sitting on the other side of the glass, and he looks at you because he hears your voice and to you it feels as if you are doing it all over again to him. You sort of try to cringe away from it all.

NICKY ROUSSEAU: Is the notion of a conduit then shattered?

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: I think using the word conduit was a way of assuring us that we could block it out, because if it breaks down, then I have to know that tomorrow I can start again, because if I break down and I know I cannot be just a conduit, I will be an emotional wreck.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: For me it was important to see the person you interpret. Because many things are involved – body language, deep breathing, sometimes the quality of sound was so poor that we had to look directly at the person speaking. It would be impossible to sit in a room somewhere else and interpret.

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: Even a one-way mirror would be problematic. It would be a trade-off, you would be spared the emotion but you would have a harder time interpreting.

KETHIWE MARAIS: You have to get an idea of what a person is saying, before you can start, you focus on the core of what they are saying, so the notion of lag time is important.

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: Afrikaans is a bit of a *tameliefje* [stick-jaw candy] with the verbs all at the end of a sentence. But if a person was telling a story your lag time would be four or five words. When someone is giving difficult evidence you stick closer because you have to be as accurate as possible.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: We were lucky if we got statements before the hearings, but they didn't help much. The English to Afrikaans interpreters found them helpful in terms of names; I found them helpful with dates and other figures. When the perpetrators were speaking in Afrikaans, the Xhosa interpreters would wait for the English and then take it to their languages.

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: There were instances where the legal representatives would sit with one earphone on to listen to your interpreting and then they would say, 'No, that is not what I said', particularly in Afrikaans and English. Eugene de Kock corrected us many times particularly in terms of explosives – every time he became technical he would put on his earphones and say, 'No, *nee ek het gesê handkanbyne* and you were just saying hand carbines'. Then he would say in his broken English, 'RPC7 launchers what-what-what'. We didn't know what these things were and I actually have to say he was quite helpful in this sense.

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: Actually it is sad that after the TRC nobody did anything about the interpreters, nobody even cared where they went. We are all over the country now. Some have left interpreting, some are here. I know an interpreter from Bloemfontein, he is so emotionally disturbed – he is so nothing, nothing. He told me three weeks ago, 'Lebohang I don't know where I am heading to with my life, everything I put my hands on seems to fall off.' I asked him why. He said, 'You need to ask?' It punishes you to see there was this good person and after the TRC the family cracked and people fall away.

KETHIWE MARAIS: It was a resource that the country built and it simply let it go and abandoned it after the process.

ABUBAKR PETERSEN: I think they want the courts to take this resource. The equipment lies somewhere in Jo'burg going to waste. I helped with a

presentation to the Pretoria High Court where we want to introduce simultaneous interpreting because we could prove that you save half the time. The judges complained that they couldn't keep up with taking notes because the procedure was then too fast. Remember they had more than one commissioner listening to the story, there is only one judge. But I don't know, I wouldn't say, 'My lord, I think you talk nonsense.'

LEBOHANG MATHIBILE: Most of the interpreters found jobs elsewhere. Some continued with interpreting, in Sasolburg. Abu is here in parliament, there are a handful of them – others have disappeared, you can't get them on their cellphones, you can't even get them through friends any more.



In an essay on this workshop and conference, Christine Anthonissen says that the official texts

testify to the fragility and often disrupted nature of the process in which the interpretations were originally produced. The discourses were often emotionally charged, tense, contentious. The interpretations reflected this not only in being true to the source articulating sometimes harsh content and painful connotation, but also in their own formal weaknesses sometimes to the point simply of poor spelling and punctuation. Nevertheless, in the wide range of literature very little attention has been dedicated to the (mostly) enabling function of language practitioners who were in strangely ambiguous ways highly visible, and at the same time virtually transparent.

In our discussion Nosisi commented, 'Now after the workshop and having translated Mrs Konile's testimony myself in my own time and at leisure, I am overwhelmed by the demands the interpreters faced. It was actually an impossible task! How do you do justice to tone, the unique expressions, the dialects, the many meanings, the culturally loaded constructs – all determined by a machine from the outside? I am really in awe.'

8

The visit

Originally we had no intention of visiting Mrs Konile. Indeed, the whole point of our analysis initially was to see how Mrs Konile could be understood merely on the basis of her official testimony as it appears in written form on the government's Truth Commission website.

Soon after we started our analysis, however, we realised that we would get nowhere without the original Xhosa version. This did, indeed, unlock most of what we were grappling with, but at the same time it opened up new 'incomprehensibles'. For example, it became clear that Mrs Konile was often gesturing during her testimony, so we realised that we needed to bring in some visual material as well.

In this way we managed to put together what we felt was a reasonably coherent narrative about Mrs Konile. When we presented a seminar to a study group in the Department of Psychology at Stellenbosch University, one of the lecturers questioned the fact that we had not visited and re-interviewed Mrs Konile. 'Is she *okay* with you doing this?'

Antjie pointed out that Mrs Konile had already paid an expensive price for her testimony: she had not only suffered a severe loss, but had re-experienced it before the Truth Commission twice in public. To inconvenience her with a visit, to make her repeat, once again, the whole painful story, to interrogate her on some detail, seemed to be the utmost form of callousness.

It could also be regarded as horribly selfish to do this for the sole purpose of writing an academic paper to be published in an accredited journal that almost nobody reads.

Kopano added that psychologists often work from printed texts. However, the text has to defer to the experience of the client, because psychology is an attempt to recast original experience into psychological theoretical language.

A student asked how we would eventually deal with the potential contradiction in our interpretations of the urine that Mrs Konile drank.

Antjie presented it as part of thirst and part of the 'dirty' excess of the margins of the body, while Nosisi spoke of its healing qualities. We responded that we thought these different interpretations were important. We were not only making a point within our analysis of the testimony, but we were also making a point about the influence of cultural filters on readings and conclusions.

In the car on our way back from Stellenbosch, Nosisi said that she felt some parts in the Xhosa transcription of the text still needed some clarification, for example, the repetition of 'wet', the red smoke, the voice crying, etc. She would not mind visiting Mrs Konile.

At our own session the following week, we realised that, although we had dealt with much of what was incoherent in the testimony, an issue such as the rock, for example, was still in some ways a problem. We noticed that we were talking about the rock in metaphoric terms. We didn't really *know* whether or not there was a rock. If there was one, then we didn't know what had actually happened there.

And so we started talking in earnest about going to Indwe.

Our first problem was funding. Our analysis was not registered anywhere. It had grown from a once-off meeting about a testimony into a piece of research that we suspected was new in a variety of ways. It was not, however, part of any specific project. We were also from three different departments in which we were involved in other projects, and going to Indwe was not part of anybody's plan or budget – we had already paid for the transcribers out of our own pockets. In the end, a combined project between the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the University of Ghent (in Belgium) kindly agreed to pay for our flights, rental car and accommodation. We borrowed a video camera and camera from the Faculty of Arts.

We asked Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela for the telephone number of Mrs Konile's daughter, Thandeka, and Nosisi arranged a date for our visit. This had to be postponed because, due to a rugby match, all the flights on that arranged weekend were full. When we postponed the visit, we were told that this also suited Mrs Konile, who was not feeling well. The second visit had to be cancelled a day before our departure because Mrs Konile's brother had died. And then, when we were already at the airport checking in, our third visit was also cancelled because Nosisi received an SMS to say that one of Mrs Konile's daughters had just died.

Although we were saying, somewhat perturbed, that the ancestors obviously didn't *want* us in Indwe, we were at the same time struck by all the external factors preventing us from going there. We also realised how inextricably the story of Mrs Konile's life was linked to the story of death. Clearly, the death of Zabonke was not a single and singular event, but part of the ongoing trauma in her life. Zabonke's death was highlighted before the Truth Commission because he died as part of the political struggle, but the deaths of her husband, brother, daughter, her dislocations and poverty, formed part of a succession of different layers of trauma that Laura S. Brown described as 'insidious trauma', meaning that a trauma survivor might find herself in a social context that could lend 'traumatic meaning to events that might be only sad or troubling in another time and place'. (We also learned later that Zabonke's daughter would never come to live with Mrs Konile, because of 'this death problem, nowadays', which we took to refer to HIV/AIDS.)

Before we booked flights for our fourth attempted visit, we spent time discussing *why* we really wanted to visit Indwe. We said a lot of things. We accepted that Mrs Konile's testimony was two sides of the same coin, a kind of 'double telling, the oscillation between the *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival'.

Despite this, we were still missing the material concreteness – the materiality – of her words. We knew her words as text, but we had no clear visual idea of what she was talking about. We only knew her face from the Truth Commission video and the very specific jersey that she was wearing during her first testimony. We saw her several times in the documentary *Long Night's Journey into Day*: first with a navy and white *kopdoek* (headscarf)

beautifully folded around her head during the Truth Commission's event hearing into the Gugulethu incident. Then, in a later session, we saw her crying inconsolably during the hearings itself and being led away with some of the other mothers crying hysterically after watching a video that the police took with close-ups of the faces of the dead young men. During a session in which one of the perpetrators, Thapelo Mbelo, asked for forgiveness from the mothers, Mrs Konile, in a white fluffy headpiece, formed an unforgettable figure with her whole body exuding unforgiving anger. Spitting out the words that she would never forget his face, he who had sold out his own blood, she literally turned her back on him and looked the other way. When he was, at the end of the session, forgiven by Cynthia Ngevu on behalf of all the mothers, Mrs Konile could be seen embracing him stiffly. Yes, we knew her voice and its different intonations, but that was all.

Wasn't that enough? Did we have the right to want to know more? Why did we want to be in her presence when she re-said or confirmed these words that we already knew so well? Why did we physically want to become part of her and her story in time?

By presenting our research in seminars, conferences and journals, were we not making too strong a link between witnessing and pedagogy? Did we believe that listening to trauma might lead to a true encounter with another and a cross-cultural engagement with The Other in a way that would re-situate history in our understanding, instead of eliminating it?

Did we think that Mrs Konile herself would take on additional meaning if she re-said her words to us? Was it anything deeper than facticity that we wanted? Did we only want to verify our interpretations? We kept on saying that the rock was standing for something else; it was a metaphor. We thought that if we saw, or didn't see, the rock, it would enable us either to make a more coherent analysis or to strengthen our current, more metaphorical, interpretation.

In addition, and this we admitted only after a while, we had also become curious. For nearly two years we had been talking about Mrs Konile, imagining her, analysing her, explaining her. Meeting her would completely destabilise the smooth narrative we had built up around her. We wanted to know Mrs Konile outside of the Truth Commission – an ordinary woman living her daily rural life.

It was during this time that our university reaffirmed its commitment to ethical research. We had to fill in a variety of forms before our visit that boiled down to the requirement that we had to inform Mrs Konile of our full intentions and the outcome of our project, as well as *not* to pay her for information.

This was very uncomfortable – unreasonable, actually. Besides the fact that we were not really clear where this visit should lead to, we knew that there was no way in which we could arrive from the city with cameras, a tape recorder and video camera and take up a whole day of Mrs Konile's life without giving her anything in return. She would be expected to relive a harrowing, life-destroying experience, for which she would get nothing, while we would be able to write a paper for which we would get acknowledgement and our university would get money.

We decided: rubbish! We would buy her a woollen blanket and pay her out of our own pockets for the food or tea that she would probably offer us. Nosisi confirmed our visit and Mrs Konile seemed to look forward to our coming. Finally, we set off.

At the East London airport we got into our rental car and, as the sun was setting, drove into the rural Eastern Cape towards Queenstown. It was the middle of winter and very cold, but we were enjoying being with one another outside the university office and outside our normal academic discussions. We had come to know one another reasonably well through our weekly sessions, but merely as colleagues. Although we would often remark on how we enjoyed these sessions and made sacrifices in shifting our diaries around so that nobody ever missed a session, it was something quite different to be together in these social circumstances.

Kopano drove. We started discussing the fact that Mrs Konile had so explicitly positioned herself against forgiving amnesty seeker Thapelo Mbelo. Why were the other mothers brought around to forgiveness, but not Mrs Konile? We reminded ourselves that we were drawing conclusions based on a few minutes in a documentary of heavily edited footage of a process that had stretched over hours. It was not that we felt she *had* to forgive, but we wanted to know how she reasoned this around the concept of *ubuntu*.

Kopano discussed an assignment he had given his students on whether it was possible to raise a child instilling *ubuntu*. We stopped for some water and

something to eat. Antjie bought batteries for the university's tape recorder and, to familiarise herself with the equipment, she interviewed Nosisi.

NOSISI: I was born in Cape Town, but stayed for quite some time with my grandparents in Stutterheim. That made me the person I am, the base for my interaction. Some of my cousins also stayed there, even people who were not really related. I remember that my younger sister had a runny nose and that I got beaten when I did not properly clean her nose when it was necessary. That taught me that I had to take care of my peers, my siblings, those around me. We lived together with our neighbours; they were also our parents and would discipline us when, for example, they found us playing instead of fetching water. So the relationship was one of caring and looking out for each other.

ANTJIE: How do you have *ubuntu*? How do you raise a child with *ubuntu*? How do you instil a need to care, to want to share what you have with other people?

NOSISI: I think it comes from within yourself, because you see, there is no compensation for it. You do it because you feel there is a need to help this person. It's something that comes from within, that is a natural part of the self. During high school we went back to our mother [*in Cape Town*] and five of us were staying in one room that we were renting because, at the time, widows could not own houses. Two of my sisters were still at primary school and we had to take care of them as my mother was working day and night shifts to make ends meet. We used to share every bit we had and that kept us together. Although we studied by candle light, we lived happily as siblings. Nowadays, *ubuntu* is gradually getting lost. Among the contributing factors are poverty and the legacy of the previous regime.

Many people who could not survive the hardships that prevailed during the apartheid era stopped going to school and ended up as dropouts. So they live with this bitterness, this empty hole through which they view the world.



The microphone was then passed around and we asked and answered questions at random.

KOPANO: I have grown up with material sharing, but emotionally and psychologically there are things that I really find impossible to share. I relate this to the family disruption when I moved from being an only child with my father and mother in a rural village where everybody was known to me, to the township in Kathlehong where in Section C we were eight, growing to eleven, literally sleeping on top of one another with my grandmother as the head of the family. This was a major rupture in my life, a move from warmth to a kind of cooling and desperate attempts in the township by everybody to re-create contexts in which *ubuntu* could exist. For example, I like to be quiet, I like to sit and listen to people. I did that in the village, but you cannot be quiet in the township, so I mistook myself for an extrovert and lost interest in my schoolwork in a big way.

ANTJIE: I'm also from a big family. We lived in a small three-bedroom house on a farm. I also have a sister but, in contrast to you, Nosisi, we fought so fiercely that my mother put us in two different rooms: one for myself and one for my sister, while my father, mother and three brothers slept in the third bedroom. Looking back, it's extraordinary that my parents allowed a five-, six-year-old girl so much . . . whim. On the other hand, behind that closed door my imagination thrived. I made stories, danced, died . . . maybe the solitude allowed imagination, and later talent and ambition.

Is the communal spirit of *ubuntu* good for talent? Would you be able to break new ground within the *ubuntu* culture? I once heard a prominent black politician say, 'How can you ever trust Carl Niehaus — he betrayed his own people?' The question is: would you stand up for what you believe in even if you have to stand with white people?

NOSISI: What is *ubuntu* saying is the way?

KOPANO: You first ask: why did this black person do this thing? What drove him?

ANTJIE: But how do you determine what is not right?

NOSISI: What is not right, is what tramples on other people's lives. Whatever I'm doing shouldn't hurt the next person.

ANTJIE: But when Carl Niehaus stood up against apartheid, he hurt his family and parents, yet he did a good thing.

KOPANO: It's a good question, but whites complicate our lives. Say a black person rapes a white child and it revolts me and I stand with a placard, but suddenly I realise that the people I'm standing with are white, there are no black people here . . . then I simply want to sink away. This country complicates our lives as black people – even when we know something is wrong, white people are complicating our emotions.

ANTJIE: Rape harms the community. Why does colour override your sense of *ubuntu*?

KOPANO: Because white people have hurt black people – so in one sense we are never free of white people. You cannot express your whole self. *Ubuntu bakho*. You can't do what is right, because white people simply don't get it, so all the time I have to be myself within a hegemony that is not even aware where I am from.

NOSISI: Where I come from, when a person says, 'I don't know what happened to me. I'm really, really sorry . . .', such a person would be forgiven. You want to hear this person asking for forgiveness, wanting to do something to show remorse for that life he messed up.

ANTJIE: Are you under pressure to suppress *ubuntu* because it cannot work in this white framework?

KOPANO: Let me tell you, whatever you say or do as a black person, you feel it, you feel it here, at the back, just below the shoulder blade, the white voice, always judging. You feel the white eyes on your back wanting you to

give an answer that will always either allow them to put their judgement of you on hold, or destroy you in their eyes. Those eyes come from everywhere. So you are never simply responding to the issue of the rape. You are responding to different kinds of black histories of disruption, dislocation, colonialism, apartheid – the whole lot.

NOSISI: Could *ubuntu* be destroyed because of this?

KOPANO: Of course! *Ubuntu* has to be lived out, but in the face of whites, you can't. Perhaps in your own family, but not as a neighbour.

NOSISI: My answer is different. I think it is so part of the community that it stays with you wherever you move to. It will always be there in your first initial response. *Ubuntu* is the reason why so many people survive their appalling conditions, while at the same time *ubuntu* is being killed by poverty.

ANTJIE: I remember that a white social worker told me how black people, under appallingly poor circumstances, somehow manage to survive, while whites, under circumstances not nearly as devastating, degenerate into something terrifying.

KOPANO: We never had the space as black people to tell the truth to each other and to reconcile with ourselves, with who we are, also to reconcile with ourselves as our own enemies. Now whiteness literally surrounds us and we never had a chance to say: so here are some white people, how do we interact with them? We have never asked ourselves that question without losing ourselves.



It was dark when we drove into Queenstown. The owner of the guesthouse waited for us at a petrol station in her 4 x 4. It was the first time Nosisi and Antjie had stayed in a guesthouse owned and run by a black woman. She showed us our rooms. 'Prof Krog' got the biggest and best room in the house. 'Prof Mpolweni' was also inside the house, but with an outside entrance, and

'Prof Ratele' was in a pre-fab room in the back yard. We sat in Antjie's room and compiled a list of questions and again decided to focus mainly on the rock and the issue of forgiveness. We also reminded ourselves to ask Mrs Konile, on behalf of an NGO that organised re-burials, if she would prefer Zabonke to be buried at Indwe.

Mrs Konile at Indwe

We hadn't slept well, we told each other at breakfast. It was an icy cold morning and we drove off with coats, scarves and jackets, the woollen blanket and our electronic equipment in the boot. It was a good road. And, as always, the Eastern Cape was beautiful. Soft rounded hills fluffed with grass even in winter. The small groupings of huts did not have any of the squalor you often find in urban areas.

We had been physically travelling since the day before, but the mental distance we had travelled was immense. All three of us were accustomed to being ensconced in the anonymity and safety of city life. All three of us lived in the suburbs of Cape Town. With ease and comfort we could be with our families. We could do our research and write it down peacefully in our studies and offices. In the mornings we travelled by car to the university. The biggest risk we were taking, was to do this kind of 'unusual' research on a woman whose life was littered with life-and-death risks.

After nearly an hour we saw Indwe, small and nestling in a kind of hollow. The three of us were suddenly quiet. This village was nowhere. It was isolated. As we drove closer it also appeared neglected. And yet, the main street was abuzz with people. Music was playing on the pavement and taxis were coming and going. Although there had to be white people living there, we didn't see a single one.

We followed directions to the empty buildings of an old hotel where Mrs Konile formed part of a local initiative of women making dresses, tablecloths and serviettes with traditional materials, techniques and designs. The women spotted us through the windows and alerted Mrs Konile. She immediately came out, dressed in a cheerful yellow, intricately folded *kopdoek* and a men's army-patterned anorak. We recognised her instantly. She greeted us formally by shaking hands, while giving the names of her ancestry to Nosisi, and then got into the car and directed us to her house.

We only confessed later that during those two or three minutes of greeting, all three of us had major concerns and made all kinds of adjustments within ourselves. Because the whole interview depended on Nosisi, she obviously had the clearest focus of how she should be to get the information she (we) wanted.

It was important to remember that I [Nosisi] was talking to a mother from a rural environment. I had to show respect as the distance between old and young was an important distinction in that cultural context. Although I was there to conduct research, I still felt that I had to maintain that traditional space of respect. This was why I put on a skirt that morning.

The fact that I [Kopano] was a professor in psychology was the last thing on my mind that morning. No, I wanted Mrs Konile to know that I respected her. But what I also noticed was that something was held back by all of us, especially when an appearance of similarity manifested. Although I often crossed boundaries, I felt that there was something that educated African people, who were sensitive to culture, held back in their interactions with non-educated or little-educated African people. While respect between old and young was a crucial cultural matter in African life, I felt that education alienated the highly Western-educated person from the greater African body-culture, such that you were either disrespectful or had to hold something back in your interaction.

Mrs Konile's four- or five-roomed house seemed no better or worse than those of her neighbours. There was a new, unfinished extension. In the sitting cum dining room Kopano set the video camera up, Antjie the tape recorder and Nosisi sat opposite Mrs Konile, maintaining the dominant space. The interview started. It was conducted in Xhosa.

There was an uncrossable wall between Mrs Konile and myself. What on earth could I [Antjie] do so that I did not remind her of the white perpetrators as they sat at the Truth Commission hearings with their cruel uncaring and furies? How could I move beyond whiteness towards her? I wore everyday clothes so that I was not constantly reminded of being so much warmer than her. I deliberately did not drive the car although it was my turn, in order not to look like the madam who was driving her domestic help to the bus stop. But the biggest divide was, of course, the language. I had no access to what Mrs Konile was saying, I had no idea where Nosisi was in the list of questions and whether she was digressing or what the jokes were that they were laughing about. I sat like a stooge at the table to the left opposite Mrs Konile. And that was, in reality, what I was. The language sorted out all attempts to hide the differences. Within the language a new hierarchy was established and I was nobody. I came with them. I had no power. I had no control. And to both my delight and anger, neither of my colleagues even once tried to interpret anything to me or include me in the discussion. For them it was unimportant that I should understand what was happening. They didn't even look my way.



NOSISI: Before I begin, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for the honour that you and your family have bestowed on us. I would also like to thank Thandi [Mrs Konile's daughter in Cape Town] who has made it possible for us to meet you. For you to give us this opportunity to come and share with you, is something that we really appreciate. You do understand what I am trying to say, Mama.

MRS KONILE: Yes, Mama.

NOSISI: To us, this is something great, we think that what you have done for us shows *ubuntu* and we thank you so much, [we thank you] very much.

MRS KONILE: Yes, Mama.

NOSISI: Another thing that brought us here is to hear from you, because you have gone through a lot of things.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: And we think that we were with you [and the other mothers] at those difficult times; in our prayers we asked that the Almighty should give you strength in all the difficult moments.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: We are pleased to see you and that you are not in bed, but that you managed to get up and are working. That makes us happy. We really feel happy, Mama.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: He [Kopano] has introduced himself, he is Mntungwa, iBhubesi. I'm not sure if you have heard of the name iBhubesi?

MRS KONILE: Aha, the iBhubesi, Mntungwa that's me. He is also of the house of Khumalo, Mdubandile, Qamu, Nodudu, Ndab' iziqhawuke, Mntungwa.

NOSISI: Yes. This is Antjie Krog.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: Heke [a confirming exclamation], she is also my colleague.

MRS KONILE: You work together.

NOSISI: Yes, at the University of the Western Cape.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: In the Western Cape.

MRS KONILE: Hmm.

NOSISI: Heke, what brought us here is that we would like to know if you still remember the time that you were called to the hearings of the TRC?

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: The time when you were asked to come and testify and give details about all the things that had happened.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: Heke, the information that was recorded during those hearings is now stored safely, because the government regards it as an important contribution to the history of South Africa.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: All the details that you and other mothers gave at the hearings.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: Including other mothers [who came to testify], everybody.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: The testimonies of other people as well, were collected. We are now going through some of them, one by one, to find out if anything is missing.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: [*We will also check*] if there is anything that is not clear. You remember that you [*the testimonies*] were recorded.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: Heke, it may happen that on the video the sound is not clear.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: To ensure that in that part you were saying something, whether it is what you are actually saying, so that when the information is kept it should be kept as the original words of the speaker and be in the same form that the speaker said it.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: Yes. That is what we actually came here for, as Zabonke and other young men were involved in that incident at that time . . .

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: . . . are regarded as heroes . . .

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: in South Africa.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: Therefore the history about them is here to stay. You saw their statues in Cape Town?

MRS KONILE: Hmm. Hmm.

NOSISI: Heke, that is what brought us here, so that we can collect everything about them.

MRS KONILE: Yes, what was not clear on the video.

NOSISI: Yes, so that we can go back and listen to it properly.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: Heke, you have already introduced yourself that you are MaKhumalo [*clan name*].

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: Heke, you also described your genealogy.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: Can you please repeat your eulogy or family history?

MRS KONILE: Hmm.

NOSISI: Oh! Yes. Could you please repeat your eulogy.

MRS KONILE: NabakwaDubandlela, uS'chazi, uNodudu, uNdabezitha, iHiledi, inyok'emnyam'engath'usayibona isemanzini uyibethe uthi, 'Yiyo le inyoka entle!' [*If you see it in the water wanting to kill it, you would say here is a beautiful snake.*]

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: That's it! I have finished now. I come from the eMaGqwashwini clan.

NOSISI: All right!

MRS KONILE: At the river of Nodudu, at the river, at the MaGqwashini.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: Now let me come to Zabonke's clan name.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: I am married to the Mncotshe clan, to the Ndala, the Memani, the Majik'uzijonge! [*Turn back and look at yourself as to where the sun is going to set.*]

NOSISI: Heke!

MRS KONILE: Ukuba litshona ngaphi na? [*As to where the sun is going to set? – a continuation of the eulogy.*]

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: Oh! Yes, Mama.

NOSISI: All right. They are all from here, at Indwe. So you are all from Indwe. Do you all come from here, Mrs Konile?

MRS KONILE: No. Our origin is Ncorha. Yes from, from, who is it again? Mathandi. How do they call him? How do they call him, it's Mathandi?

NOSISI: You mean KD? [*Matanzima*]

MRS KONILE: Oh! Yes!

NOSISI: It is KD!

MRS KONILE: KD's people.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: Yes, that is our origin.

NOSISI: Are you all coming from that side?

MRS KONILE: We are all coming from there and then later I came back with my children after my husband had passed away.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: I turned the jacket inside out [*idiom meaning to change one's mind*] and moved here and looked for a place with my children.

NOSISI: Oh! Yes, with your children.

MRS KONILE: I didn't just come here, I looked for my own home.

NOSISI: You did not just stay without a home!

MRS KONILE: I built my own home – Zabonke grew up here.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: He loved to study, he was schooling here at Roma.

NOSISI: All right, at Roma. So now by staying here at Indwe you saw that you lived the same lifestyle as the one you had at Ncorha. You live happily as one family in this community. You love one another, there is *ubuntu* and co-operation?

MRS KONILE: Yes, people are working together, Mama.

NOSISI: Hmm.

MRS KONILE: I would not say that the lifestyle is not the same, because I see myself as the original citizen of this place.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Because the child that was born here is Thandeka.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: I came with her here, it was Thandeka who was born here.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: I am like an old citizen of this area.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Yes, I am like the old member of this place, I work here. Zabonke was working here, he was schooling here then he left when he was doing Standard Nine.

NOSISI: Hmm.

MRS KONILE: I was going to take him to school at Nonkqubela.

NOSISI: Yes, Mama.

MRS KONILE: Then he played truant.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: He went to Johannesburg. At first he worked in Johannesburg and he came back. On his return from Johannesburg, the building of this site started.

During the interview, I held back the Nosisi in me. I noticed that I was behaving as if I was Mrs Konile's daughter. It facilitated a particular kind of interaction and I think she spoke more easily to me. The mother-daughter relationship is safer.

Having only seen her on video and heard her on tapes, I was very excited to see Mrs Konile in real life. I had been looking forward to seeing her, speaking to her and to hearing whatever it was she had to tell us. Despite all our arguments and analysis, at the back of my mind, I had always wondered what the state of her mind was, her condition, as to whether she would be able to share things with us, because she had recently lost a brother and a daughter. I was thinking we were going to open old wounds, old pain, in view of the fact that she had again lost her loved ones.

But it was clear from the beginning that she liked seeing us. She asked our clan names and that sort of established that we were all family. This tracing of the genealogy created a wonderful equality and sameness among us. When we returned to the co-op afterwards, she said to the people there 'my children are here', and introduced Kopano as her son. Her wisdom was quite sharp – she was clearly a normal older person with a lot of wisdom.



MRS KONILE: Then he [Zabonke] left again and went to Cape Town. It was just at the time when it was almost window height and we were building a four-roomed house.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: Hmm. Oh! Yha, so the building was high and then I started to put on a roof of corrugated iron from the sheets that he bought, then I added other sheets he bought after he came from Johannesburg. Then he went to Cape Town. It was in winter month that time. It so happened that, in that winter month, if it was not June, or not July, because it was the time of collecting beans. I had planted something in my garden, I had planted something. This area was a garden and it was green as it is now part of the house.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Heke! After this I received a phone call, no it was not a phone call, Trevor [*Pheza's second name*] arrived. Trevor is here. He lives here [*she points to a nearby house*]. He is the one who knows everything.

NOSISI: Is Trevor also from here?

MRS KONILE: He is not from here, he was a taxi man.

NOSISI: O-o! He was a taxi man.

MRS KONILE: Yes, he is the taxi man I used to travel with to Cape Town.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Now, Trevor came to fetch me. Yes, that is how I came to know Cape Town.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: I didn't know Cape Town.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Only to find out Zabonke and others were shot the previous month and then I received the news at the beginning of the second month.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Because of being unknown [*that is, being difficult to trace*].

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: They did not, the children did not divulge their whereabouts while they were there in Cape Town because they were staying in the bushes. The people came to fetch me, if I am not mistaken the month was . . .

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: If it was not the coming month. If I'm mistaken, but if I'm mistaken, it would be just a mistake because it is something that happened a long time ago. I can no longer remember it well now. It is no longer fresh in my mind.

NOSISI: It happened some time ago.

MRS KONILE: It happened some time ago and I am already at peace with myself.

NOSISI: Oh, you already have peace with yourself?

MRS KONILE: Yes. I arrived in Cape Town and then to the enemy that is how I became known. When I was there at the meeting I introduced myself and said, 'His mother is from Indwe, her name is Notrose.'

NOSISI: Oh, her name is Notrose?

MRS KONILE: Yes, that is my name, here this one. They are two.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: Yes, Notrose, this one at the corner. So now, it happened that, it so happened that he did not return from the battle and now people started to remember that he said . . .

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: That is his name where he was working, he was working at the butchery . . .

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: He was known as John.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: To them he was known as John.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: That was his name, that is how they knew him in Cape Town.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: This name, Zabonke is how we call him here at home.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: This is me, here are my names, that is why I brought this ID . . .

NOSISI: Tyhimi! [*an expression of surprise*] You were a beautiful girl.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: You can see even now that you were beautiful.

MRS KONILE: Umm, umm. And now they came to fetch me. It was Pheza himself.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: He told me that Zabonke and others were shot.

NOSISI: Hmm.

MRS KONILE: They were seven, at Gugulethu. They were going to the Island, they were going to fetch Mandela from jail.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: The police met them. There was also a policeman among them. Zabonke met the police in jail, the police was from Bloemfontein, it was a black policeman and then this policeman [*Thapelo Mbelo*] became

Zabonke's friend, only to find out that while he was befriending Zabonke, he was searching for information so that they could be killed. They were shot because of this policeman from Bloemfontein. After he had finished [searching for information] he would come to sleep with them, listening to whatever they were discussing, 'What are you going to do next? And then what? And then what?'

NOSISI: Tyhini!

MRS KONILE: He had his house at KTC [near Gugulethu in Cape Town]. Others were sleeping in the bush with him and that policeman. Who assigned him to stay there?

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: It was Bharnathi [Barnard].

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: Yes, so now on this day that they were going to take action [execute first guerrilla attack] he was not among them, he had left.

NOSISI: You mean Bharnathi?

MRS KONILE: No.

NOSISI: O-oh.

MRS KONILE: This detective.

NOSISI: You mean this detective?

MRS KONILE: Yes, he left and he did not sleep with them on this day.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: On that day they woke up and went there [to take action].

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: We were collecting the bombs, everything that was there. Everything, as well as guns, everything. [Mrs Konile seems to be referring to Zabonke and other comrades when they were preparing themselves for the battle; she seems to reflect Zabonke's words.] All these things were hidden in the sand. When they were about to, he informed the Boers [white Afrikaners] that they were coming at a certain time. While they were still busy preparing their things, the Boers were already waiting for them. And because Zabonke was the leader, he came forward and lifted up his hands in the air, but the Boer shot him at close range. I was talking to him, this young man.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: Yes, at the [TRC] office, I was talking to him at the hearings and the way he was crying.

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: He shot him [Zabonke] right here in the head. He was shot here [pointing to her head].

NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: While he was asking for forgiveness with his hands in the air ...

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: I only heard about this after everything had happened — they were already at the mortuary when I went up to Cape Town. When I arrived in Cape Town, they were in the mortuary. I was told that people were not allowed to enter at the mortuary but I said, I had this question, 'How will I identify my own child if you say I cannot enter here?' and then I was allowed to go in. Heyi! It was difficult, it was difficult.

NOSISI: I understand. There were many of them, I'm sure it was full.

MRS KONILE: You can imagine, they were just lying there. Yho! Eyi! Poor children! It is difficult. It is difficult there.

NOSISI: Let us accept it, Mama, as you say you have already accepted it and you have already referred everything to God.

MRS KONILE: My child, as I was standing next to the door ...

NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: He was lying here at the entrance, another one was lying just above him, another one lying here, another one there, another one lying there, another one lying there, seven of them. [pause] Then we were asked, they were all swollen and their faces had turned dark now.

NOSISI: Mmm!

MRS KONILE: One policeman that was there asked me, he said, 'Which one is your son here? How are we going to identify my child? How will we know which one is your child?' I said, 'It is this one next to the door.' He asked, 'How do you know that?' I said, 'I can identify him by his feet and by his penis.' Umm. Umm. He was sleeping naked.

NOSISI: Ooh!

KOPANO: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: Yes, I am going to say it in proper Xhosa here. I was also speaking proper Xhosa there.

NOSISI: Heke!

KOPANO: Umm!

MRS KONILE: I said, 'I can identify him by his feet right there at the bottom.'

NOSISI: Eee!

MRS KONILE: 'I can identify him by his penis.'

NOSISI: Hekel!

MRS KONILE: The white man asked how does it look like, because they are all lying there.

NOSISI: Hmm.

MRS KONILE: I said, 'This is the one.' He laughed and I just left that policeman on my way out. Then I came back and we were now going to the funeral, that very very sad funeral of the comrades. It was a sad one because [pause], but I love them now.

NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: Oh! No. I love them now, they are in my blood because this house of mine, I got it through the comrades.

NOSISI: Ooh! Yes!

MRS KONILE: Oh! Yes, this house of mine belongs to the comrades.

NOSISI: Ooh! Wow!

MRS KONILE: Because of him, because he was a great comrade.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Everything that is done here at Indwe [was done because of him].

NOSISI: Ehe!

MRS KONILE: It is done to honour his death and everything that he has done.

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: Even the fact that the white people have left Indwe and building of structures like, like, like . . . Oh! My God [What is it again?], a big place, a big hall.

NOSISI: Ooh! A hall.

MRS KONILE: There was an existing hall but it was for whites only.

NOSISI: Oh! Yes.

MRS KONILE: But after they died [Zabonke and other comrades] . . .

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: The people, everybody was now an ANC member.

NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: Then a hall was built. It still exists and it belongs to the comrades. It came into existence here at Indwe because of him.

NOSISI: Tyhini! He has really worked.

MRS KONILE: Here at Indwe, because of him.

NOSISI: Yhu!

MRS KONILE: It is ANC membership all over here at Indwe because of him.

NOSISI: Yes. Can you see that! He was a real hero.

MRS KONILE: And then we went there. We were told that the funeral was going to take place the following morning. We then, we went to choose the coffins at the head office [the funeral parlour].

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: And again, Zabonke's coffin was put here next to the door. We were asked to go and choose the coffins and we all went as parents. There were also young men from Port Elizabeth and from Herschel. The parents of those young men were not present.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: They were in Herschel and Port Elizabeth, but their families were not present.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Because they [these young men] were squatting here and there.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: They were squatting here and there, squatting here and there, heke, e . . . now I again began to talk about this coffin [of Zabonke]. I said, 'Here is Zabonke's coffin', and the other mothers moved on. They moved on to choose their children's coffins.

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: They are all the same mos.

NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: But it's only you that can identify your child's stature.

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: Each person knows his or her child stature. [talking to herself] What do you think about this my brother? I can identify him easily [pause] because he was on top, on this side [demonstrating with her hand].

NOSISI: Was he tall?

MRS KONILE: He was tall and left-handed.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: Yes, I know my one, he was tall.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: That is why his things are slightly different from the rest.

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: We buried and everything was done in the midst of gunshots and we returned home. I returned home the following week. I was given some documents and they said, 'You should never lose these documents. You should keep them.' The place where we were given these documents was a big house, the head office of the comrades. I kept these documents I'm not sure for how many years. I can't remember whether it was for four years. At that time, Thandeka was at school at UMthatha. She was studying at UMthatha at that time. All was quiet about these documents. After some time, I was asked to come to Cape Town. It was the time when Thandeka was already staying in Cape Town. We arrived at this place I was called to. De Klerk, De Klerk. [*FW de Klerk, former South African state president*] Yes! I met De Klerk in person.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: Yes, and those white people, the ones who killed [*our children*], those policemen. The one who killed Zabonke [*Riaan Bellingan*] is shortish and the informer from Bloemfontein, I also saw him.

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: He [*Thapelo Mbelo*] has, he has marks on his face.

NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: He looks like somebody who had a knife broken on his face.

NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: Yes! We left for the hearings. At the hearings I did not have much to say, because I was here at home when it all happened. The details were given by the mothers who were in Cape Town. Yes, MaRhadebe and others whom this thing happened close to their houses.

NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: But at Gugulethu I gave details. When we were now brought together with these whites in front of the judge, I had a question to the

killer [*Mbelo*] that when Zabonke approached, 'Did he not ask for forgiveness [*with his hands in the air*]?' Here he [*the killer*] is asking for forgiveness from me! So my question was, 'Did he not ask forgiveness from you?' My question is, 'Did he not ask for forgiveness from you?'

NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: What about the time when he had his hands up? But he [*the killer*] had no answer. Not even the judge and his attorney – because they had their attorneys.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: He had no answer for the question from me to him.

NOSISI: Ee, yes. Did you end up forgiving him?

MRS KONILE: Hee!

NOSISI: What did you end up doing with him?

MRS KONILE: I ended up not forgiving him.

NOSISI: You ended up not having peace [*with him*]?

MRS KONILE: I do not want to lie, the only person who ended up forgiving him is Zabonke's daughter Khanyisa. It is Khanyisa who had forgiven him, as well as Thandeka, Zabonke's sister. As for me, I did not forgive him.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: Yes, so much so that I began to pray for myself and punished myself and taught myself that it is high time that I teach myself to accept somebody's plea for forgiveness. That is all about me.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: At the hearings, we stayed for some time and then we came back.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: Time went by, time went by, time went by and time went by until now, so to say.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: After some time, Thandeka will remember better the number of years.

NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: I received phone calls now.

NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: Hee! The person asked where I am and whether I am still alive and so on, and I would just answer whatever he asks. They introduced

themselves that they are from the ticket [*Truth Commission*] office in Cape Town. [*They explained that*] the people who came earlier on have left [*the office*], 'the ones who were with us before have left'. It is now other people and they are also looking for information.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: And then because Thandeka was already in Cape Town, this was at the time when she was already in Cape Town.

NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: Then Thandeka would keep me informed that it has been said that I should go to Pretoria with the documents [*that I had kept*], but they were already lost. I only managed to go because of her and the head office.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Yes, she managed. Things went well, we were given some money but it is not much, and it is that money that I used for the ceremony to bring him back.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: It was his money that I used to conduct the ceremony of bringing him back – the money that was given to me.

NOSISI: Ooh! You managed to prepare everything for the ceremony to bring him back?

MRS KONILE: Yes!

NOSISI: As well as the ceremony to bid him farewell?

MRS KONILE: Yes, and the ceremony to bring him back. What is still left with me? I just wish that you could see it, you could see his grave.

NOSISI: We will definitely visit his grave.

MRS KONILE: He is here, now, he is no longer at Gugulethu. He was returned last year.

NOSISI: Ooh! He was returned last year?

MRS KONILE: Yes, last year.

NOSISI: Ooh! Because that is one of the things that we came here for.

MRS KONILE: We conducted the ceremony of bringing him back last year.

NOSISI: I think you were also at peace now, now that your child is close to you.

MRS KONILE: It was joy to me now, because I had always wanted this thing of his bones even at that time [*in Cape Town*], but I had no means.

NOSISI: Heke!

MRS KONILE: [*Even at that time*], I came out hoping that the, the comrades cannot be defeated because he died as a soldier. But I was told that I cannot conduct a ceremony of bringing him back and I could see that there was no way out, but I was also living an unhappy life, because he also wanted to come back. He also wanted to come back.

NOSISI: Did you ever notice anything with your dreams?

MRS KONILE: Yes, in my dreams I could see him [*Zabonke*] entering that door.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: He would explain that he was cold.

NOSISI: Ooh! Yes.

MRS KONILE: At one time, I had to go to Cape Town to put a blanket over his body and then again I rebuilt his grave.

NOSISI: There at the graveyard?

MRS KONILE: Yes, and I cemented it. My child was the only one there in Cape Town whose grave was cemented – of all the young men that he was buried with.

NOSISI: At least with the little that you received, you managed to do something.

MRS KONILE: I had already done the ceremony in Cape Town out of my pocket.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: Oh! Yes, as for the Cape Town ceremony, I did it myself out of my own pocket.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: But as for the one that was done here, I was given something, NOSISI: Was the amount in the region of two thousand rand and something, or something like that?

MRS KONILE: Oh! No, at least it was more than that, it was above that.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: Why I'm saying that is because Thandeka paid, there was another examination of land then she paid again. Again, another examination of bones, again a priest came to check how far is the person who came to examine the bones. Then after some time, the other one was checking where

he [*Zabonke*] is buried. Then it was time for his body to be dug out now. You see, these things are not done at the same time.

NOSISI: Oh! Yes, that's true.

MRS KONILE: They all take long. Nothing happens as fast as I speak!
NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: It can even take a month and Thandeka would again go and enquire from the people who are in charge of this matter, the matter concerning these bones, then the bones would be sent for cleaning.
NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: This is how the process went on. I think she spent eight or ten thousand rand and she even took from her pocket, she had to add something now to reach to ten [*thousand*].

NOSISI: An amount of ten thousand?

MRS KONILE: Umm, she was now adding from her own pocket.

NOSISI: Ooh, she also contributed something?

MRS KONILE: She added from her own money because it was a big ceremony, to conduct a ceremony is no child's play, Sisi. Again another ceremony that was conducted, the memorial service that was conducted.

NOSISI: There was also a [*memorial*] service?

MRS KONILE: There was another service here at home. The bones were brought here from Cape Town. The comrades also conducted a big service there.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: It was the comrades who were carrying his coffin and yes, the church minister was also present. Thandeka is the person who can describe the ceremony better, because she's the one who saw it clearly. You see, she is the one who saw it, she can even give you the date on which it all happened.
NOSISI: Heke!

MRS KONILE: She will be able to say, 'It happened on this date'.

NOSISI: Heke!

MRS KONILE: Because she is the one who went to Cape Town.

NOSISI: At the time.

MRS KONILE: She got married there. Together with her husband, they are the people who know better, they can give you full details of what happened. But on this side I was also preparing everything. I went to buy the 'grave site' in town. Yes, I buried him among the Boers at that place where the Boers

did not want him to come, because they were saying he had bombs after they had killed him.

NOSISI: Heke!

MRS KONILE: I put him there among them.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: Yes, I put him there and then his grave was built.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Yes, Thabile [*a friend of Zabonke's*] brought the tombstone and then we were just short of his body, but it does not show that it does not have a body, it is the body [*pause*], it is just the head that we are talking about and the arms.

NOSISI: Ooh! That is all you could get?

MRS KONILE: Yes, and I buried them.

NOSISI: At least it is much better now. I'm sure you are relieved now.

MRS KONILE: Oh yes! At least I'm relieved but the only thing that makes me cry is that when I describe it, I can visualise the picture.

NOSISI: We understand the pain of a mother for her child.

MRS KONILE: I can visualise the picture when I describe it, I can visualise it ... It is not to say I'm still in pain.

NOSISI: Yes, yes.

MRS KONILE: No, I'm not in pain. No.

NOSISI: At least since you managed to bring him back, I think you also sleep peacefully now.

MRS KONILE: No, at least I am now relieved, I'm relieved because I have tried my best and brought him back.

NOSISI: You brought him back, exactly what you wanted.

MRS KONILE: Exactly what I wanted.

NOSISI: I remember that you fought for this but the officials there [*in Cape Town*] refused completely.

MRS KONILE: Iyho! I was really fighting there. Yho! I was not playing. Even at the time I went to the hearings, when we were at the hearings. No, I was not afraid of them at all or ashamed. I did not even think of myself as an uneducated person.

NOSISI: Heke!

MRS KONILE: No, I did not have a soft spot for the Boers, even now I do not have a soft spot with the Boers.

NOSISI: Hayi!

MRS KONILE: Umm!

NOSISI: Now, you mean at the time you went to the hearings?

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: Testifying [about] everything that happened, I wonder how you managed to face that big crowd of audience because it was always packed at the hearings, always packed, packed and you [and other mothers] would be seated in front, facing the crowds.

MRS KONILE: You mean at the office [hearings]?

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Eyi! Hayi!

NOSISI: How did you feel? What did it feel like?

MRS KONILE: No, I felt like crying a little bit. Their video [one of the documentaries] will be showed [on television] in June, in June their video will be showed on television.

NOSISI: Whom are you referring to?

MRS KONILE: The video of Zabonke and other comrades will be showed on television. You will also see them, their video will be released. I will also be on that video.

NOSISI: Ooh, yha!

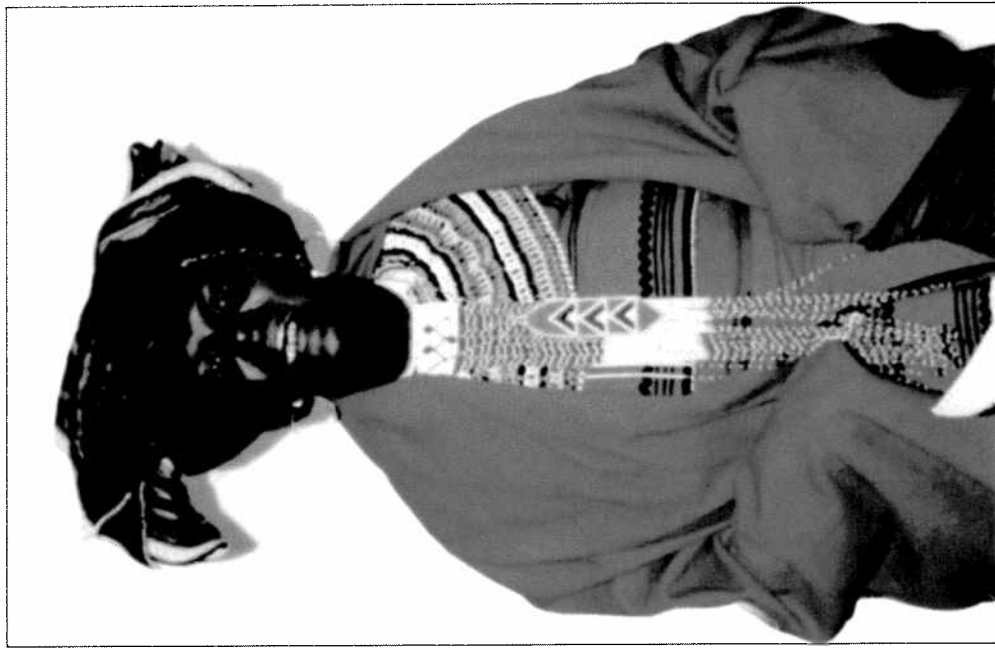
MRS KONILE: In June, their video will be released, you will also see the hardship that people experience. Just ask for the date from Thandeka, what I still remember is that it will be in June.

NOSISI: It will be in June?

MRS KONILE: Umm, what I think is that if it's not June, it will be this month but the video will be showed in June. It starts when we were at the hearings, they appear first together with those policemen, everything that the policemen were doing, dragging them with chains.

NOSISI: Yes, yhu!

MRS KONILE: What the Boers were doing came out, even the one who shot him with his hands in the air, it will be shown on TV [in June]. De Klerk himself will also be shown on TV and all the work that they were doing will be exposed. Even the time I was asking whether he did not ask for forgiveness is also shown on TV. They [Zabonke and other comrades] first appear before we begin to testify.



Mrs Konile dressed in traditional amaXhosa attire consisting of ochre/red cloth braided with black, worn with beads and a decorated *kopdoek* (headscarf) stylishly folded. This photograph was taken at a wedding and was kindly supplied by Thandeka Konile.

Goats form an integral part of life (physical and spiritual) and are everywhere in Indwe. Here three of them rest at a front door.



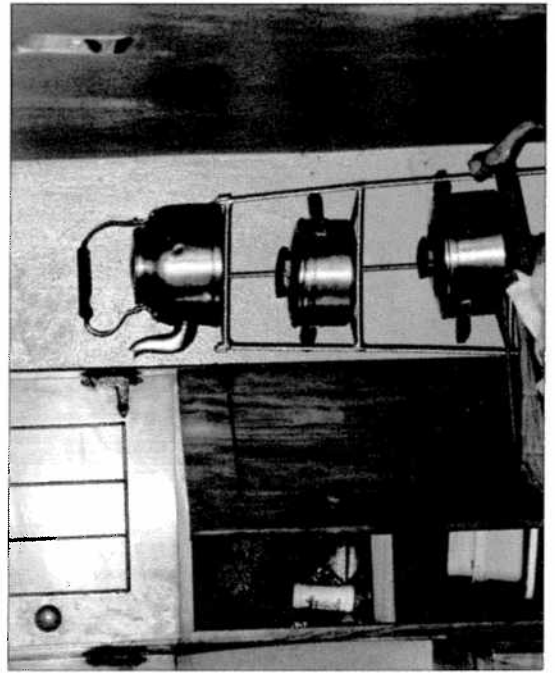
View of a part of Indwe in the Eastern Cape taken from the slopes of the mountain where some of the coal quarries are to be found.



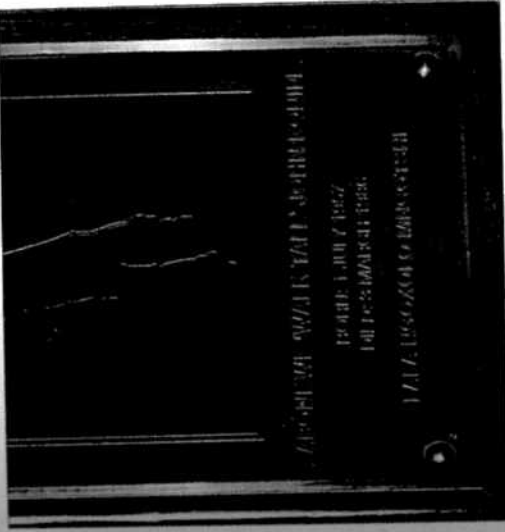
The back door of Mrs Konile's house. She dreamt that she saw a goat standing on its hind legs at this particular door.



The newly built lounge of Mrs Konile's house. Left is Kopano Ratele, taking a photograph, next to him is Nosisi Mpolweni doing the interview and Mrs Konile is to the right with a double coloured headscarf. The commemorative plaque to Zabonke Konile can be seen in its honorary place to the right against the wall.



Mrs Konile's kitchen with its shiny kettle and pots and some salt and coffee in the cupboard.

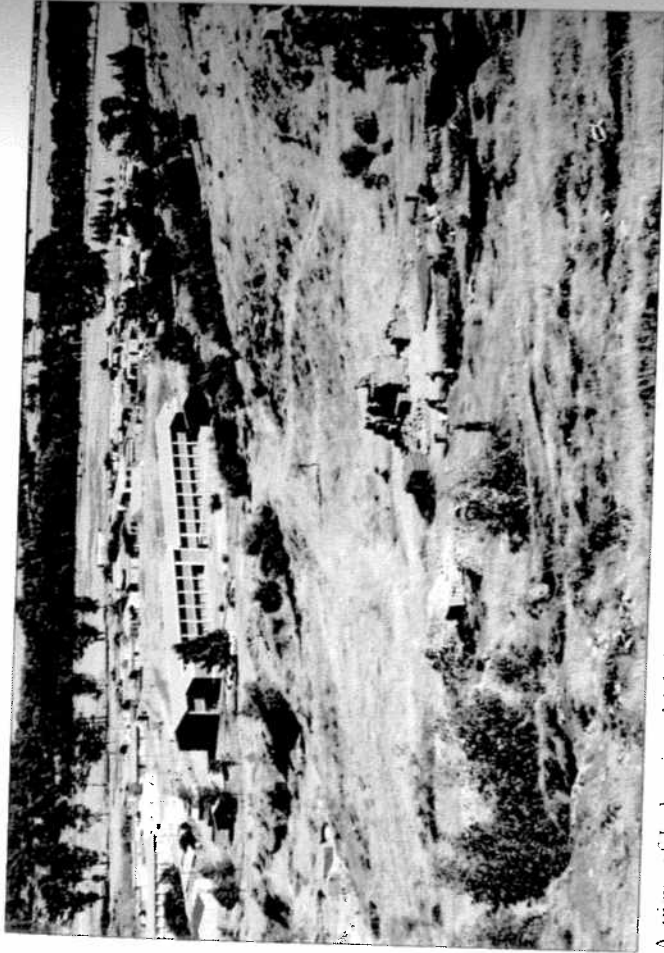


The commemorative plaque to Mrs Konile's son on which his name is misspelt. Under the silhouette of a running figure is written:

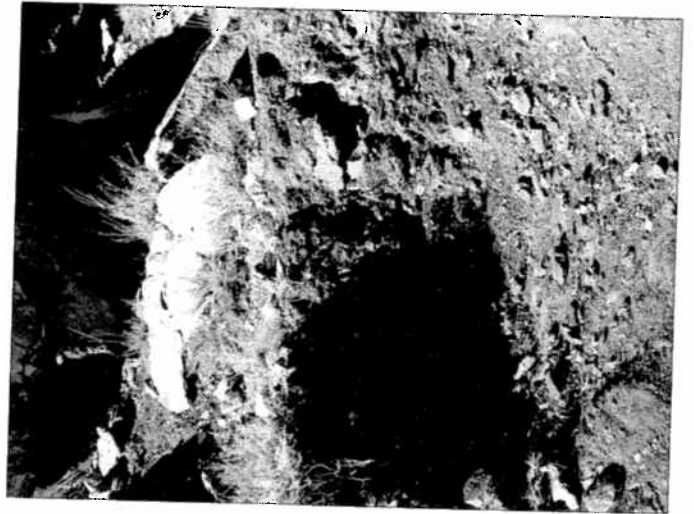
Zabonkwe 'Walk Tall' John Konile.
Born 1 July 1957
Died 3 March 1986
Lala Ngoxolo Mncotshe /Rest in
Peace you-belonging-to-the-Mncotshe
clan/



Zabonke's nickname 'Walk Tall' is inscribed on his tombstone in the cemetery at Indwe.



A view of Indwe in which brick-making efforts can be seen in the foreground. This is where the coal is needed to bake the bricks.



One of the quarries where coal is being dug out with tin plates. Note the unstable nature of the ground.



One of the coal pickers holding a piece of coal that he took from his wheelbarrow. He was pushing the wheelbarrow down to the brick-making area in order to sell the coal he had collected.

NOSISI: Oh, you were not afraid, you said what you wanted to say.
MRS KONILE: I said exactly what I wanted to say. Yes, we did cry, but we testified under those tears.



I [Antjie] was sitting at the table and after the ancestry had been established, I had no idea what they were talking about. The tape was running smoothly. Initially I was wondering whether it was possible to introduce me in a way that my ancestors could also form an interconnection, but then decided rather to make myself useful by jotting down notes about the inside of the room: many hen-with-chickens plants, porcelain dogs and pink ducks, all dominated by a copper plaque with the relief of a running man: 'Zabonkwe "Walk Tall" John Konile. Born 1 July 1957 – died 3 March 1986. Lala Ngexolo Mncotshe' [Rest in Peace you-belonging-to-the-Mncotshe clan].

I got up and walked out to take photographs of the outside of the house. I went in the back door into the kitchen and from there could look into one bedroom. It was completely bare with only two sacks of cement in it. While I was standing in the kitchen a young boy of about ten came in, greeted Mrs Konile, and then came through to make himself some coffee. I noticed there was no milk. No bread. No sugar. He drank the black coffee. Apart from some salt, I saw no sign of food anywhere in the house.



NOSISI: In the course of your testimony, you explain your pain and you mention that you had a dream in which there was a goat that was standing next to a tree. Do you still remember that part?

MRS KONILE: Yes, ha, hayi, ooh, yes, I still remember it now that you have mentioned it. It was standing at the door, that one in the kitchen.

NOSISI: Ooh, ooh!

MRS KONILE: This goat is not really a goat, but it was in a dream.

NOSISI: Ooh! It is in the dream.

MRS KONILE: With its legs like this, and I have not been told anything at this time. It had its forelegs in the air like this [*demonstrating*].



The women's co-op where skirts, dresses, beadwork, serviettes and other attire are being made and sold. Mrs Konile, with the yellow headscarf, was a founder member of the group and is explaining some of the traditions around the products in the shop.

NOSISI: Yes, ooh!
MRS KONILE: These legs like this [*demonstrating*].
NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: These [*hind*] legs bent like this, squatting.
NOSISI: Yes, all right.

MRS KONILE: It is a goat.

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: [*Standing*] like this.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: And I said, 'He! What is wrong with this goat, why is it bringing me bad news?'

NOSISI: Yes, yes!

MRS KONILE: I wonder who has passed away?

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: I was shocked when the following morning I was told about this.

NOSISI: Oh! You could immediately understand that there is something wrong just by the way it was standing?

MRS KONILE: The way it was standing was in itself bad news.

NOSISI: Ooh, ooh!

MRS KONILE: Because it was standing next to the door.

NOSISI: Yes, ooh!

MRS KONILE: First, [*in my dream*] there was a bag, at first there was a bag.

NOSISI: Which bag?

MRS KONILE: A luggage bag. After this bag, while I was still looking ... [*pause, being surprised*] ...

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: Being confused by this bag ... [*pause*]

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: Then a box [*coffin*] came in.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: When the coffin was here ... [*pause*]

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: Then it was this goat.

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: This goat was doing like this [*demonstrating*].

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: While I was saying, 'Tyhini! [*clapping her hands in shock*] A coffin entering the house! Where is the person?'

NOSISI: Umm, umm!

MRS KONILE: 'Where is the owner of these clothes? [*in the bag*] Why is it that a coffin comes in?'

NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: When I looked around, here is this coffin, I said ...

NOSISI: Umm!

MRS KONILE: Yhu! Yhu! Yhu! I wonder who must have passed away?

NOSISI: Umm! Yes!

MRS KONILE: Then I awoke up.

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: When I was looking for these things.

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: There's none of them, nothing at the kitchen door ...

NOSISI: Tyhini!

MRS KONILE: These things seemed to be happening at the kitchen door.

NOSISI: At the kitchen door?

MRS KONILE: Yes, it was not this one but the kitchen door.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: That one.

NOSISI: Everything is still fresh in your mind?

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: All that happened?

MRS KONILE: Yes, I remember it well.

NOSISI: Yes, and now there's that part [*in the video*] where you tell us that you had returned home after everything was done in Cape Town.

MRS KONILE: Umm.

NOSISI: And now you came back after the funeral and you were on your own.

MRS KONILE: Umm.

NOSISI: You came to stay at home.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: And the hardship that you experienced because you were used to your son [*who was assisting you*].

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: You decided to go and dig coal.

MRS KONILE: Oh! Yes.

NOSISI: And now, what actually happened about the coal?

MRS KONILE: I was digging the coal mine.

NOSISI: Where?

MRS KONILE: We had a coal mine here. Our place is called 'At the coal place'.

NOSISI: Ooh.

MRS KONILE: This place is called 'At the coal place'.

NOSISI: Oh! This place?

MRS KONILE: We have changed it now, it is now called Indwe. The Boers are silly.

NOSISI: Ooh.

MRS KONILE: After all this, the Boers did not pay us.

NOSISI: Ooh.

MRS KONILE: And now we were selling [*this coal*] here. There came a rock. I was still out here *mos*.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: The rock fell down, as it fell, it hit me on my waist.

NOSISI: It was coming from the top?

MRS KONILE: Yes, it was coming from here, coming from here.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: It was just coming from here exactly. I was kneeling down there.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: It just landed on me like this [*demonstrating*].

NOSISI: Yhu, and it was big.

MRS KONILE: It was very big, Mama, sitting against the wall like this.

NOSISI: Yho!

MRS KONILE: And then it came to land right on my waist.

NOSISI: Tyhini! Yes.

MRS KONILE: And out of God's mercy, I did not sustain any injuries. The doctor who was on duty at Robertson at the time just said I was lucky. I was still under the rock at this time until four o'clock.

NOSISI: Did you bring a watch with you on that day?

MRS KONILE: We did not bring a watch, it was in the morning.

NOSISI: Oh! Things can really happen and go by.

MRS KONILE: At nine.

NOSISI: You estimate the time according to the sun rays?

MRS KONILE: Yes, no, I'm just estimating the time at which the rock fell on me, it was at ten.

NOSISI: Oh, you are thinking that it was more or less at that time?

MRS KONILE: I am not estimating, it was at ten.

NOSISI: Oh, you were looking at it according to the sun rays.

MRS KONILE: Remember when I came out I . . . I was dug out by pick-axes.

NOSISI: Yes!

MRS KONILE: Up to my waist and a rock had to be broken up.

NOSISI: Yhu!

MRS KONILE: And then I was taken out at four o'clock, I was now taken out. After I had been taken out I asked for water. When they said, they said there is no water, I said, 'urinate'.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: They urinated and I drank.

NOSISI: Was your thirst quenched at all?

MRS KONILE: At least I got relief.

NOSISI: Does it [*urine*] really help?

MRS KONILE: I left. [*I fell unconscious.*]

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: After I had finished drinking, I lost my senses.

NOSISI: Your senses!

MRS KONILE: Yes, I lost my senses, Sisi, I lost them Nono. While I was in this state, I heard a cry. I heard a cry of this young girl whom I say is the eldest daughter.

NOSISI: Oh! But you could not actually see her?

MRS KONILE: No, I just heard her voice.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Remember, after I had drank the urine I just lost my senses.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: My senses . . .

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: I would say I had lost [my] senses because they say I was dead.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: But I would say my senses.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: And now, when they related this story, they say when I came out I asked, 'Where is Nombhe? That was her voice.' You could hear her voice down below as we were right up at the hill.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: Was it really her?

MRS KONILE: It was really her [*Nomishongiso, Mrs Konile's eldest daughter*].

NOSISI: Oh! She could have heard what had happened to you.

MRS KONILE: Yes, she heard that I was coming down the hill and got hurt.

NOSISI: You got hurt. Ooh yes!

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: And then they brought a car.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: And then when they were about to, when they about to cover my body as somebody who is dead . . .

NOSISI: Tyhini!

MRS KONILE: I said, 'Not me!'

NOSISI: Tyhini!

MRS KONILE: 'Carry me on your shoulders.'

NOSISI: Heke!

MRS KONILE: I lied down and said one of the man should stand on this side the other one that side . . .

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: You can't just take like that.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: You can't take me down like this.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: They carried me and I went down to the car. I was taken to hospital.

NOSISI: There is also a part where you mention that there was red smoke and you felt as if you were getting off the bed.

MRS KONILE: Yes, as if I was getting down.

NOSISI: It is still in your mind.

MRS KONILE: I was about to, I don't actually know because I was getting down.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: It was just dusty where I was lying.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: But as I was coming down it was much better because it was a bit windy.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: It was windy and dusty. And now I felt as if I was in bed and I heard this cry.

NOSISI: Oh! You could see?

MRS KONILE: In my sleep.

NOSISI: All this is happening in your sleep.

MRS KONILE: Yes, all this, even now.

NOSISI: It was not really happening.

MRS KONILE: It was as if I'm flying.

NOSISI: As if you were dreaming, yes.

MRS KONILE: Only to find out that I'm sleeping.

NOSISI: Ooh.

MRS KONILE: Yes, as if I'm flying.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: There was this cold air . . .

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: And red smoke.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: There is this red smoke.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: But as I was getting down . . .

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: As I am getting down, I kept my eyes closed *mos*.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: I am trying to figure out, 'Where is this cry of Nombhe coming from?'

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: Then they saw that I have woken up.

NOSISI: Yes, and then she [*Nombhe*] came and saw her mother . . .

MRS KONILE: They refused to allow her to see me. They refused.

NOSISI: Maybe they were sympathetic with her.

MRS KONILE: Remember I had lost consciousness. Even then, I just opened my eyes for a few seconds.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: And now the urine, you were perhaps taking it as something that could help you?

MRS KONILE: To me, it was as if I was drinking water.

NOSISI: Oh! You thought you were drinking water.

MRS KONILE: No, I did not want urine as such.

NOSISI: Oh!

MRS KONILE: Only after they said there's no water then I asked for urine.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: 'Urinate so that I can drink.'

NOSISI: Because you were hoping that it could quench your thirst.

MRS KONILE: At least I got relief from thirst.

NOSISI: Oh! You got relief.

MRS KONILE: Yes I got relief because I went to sleep afterwards.

NOSISI: Oh!

MRS KONILE: Yes, after I had finished drinking, I slept.

NOSISI: Heke.

MRS KONILE: One of those who urinated, is the one who woke me up.

NOSISI: The one who helped you.

MRS KONILE: How shall I put it, revived me?

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Heke.

NOSISI: Isn't it true that black people regard urine as helpful?

MRS KONILE: Only now that I'm old do I realise that it is helpful. At that time . . .

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: But now I know that it is helpful.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: At that time, I was just drinking.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: I was not really aware of its use.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Umm.

NOSISI: What do you usually use it for, how does it help people?

MRS KONILE: You mean urine?

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Even when one has a bad dream.

NOSISI: Oh!

MRS KONILE: Or when one has a strange feeling [*umbilini*].

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: One can just take a sip of urine.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Yes!

NOSISI: One will at least get relief.

MRS KONILE: One will at least get relief.

NOSISI: Ooh! Tyhini! It really helped you.

MRS KONILE: [*laughs*].

NOSISI: Oh, yes it helped you.

MRS KONILE: I know now because even at the time that had a strange feeling that was persisting.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Before I was told about my child [*Zabonke*].

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: When I became tired of this persisting strange feeling, I would take urine and drink.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: [After being pinned down by the rock, as well as losing consciousness after drinking urine and then being dug out by pick-axes] I was laid on a table like this one.

NOSISI: Yes, a stretcher.

MRS KONILE: I was revived by water.

NOSISI: Oh! By water.

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MRS KONILE: Remember, I have a dual role, that of a mother and a father.

NOSISI: Umm, there is no father figure.

MRS KONILE: There is no father [husband] that I can report to when I need something.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: I can't say, 'Here is a problem', or 'We ran out of something'.

NOSISI: Yho!

MRS KONILE: It happened [Thandeka got married] just at the time of my injury.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: And at that time, Thandeka got married.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: And when people were humiliating my daughters they would say . . .

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: They would say, 'You are the girls of the rock woman!' Is that a nice thing to hear?

NOSISI: Yho! Yeha, ke!

MRS KONILE: Yes, is that nice?

NOSISI: Why do they joke about such a terrible thing?

MRS KONILE: They are not joking about my daughters as such, they are referring to me, 'Their mother is the rock woman'. I received a grant after I had been hit by the rock.

NOSISI: Ooh!

MRS KONILE: I was not yet qualifying for pension it was because of this accident.

NOSISI: Oh! This enabled you to receive a grant?

MRS KONILE: After I had received the grant I was independent and their sons were now interested [in] my daughters, the rock girls.

NOSISI: Ooh.

MRS KONILE: Umm, umm.

NOSISI: Tyhini!

MRS KONILE: My daughters have big houses.

NOSISI: Oh! They are big, they are big.

MRS KONILE: [The same daughters of] the rock woman.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Oh! No!

NOSISI: You really worked.

MRS KONILE: It is big. Oh! No! I have no daughter who fell pregnant before marriage. They all got married through the right channel.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Any young man who wants to make a request for marriage knows that he has to go through the traditional process.

NOSISI: Tyhini! No, you are really blessed, because nowadays, girls simply disappear with the man.

MRS KONILE: In so much that, even with Zabonke's daughter, I have been fortunate.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: She is just working in Cape Town and she stays with her mother.

NOSISI: Ooh! She is with her mother.

MRS KONILE: Umm.

NOSISI: Yhu, it would be good if things could stay like that.

MRS KONILE: No, I don't think I will get her back, especially now that there is this death problem [HIV/AIDS].

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: You know, these days there is this death problem.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: Yes!

NOSISI: Now, how is your state of health, apart from the leg problem, how is it on the whole?

MRS KONILE: No, my health.

NOSISI: I'm thinking of the scars and everything that you went through.

MRS KONILE: No.

NOSISI: How is your state of health?

MRS KONILE: It is not good at all, especially now.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: The body can feel that it's been a long time.

NOSISI: O-oh!

MRS KONILE: No, it is not good at all.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: It-i-it, here on my back . . .

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: I constantly have pain on my waist, it is as if I am carrying something. [*The pain in my body*] developed into rheumatism. I have many complications including ulcers and high blood pressure.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Now, I'm back to the crutches.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: The ones that I received [*at the time of the accident*].

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: I'm using them now.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: The ones that I got from hospital.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Yes, because as for now, my health is giving in. I used to walk freely when I'm in the house.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: I used to work on my own because I do not have a helper.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: But now I even find it difficult to kneel down . . .

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Even when I want to polish the floor I find it difficult to kneel down.

NOSISI: O-oh!

MRS KONILE: Umm.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: It is mainly the lower body that is problematic.

NOSISI: Another thing, it is cold [*because it is winter*].

MRS KONILE: You see now, the body can feel it.

NOSISI: O-oh.

MRS KONILE: No, I think it can feel it, but it is much better on a warm day.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: I think the body can feel that this is more or less the time when the accident happened.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: The doctor said I should not use these things [*crutches*].

NOSISI: Oh, yes.

MRS KONILE: But I did not listen to his words.

NOSISI: Especially that you have rheumatism.

MRS KONILE: Umm, because I now have rheumatism.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: There are now additional illnesses, I even have ulcers.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: Things that I never thought of, even high blood pressure.

NOSISI: But you are under doctor's supervision?

MRS KONILE: I do go occasionally.

NOSISI: You just visit the doctor now and then?

MRS KONILE: No, I'm no longer taking treatment, there aren't medicines any more.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: It was only when there were still doctors that we were receiving treatment.

NOSISI: Maybe it would be better to stay with Thandeka because there are many doctors where they stay.

MRS KONILE: Who will take care of the house? And what about my things?

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: Who will take care of the house?

NOSISI: You are now worried about that?

MRS KONILE: I'm worried about that.

NOSISI: And what about your health?

MRS KONILE: No. No, I cannot see myself staying at the children's place. They should . . . we do have doctors even here and I do visit the doctor and get medicine.

NOSISI: O-oh.

MRS KONILE: No, I cannot stay at the children's place.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: Oh! Yes.

NOSISI: What about the promise about the house that Zabonke had apparently left in Cape Town for you? Did you get it in the end?

MRS KONILE: No.

NOSISI: Nothing at all?

MRS KONILE: They did not give it out at all even his child . . .

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: She ended up building herself a shack.

NOSISI: Where? In Cape Town?

MRS KONILE: Yes. They have now *bhelepele* it [*twisted it to their favour*].

NOSISI: What do you mean now?

MRS KONILE: It means that even those who were negotiating on my behalf, they are now after the same house.

NOSISI: Ooh.

MRS KONILE: Oh! Yes.

NOSISI: There are now people who want it.

MRS KONILE: Yes, the same people who were with him [*Zabonke*].

NOSISI: Ooh.

MRS KONILE: Yes, they turned things around and took it over.

NOSISI: Oh! Yes!

MRS KONILE: But it doesn't matter.

NOSISI: It does not matter, really.

MRS KONILE: No, because even here I could improvise because I had already built him two houses.

NOSISI: Okay.

MRS KONILE: I just added another building to his house, that one that belongs to him.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: I have now added to the house that he had built.

NOSISI: Heke.

MRS KONILE: I had built it.

NOSISI: Oh! You had built it?

MRS KONILE: Ja.

NOSISI: Ooh.

MRS KONILE: Afterwards, Thandeka said we should just join it into one house because there's no . . . I cannot have a tenant.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: I do not want to rent it out.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: We then combined it into one house. Umm! Now I'm no longer interested in that one because it was a shack anyway.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: It was not that wonderful anyway.

NOSISI: The one you have is better.

MRS KONILE: Oh! No. Yhu! A shack!

NOSISI: Yho!

MRS KONILE: The one I built, it was a two-roomed house.

NOSISI: The one you had at first.

MRS KONILE: Yes, the one I built for him.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: Yes, the one I built for him, it was on the site where he had built a foundation.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: He had reserved it.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: I then . . . I then raised the wall and put bricks and this was after I had an accident.

NOSISI: Tyhini!

MRS KONILE: I laid bricks.

NOSISI: Yho!

MRS KONILE: I mean bricks.

NOSISI: Here you are now with the after-effects, you exposed yourself to cold.

MRS KONILE: I laid bricks.

NOSISI: You mean brickwork?

MRS KONILE: No wonder that I have lost strength.

NOSISI: Absolutely.

MRS KONILE: After I had finished with the building, I came to work at the place where I am at present.

NOSISI: Heke.

MRS KONILE: The place was previously under the Roman Catholics. We used to start early in the morning even after I was injured.

NOSISI: When did you start at the hotel or have you just started recently?

MRS KONILE: Before we worked from the hotel we used to work at that office.

NOSISI: O-oh! Yes.

MRS KONILE: Here, at the office. [*For our project at the hotel*] we asked for assistance and capital from the government for the business and to get machines.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: Then the results of our request came out, they came out recently.

NOSISI: At the time when you were involved with this project.

MRS KONILE: Yes, in this project, in this sewing project.

NOSISI: You received the initial funds from the government.

MRS KONILE: Yes, we were assisted by the government.

NOSISI: You mean funds to start the business?

MRS KONILE: We had already started.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: Yes, it is a matter of rising up and doing things for yourself.

NOSISI: Oh! To rise and do it yourself.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: You still remember the time of TRC hearings. Some of the things that they were trying to do, were to . . .

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: They were trying to encourage *ubuntu*. Would you say there is something that you noticed that has to do with *ubuntu* at the time that you were invited as parents to come and testify? Would you also agree that this was a way of comforting the people because this is how they saw it? They

were trying to heal the wounds by allowing the person to empty his chest so that he can feel relieved.

MRS KONILE: Yes.

NOSISI: Did you also see it the same way that the aim of all that was happening and the instances in which you were called in to speak . . .

MRS KONILE: Umm.

NOSISI: . . . and testify at the hearings . . .

MRS KONILE: Yes, no, I could see it. Oh! Yes, it is true it was really happening, shame, there's nothing wrong.

NOSISI: Oh umm.

MRS KONILE: Oh! Yes, we were really comforted.

NOSISI: Oh! You felt comforted, oh!

MRS KONILE: Yes, but only after we had finished testifying were we taken care of – even at the time that I had to come to Cape Town.

NOSISI: Yes.

MRS KONILE: We were assisted with money.

NOSISI: Oh!

MRS KONILE: Even at the time I was leaving for the funeral.

NOSISI: Umm.

MRS KONILE: Pheza was given money to come to Cape Town.

NOSISI: All right.

MRS KONILE: Then I came back, on my way back, I was given money. Oh! My cups? [*Talking to the child in the kitchen.*]

NOSISI: Oh! Yes, at least you got something.

MRS KONILE: There he is.

NOSISI: Hello, young man.

MRS KONILE: Greet [*the visitor*] by hand, young man. Didn't you say that?

THE BOY: How are you?

KOPANO: What is your name?

THE BOY: I am Makhanya.

KOPANO: Oh! You are Makhanya. You are back from school.

MAKHANYA: Yes.

KOPANO: How was your day at school?

MAKHANYA: It was nice.

KOPANO: All right.

MRS KONILE: Here's your bottle top.  
 MAKHANYA: It's not mine, it belongs to the other child.  
 MRS KONILE: All right. Sit there so long.  
 NOSISI: We have come to see you today.  
 MAKHANYA: Ooh.  
 NOSISI: Are you happy?  
 MAKHANYA: I'm happy.  
 NOSISI: We will go with you. We are going to steal you from your mother.  
 Would you like us to steal you?  
 MAKHANYA: No.  
 NOSISI: No, we can't do that [*laughs*]. Heke.  
 MRS KONILE: Ee . . . this is the person I stay with.  
 KOPANO: Yes.  
 MRS KONILE: He grew up staying with me and the other one is in Cape Town with Thandeka.



NOSISI: Is there anything you would like to add that I have left out?  
 KOPANO: Did you notice that this [*the copper plaque on the wall*] is written Zabonkwe?  
 MRS KONILE: Yes.  
 KOPANO: There in that thing.  
 MRS KONILE: Yes.  
 KOPANO: Zabonkwe should read Zabonke?  
 MRS KONILE: Yes, his name is Zabonke.  
 KOPANO: Zabonke, ehe . . .  
 MRS KONILE: It is the writing that says Zabonkwe.  
 KOPANO: Yes.  
 MRS KONILE: No, his name is Zabonke.  
 KOPANO: His name is not written properly.  
 MRS KONILE: No, they have not written his name properly.



The interview lasted more than an hour. Then we thanked Mrs Konile and Kopano gave her the beautiful blanket. She was evidently overjoyed. But as she didn't offer us any tea or coffee (there was so little in the house), we offered instead to take her out for lunch. On our way back to the town, she showed us the way to the mountain towering behind the township. At the foot of the mountain people were busy making bricks from grass and dirt. Mrs Konile explained that there was enough land for houses, but not enough money. These less expensive bricks could be bought, or you could come and make your own bricks, in order to build a house. But to bake the bricks, you needed fire. And for a fire, you needed coal. We parked the car next to the road and then we saw the coal – it was literally lying around in Indwe.

As Mrs Konile could not walk with ease, Nosisi stayed with her at the car while Kopano and Antjie walked up the mountain to one of several quarries. Men were scraping coal with tin plates from the edges of this quarry, loading it into a wheelbarrow that they then pushed down the slope to the brickworks to sell. We came across these men. There were no women. They were visibly, exceptionally impoverished. They were so dirty, so desperately thin and torn and poor that we were completely shocked into silence by their appearance. The eyes of one of them were so dry that it seemed as if the lids had become stuck when he blinked; some of them could only respond with dry croaks to our questions, as if an overwhelming tiredness and dryness had invaded them. Their eyes were dead. It was clear to us that the coal-pickers of Indwe were truly the deeply desperate ones.

We understood then what coal-picking meant.

We understood the distance between picking up coal and where water for drinking could be found.

The rock incident became equally clear. The coal was just below the surface. But at ground-level there were big sandstone boulders lying against the slope. At some of the quarries we could see the boulders literally lying on the edges of the holes. A few more scrapings, or breaking the coal with smaller boulders, could send the big ones tumbling down. The men confirmed that people had indeed been pinned down by these loosened boulders to lie for hours in the sun until someone could come and dig them out.

The coal and the rock were no metaphors. They were the bedrock of deprivation. The geology of poverty was speaking.

On our way back to the car we passed a house where three goats were lying next to the door. And we suddenly became aware that goats were actually a very common sight in Indwe. To dream about a goat in Indwe was like dreaming about trucks in Johannesburg. They were everywhere. Clearly it was not dreaming about a goat that had perturbed Mrs Konile, but the way the goat had been standing in her dream.

Then Mrs Konile took us to the graveyard where her son had been re-buried. The words 'U DIED 4 AFRICA' and two roses were engraved on the granite of the tombstone. While we looked at the grave in the white part of the graveyard, Mrs Konile stood peacefully with us.

Afterwards we drove through the town to find a place to eat in a social way. We couldn't find anything, either because it didn't exist or because it was hidden in places that only 'informed' people knew about. Mrs Konile took us to a take-away place with one table and a few chairs in the corner. Antjie looked in despair at the heaps of oil-dripping sausages and *vetkoek*. Kopano suggested that, instead of spending all the money on one meal, we buy some groceries for Mrs Konile.

'When I said to Mrs Konile she could order what she wanted,' Nosisi said afterwards, 'it was clear that she had no real freedom of choice. She immediately said that she would prefer to order bread, because she could take the leftovers home for the grandson who was staying with her. She also chose milk. In the end I bought fish, russians, bread and milk for her. Many people in the café recognised her and talked to her. She was obviously a well-liked person there.'

Meanwhile Kopano and Antjie went to the nearest trading store, got a basket and started taking groceries from the shelves. Something unusual happened. During our first session afterwards at the university, we described it in the following way.

*The interview with Mrs Konile brought us out of our 'own place', the place from where we engage with the world. We found ourselves in a space where we felt different — 'loose' or 'unmoored' were perhaps the closest words we could find to describe the feeling. It was as if the moment*

*was filled with a sudden rush of risk: not only of becoming, but also of loosening our race-anchored selves. The theoretical equality between Mrs Konile and us, so neatly described in the contract of ethical research, had been thoroughly shattered by the economic inequality. Talking to her though, made us feel that it was possible, not to be her, but to be fully towards her — and in that movement we became closer to each other than ever before, gripped by a desire in the Indwe Trading Store to make at least one day's difference in Mrs Konile's life. We no longer had the wholeness and familiar separateness we had arrived with, we were no longer sufficiently detached and, among the shelves of food, it felt as if we could feel her standing in her empty kitchen with a grandson coming home on a Friday morning, shivering with cold.*

*'Soup' we said and put tins and packets in the basket. 'Meat' for today and tins that don't need a fridge.' 'Jelly,' yes, with a box of custard for pleasure, sugar, biscuits, condensed milk, rice, flour, yeast, dried vegetables, Bovril, jam. We chose within a combination of imagining and practical knowledge, but it gave us both one of the most liberating moments of the whole research trip: we were closer to Mrs Konile than any research had brought us. We cared. Her narration and her life filled us. We were somehow re-anchored differently — more of her, less of us.*

*However, we also realised that we could look at it from another perspective: we did not simply leave with a good interview in the boot, we also 'bought' ourselves out of being 'in' Mrs Konile's life — confronted, face to face, by her poverty. And we were also strangely aware of how charitably and generously she had acted towards us during the whole day. Was this good or problematic in terms of power relations? We were not sure.*

*With four heavy bags of groceries we walked to the car where Nosisi and Mrs Konile were already waiting. We took her back to the hotel where she showed us the whole co-op working space and shop. We bought serviettes, shawls and aprons. We saw a grass-plaiting enterprise and took photographs of Mrs Konile among smiling women, who seemed to be proud to have*

such a famous person with them. Then she hugged each of us and we left for East London.

### After the visit

We were quiet on the road back. Nosisi was exhausted. Antjie didn't know what had been said in the interview and was driving. Kopano was searching for music on the radio. Somewhere along the road Nosisi said, 'Survival. We have to look at that concept again.'

It was already dark when we arrived at some beautiful cottages on the banks of the Nahoon River where we were to stay the night before flying home in the morning. We were hungry and were directed to a nearby restaurant. While walking there, Kopano remarked that Mrs Konile on one level reminded him of all the older women he knew who struggled to raise children. 'I can make sense of it because it doesn't make sense, precisely because there is such a lot of sedimentation in black life in this country. On another level it feels to me that, to use Claude Lanzmann's expression, "the obscenity of understanding", I have to refuse to understand what has happened to her. It is through hanging on to this non-understanding that I will keep being engaged with her and keep believing that what had happened to her is not, and should never ever be, in the realm of human understanding.'

Antjie was reminded of the words of Njabulo Ndebele about the vulnerability of the black body:

We are all familiar with the global sanctity of the white body. Wherever the white body is violated in the world, severe retribution follows somehow for the perpetrators, if they are non-white, regardless of the social status of the white body. The white body is inviolable, and that inviolability is in direct proportion to the global vulnerability of the black body. This leads me to think that if South African whiteness is a beneficiary of the protectiveness assured by international whiteness, it has an opportunity to write a new chapter in world history. It will have to come out from under the umbrella and repudiate it. Putting itself at risk, it will have to declare that it is home now, sharing in the vulnerability of other compatriot bodies. South African whiteness will declare that its dignity is inseparable from the dignity of black bodies.

Maybe this process is also true of the protected body of the affluent vis-à-vis the vulnerable body of the poor.

When we sat down in the restaurant, Kopano put a bottle of 2003 Shiraz on the table and asked permission from the restaurant owner to drink it. Suddenly we were out of our skins. The world was lovely. We were talking in that discovering kind of way that provides the sort of thrill an explorer must get addicted to. Everything we said seemed new to us and endlessly interesting. We confessed and laughed a lot. We ate great food. We suddenly talked about ourselves. When we started moving towards more intense discussions, we did it as if we could move freely, as if the racial stereotyping that always stays with us like a shadow, was suddenly no longer there. We could talk as ourselves to ourselves, without baggage, without strain, without threat. Although we used English, as our second and third tongue, we were even freed from any possible superior sound.

It might have been that the poverty of Mrs Konile had brought a class solidarity among us – or the Shiraz, some might suggest. But we believe that the ease, the banter, the inclusive obvious pleasure and friendship we had in one another, were rooted in the trust we had shared in our compassionate interconnectedness with Mrs Konile. She pulled us out of where we were into crossing boundaries into respect and care.

We went back to the cottages quite late – reluctant to break the glow that was with us right through that dinner. Precisely at six o'clock the next morning the air scattered with the harsh sounds of an enormous flock of *hadedas* living in the willow trees next to the river. We were on our way back.