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Revisiting Mrs Konile's narrations

What are the things that we didn't know before we visited Mrs Konile? How did the visit to her at Indwe, in the Eastern Cape, influence our analysis of her testimonies and change our perception of who we thought she was?

The biggest difference was that we now had *three* narrations delivered by Mrs Konile: the primary source of our research, namely the first official website testimony of Mrs Konile, given on 23 April 1996 (broadened by a transcription and retranslation of the original Xhosa testimony); the official website testimony of her second appearance before the Truth Commission during an event hearing of the Gugulethu Seven incident, held on 27 November 1996 (see Appendix 1); and, after our return from Indwe, we had an interview describing the same event ten years after her Truth Commission appearances (also broadened by an original Xhosa text).



The event hearing, attended by both victims and subpoenaed perpetrators, opened with the showing of the police video taken at the time, with lingering close-ups of the faces of the dead young men flanked by bristling and smiling members of the police and Vlakplaas death squad. Havoc ensued. Mothers and family members started to cry, some hysterically,

and had to be escorted out of the venue. Others were yelling, somebody threw a shoe at the perpetrators, at which point this group stood up and stormed out. Commissioner Dumisa Nsebeza ordered the video to be stopped and adjourned the hearings until people had been assisted. The Truth Commission was much criticised afterwards for re-traumatising the victims.

One advantage of having more than one narrative is that this showed up things we had not noticed before, such as Mrs Konile's indication of reserves (through indigenous and personal contacts and traditions), as well as resources (through reparation money and Truth Commission resources) that she was busy accessing in order to wrestle back control of her life.

We also realised that the visit to Indwe had destabilised our iconographical readings of the goat and the rock scenes in an important way. The 'naturalness' of dreaming about goats, but the 'unnaturalness' of the goat's stance, was brought home. And our visit to the coal quarries at Indwe ripped the rock incident from the safety and objectivity of analytical theories into an exposure of how powerless intellectual activity often (mostly?) is to translate effectively, and to change actively, the lives of the marginalised.

It was clear how difficult it was for the full extent of the devastating poverty and deprivation that characterised Mrs Konile's life after the death of Zabonke, to enter readily the framework of the Truth Commission and its audience sitting in Cape Town. A framework that was legislated to find heroes, victims and perpetrators, and to compensate with reparations or amnesty, is not necessarily equipped to understand the ways in which 'confused' (or 'thick') narratives of women actually present a 'broader set of truths about systemic injustice . . . the lacerating sting of ethnic discrimination and the futility of seeking justice from the legal systems'.

Although we were aware that single women often 'wore poverty with unconscious dignity', which became a 'feature of [their] moral character', to use the words of Bessie Head, we also realised that the level of poverty Mrs Konile was spiralling into, disqualified all the frameworks set up by a modern parliamentary commission.

Within the context of Indwe, Mrs Konile was completely coherent. Kopano remarked that her 'ungraspability' had shifted greatly. 'Before the meeting, Mrs Konile was uniquely strange, now her "strangeness" was based on more general things like age, geography, poverty.' Nosisi underlined Mrs Konile's clear-headedness during the interview, as well as her evident good understanding of politics. 'In some cases, rural people often do not know much about politics, but she knows her politics!'

We agreed that what we had been doing in the past was more in the realm of speculative analysis, but the visit made it clear that Mrs Konile was a witness of another truth – that of poverty. 'I don't think I have the tools to hear poverty,' Antjie said. Kopano approached it from a different angle.

Although, when you see something, you want to believe that you know more about it, there will always still be something to be speculative about. For example, about how Mrs Konile tells her story, the position she takes in her own stories, about her self, her family and Zabonke. Critical discursive African psychology seeks to take the experiences of Africans seriously, but it also tries to remain critical about how that experience is expressed. There is the Interpretative school that says people will tell their stories and you have to take them seriously because they contain the truth. Critical discursive psychology says, however, that people do not have a privilege into their own consciousness. They don't necessarily know the demons and the dreams that motivate why they say what they say. Mrs Konile's new story during our interview confirms many more things, but not everything, because she doesn't have all the information about herself, Zabonke or Indwe, or of the way in which we, who were sitting there, were influencing her story.

The spaces around and in Mrs Konile's testimony

During its existence, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission played a significant role in the transformation of spaces. It transformed previously dangerous spaces, such as the Old Fort in Johannesburg, the 'white' city hall in Ladybrand, and so on, into new spaces of safety and official acceptance for all citizens. It cast familiar/unfamiliar spaces, such as the venue where Mrs

Konile testified – the Nico Malan Indian Nurses Training College Hall in Klipfontein Road, Heideveld – into a new light as famous Truth Commissioners, seen regularly on television, government officials, black caterers, city councillors, journalists and academics found themselves in ‘unknown’ (read ‘black’) parts of a town or city.

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*Nico Malan was an apartheid politician and provincial Minister of Education during the mid-1950s and later became Administrator of the Cape Province.*

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These much-publicised Truth Commission events and famous personages changed the spaces from invisible to visible and known – giving them a non-racial prominence they had not had so broadly before. Within these venues, the Truth Commission created more intimate spaces for victims and survivors.

The college hall where Mrs Konile testified was protected by police. The Gugulethu mothers (as well as the commissioners and other victims) were accompanied by the police to the hall.

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*This seemed necessary, especially in the beginning, as bomb threats were made on the very first day of hearings and nobody could predict what the reaction of perpetrators – many still in powerful positions, wielding substantial influence – would be.*

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Despite a court ruling to the contrary, victims decided to name their perpetrators publicly. In other words, the white and black uniformed men, who previously had violated Mrs Konile’s personal space, were now protecting

her space to tell her story, even if she implicated them. She had moved from a space where violence was justified, to a space where human rights were respected. On that chair, at that table, in front of that microphone, her space was protected and officially demarcated – there she was safe. There she was official. There she had the right to relate her personal story as part of the official documentation of the gross human rights violations that took place in South Africa between 1 March 1960 and 10 May 1994.

Combined with this physical space, Mrs Konile created a safe space for herself within her mother tongue, Xhosa. She could search and formulate, make and distort rhythms as she wished, without being driven into spaces where Afrikaans was used to exclude her as Mrs Mxinwa testified:

From there we went to Wynberg, that’s where the trials were. . . . Afrikaans was spoken a lot and there were no interpreters and . . . we didn’t really understand what was happening because of the Afrikaans that was used at the time.

Despite some omissions in the interpretation and subsequent transcription, the interpretation process gave Mrs Konile an immediate voice, with its accompanying impact on an audience, as well as instant and privileged access to the powerful ears of the Truth Commission, government, media and academia.

But the space ‘behind the scenes’ so to speak, which not only informed Mrs Konile’s testimony but also made it coherent on many levels, was Indwe in the Eastern Cape. Indwe was important as the place and moment in history that Mrs Konile chose to designate in both testimonies as the beginning of her identity and heritage. According to Yael Danieli, the naming of a place indicates the ‘variety of dimensions the individual involves in the recovery process’. Mrs Konile chose to open her conversation with us at Indwe with her Mfengu ancestry in the Eastern Cape. Both Indwe and her Mfengu ancestry played a role in her recovery process.

The Eastern Cape and being Mfengu

In terms of racial tension, the Eastern Cape is unlike any other space in South Africa. For nearly four centuries, it formed the first frontier between

black and white, between 'the terrestrial endeavour of Africa and the maritime endeavour of Europe'. According to Noel Mostert, the indigenous people of the Eastern Cape found themselves selected by history to bear, for centuries, the brunt of contact with the outside world.

Later the area broke ground in international black political thinking with the development of Black Consciousness and the formation of the Pan-Africanist Congress, which produced a strong political awareness as well as an impressive crop of black political and intellectual leaders. Of all the people detained without trial in South Africa, one-third came from the Eastern Cape. Although Xhosa people dominate South African politics, this is the second-poorest of the country's nine provinces, with more than 65 per cent of the economically active population unemployed. Like many before him, Zabonke went to the cities to look for a job.

When she came out to greet us at Indwe, Mrs Konile introduced herself immediately by her clan name, Khumalo, and then recited her ancestors:

OoMntungwa, abakwaSicaba, bakwaNonjiba, abakwaMzilikazi,
ooNdabezitha, ooMdletye, ooNontshingili, nabakwaDubandlela,
uS'chazi, uNodudu, uNdabezitha, iHiledi, inyok' emnyam' engathi'
usayibona isemanzini uyibethe uthi, 'Yiyo le inyoka entle!', AmaGqwashu.

Her first words to us were 'I am MaKhumalo', thereby rooting herself with pride within the Mfengu group, survivors of the Eastern Cape. When Kopano introduced himself as being of Zulu origin (and therefore linked to the Mfengu), she introduced him to the other women afterwards as 'my son'. Seen in the light of the loss of her son, this was an intricate yet swift interconnectedness that she established.

Mrs Konile addressed Nosisi, who is much younger than her, as 'Mama' in the beginning of the interview. But during the interview it changed to 'Sisi', then became 'my child', and then she used a term of endearment, 'Nono'. This points to the successful way both Nosisi and Mrs Konile managed to change the power relations between the two of them to arrive

at the desired mother-to-daughter relationship. It also underlines how the tone of Mrs Konile's narration grew in confidence and agency.

Mrs Konile also said that she was originally from Ncorha (a village around one of the earliest missionary stations that later formed part of the Transkei homeland ruled by K.D. Matanzima), moved to Bityi (also a village in the former Transkei) after the death of her husband, and then finally settled with her children at Indwe.

Being a black Mfengu widow in an area targeted more than usual by conquest, colonialism and apartheid policies, has certain effects. Historical trauma is an ongoing process that creates its own culture of stress, which is carried from generation to generation. Studies on indigenous people suggest that traumatic histories create 'a nucleus of unresolved grief' within members of such a community, which continues to affect successive generations. This concept is, of course, not new, and had already been formulated by Fanon in the sense that it hurts to be black. Through the progressive impacts of black conquest, colonisation, homeland and apartheid violence and poverty, 'cumulative waves of trauma and grief... have become deeply embedded in the collective memory of aboriginal [or indigenous] people'.

The Mfengu were refugees from the Natal chiefdoms, crushed with excessive violence by Shaka, who fled westwards through the Transkei, only to be subjugated by the Gcaleka Xhosa. The missionaries 'rescued' the Mfengu around 1834 and that made them some of the earliest converts to Christianity in the Eastern Cape. As the Mfengu thereafter tended to side with the British in subsequent struggles with the Xhosa and identified with Western culture, the colonial regime rewarded them with privileged access to land. During the disastrous cattle killing (from 1856 onwards), the Mfengu ignored the prophecies of Nongqawuse and bought cattle cheaply from those who believed they should get rid of all their livestock, and the Mfengu continued the cultivation of fields. But when these areas were swarming with starving and emaciated people, it was often with the Mfengu that they found shelter and food. The Mfengu embraced 'Victorian Christian ideology with its emphasis on agriculture over pastoralism and individualism over collectivism, and literacy, numeracy, the plough and introduced cultivars'.

Sadly, this singled-out group, described somewhere as the Jews of Kaffirland, was not spared the final dispossession via racial land legislation and white hegemony in the twentieth century. These measures soon reduced all rural blacks to a below-subsistence level designed to encourage the recruitment of young males for labour on white farms, in mines and public works.

We can therefore assume that dislocation, contestation, resentment, fighting for land and spaces for survival, form an ingrained part of the identity of most people from the Eastern Cape. Being a Mfengu, and therefore a 'foreigner', but ultimately a survivor through own initiative and collaboration, would equally form part of Mrs Konile's collective memory.

The town of Indwe

Long before the Indwe area became part of the Colony, the existence of coal was apparently widely known by the groups of Mfengu and Thembu who lived there, and by some white settlers. The landscape around Indwe is described by Alan Mabin in an article as 'mostly bleak and cold, though the scenery is beautiful and at times breathtaking'.

In the article, 'Capital, Coal and Conflict: The Genesis and Planning of a Company Town at Indwe', Mabin says that Indwe was an example of a

company town, among the first properly laid out and planned in an attempt to produce an order suitable for the model of corporate control ... its very site required forced removal before its titular owners could accomplish their urban purpose.

After two sets of forced removals, the town was established in August 1895 and by 1899, a succession of coal-mining companies produced 100 000 tons per year, making it 'the only Cape coal mining venture which ever paid substantial returns'. When the company went into 'voluntary liquidation' by 1917, the remaining areas not used for town or mining, were made available for the settlement of returning white soldiers after the First World War.

Mrs Konile suggested in our interview with her that Indwe was initially called Emalaheni, the place of coal, and that the Boers changed it to Indwe. She says specifically that the Boers took the land without paying anybody. As recently as 2007, a company called Independent Power Corporation secured mining rights:

Strategic Natural Resources PLC (SNR) granted IPSA exclusive rights to develop a mine mouthcoal-fired plant at Indwe using coal to be produced from one of South Africa's oldest coal mines. Subsequently SNR has completed an initial drilling programme that has satisfied both IPSA and Exodus that the commercially exploitable coal reserves justify an on-site power plant of no less than 500MW.

Apart from Indwe coal, the *instability* of Indwe sandstone also gets mentioned. So clearly, with the slopes of the Stormberg mountains literally rising 200 metres from her house, coal and sandstone are part of Mrs Konile's everyday life, and a story from Indwe is bound to include details about impoverishment, coal and big boulders. But it is precisely this everyday detail that is invested with a history of dislocation, loss, poverty and subjugation.

Research into the role of poverty when self-identities are formed, has found that deprivation of goods translates into deprivation of identity because poor people mostly have a highly developed reflective capacity. They know they are poor. They know that people look down on them. They also know that they are equal, but do not know how to prove that. A distinction is also made between people who are poor in terms of a low well-being (inadequacy of economic means), and those who are poor in terms of being so hampered by poverty that they are unable to pursue any form of well-being (inadequate capabilities).

We agreed that during the time of the Truth Commission, Mrs Konile seemed bereft not only of money but also of any capability to pursue her well-being. When meeting her in Indwe, however, we could see that she was still poor, but had regained sufficient control over her capabilities to search for a possible well-beingness as she was laughing, even joking, with the other women at the co-op, surrounded by beautiful fabrics.

Changes in the details of Mrs Konile's narratives

When we compared Mrs Konile's first and second Truth Commission testimonies to her interview ten years later in Indwe, we found a number of thought-provoking similarities and differences, exposing the ways in which she worked to bring control and stability into her life.

House detail

The first thing that caught our attention in the first testimony was the consistent referral to a house, houses, shacks. Initially it was hard to regard Mrs Konile's intimation that her son would, in his last words, bequeath his shack in Cape Town to his mother in Indwe, as anything more than fantasy or wishful thinking. Yet in the light of two centuries of border wars, displacement through famine and forced removals, having had to move from Ncortha to Bityi to Indwe for whatever reasons; of knowing that your only access to a house was through a male family member, and your only son had just died, you could develop an obsession about having a roof over your head.

Traditional custom allows the family of the deceased, and not the wife or girlfriend, to inherit the property. The story of Zabonke's shack was, however, verified and expanded upon during the second appearance of Mrs Konile at the Truth Commission's special investigation into the Gugulethu Seven. Her son-in-law, Tsherden Mbenyana, first described how difficult it was to get Mrs Konile to the shack, because of the riots in the township during that day, and then added:

But [*in the end*] we got hold of this shack and we took it to Site C and we moved from [S]ite C to Site B and I asked Zabonke's mother to stay there, but she wanted to go back to the village and we sold that shack for R500. And I sent that money to her, thank you.

In our interview with her at Indwe, Mrs Konile spent a considerable amount of time explaining how she herself had actually built two houses for Zabonke. She stressed that she had laid the bricks herself and it seemed that in the end she combined the two houses (added the extra from Zabonke's other house) to have, finally, a proper house – the one we were interviewing her in. But where the lack of housing was a moment of anguish in the first testimony, it became a story of triumph during the interview. It seemed that, despite the suggestion that the comrades (or the mother of Zabonke's child?), did not really give her everything that was due to her, she was, against so many odds, able to stabilise and secure her living conditions.

It was mentioned twice (by herself and by her son-in-law) that Mrs Konile refused to stay with her daughter in Cape Town after Zabonke's death. We

believe she realised that moving back to Indwe would equip her better to pool both her traditional, rural links and knowledge as well as capital resources, which included help from her children, the Truth Commission and Zabonke's shack. In an immense effort to overcome the traumas of dislocation and interrupted, overwhelming experiences, she grabbed her fate and managed her own needs.

'Home' is, of course, not an ordinary concept in a country where so many homes have been demolished over so many centuries. 'The rebuilding of homes and communities may have become the most compelling factor in enabling us to sustain our nationhood,' writes Njabulo Ndebele in his novel *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*. One of his characters says:

I dream that my children may build homes of the kind that eluded me; homes that can never be demolished by the state in order to make memories impossible; homes that can sustain public life because they infuse into it the values of honour, integrity, compassion, intelligence, imagination and creativity. This is the discovery of personal and social meaning through the pains and joys of belonging, participating, trusting, and just feeling at home, even without my husband.

In an astonishing demonstration of 'rising up and doing things for yourself' – Mrs Konile's own words in our interview – she did just that. Note the pride with which she referred to the big houses of her daughters and their successful entries into marriage and family life.



It is such a big thing for a certain generation of black women to own their houses. Ten years ago at the age of 50, my [Kopano's] mother got her own house for the first time and, still today, she would marvel at the fact that she owns a house. Also my grandmother got her house very late in life. Previously a house was linked to a man, but then modernity happened and with it monogamy, and now women have to refigure their links to property. Black women have the lowest married statistics so they invest a lot in relationships, but they need bricks and mortar, even a shack, to

safeguard them. Dislocation is what black women carry with them until they have a home that is theirs. Recently I visited my grandmother as the family was negotiating the marriage of a cousin, and I watched how my grandmother handled the discussions in her house. Her house is incredibly poor, you have no idea how poorly it is furnished. But when I asked for a plate she ran to her bedroom and fetched one. When we had cooldrinks, she went to her room to fetch glasses. At one stage I observed myself observing all of this.

Initially our [Nosisi's] 'home' was always in Stutterheim where my grandparents had a farm with cows and land. We are seven children and those who lived with my mother in Cape Town all went 'home' during December. At one stage my mother worked in Clifton, on Fourth Beach, for an old retired gentleman, Mr Middleton. He was a very generous, humble old man who allowed us to stay with our mother in the basement, but we went up into the house and sometimes he would even feed my little sister, so that became our 'home' and he sort of replaced our father. When he died we had to move back to the township and then we rented a place, my mother and five of her children. I was already a teacher then. It was so crowded that I could not iron my clothes for the school the night before, because there was nowhere to put them. Eventually my mother got a house in 1956. I remember when she finally got her papers that a house was hers, we were so excited, we went straight to that house, even when our things were not there, and slept there. It was such a GREAT relief. My own first house was in Hazeldene. I sold it and bought one in Pinelands where I live now.

For years my [Antjie's] mother talked about this house that one day she would build in which inside would be outside. We lived in a small, very old house that was falling apart, but on a farm that had rooigras up to as far as you could see. I was ten years old when she saved enough money to build a house of sandstone walls and ironstone floors. Although it was much cheaper than bricks, few builders could build with it, so Simon Mtinkulu arrived every Monday with a bag of chisels, a pair of goggles and a khaki coat on a motorbike from Edenville. My mother scavenged

demolition sites, so our house was built with sandstone from the old post office that had burnt down, the front door came from the technical school that had been modernised, the inside doors from the old fire station, the gates were welded together from the cast-iron fence of my great-grandmother's house. I had a skylight above my bed and, yes, at night I sometimes lay in moonlight. When I returned from the hostel on Fridays the house would smell of water and stone as the cleaning women carried the hosepipe deep into the house and scrubbed the stones.



It was not only Mrs Konile's tenacious drive to have her own house that gave us a glimpse of her efforts to survive, but it was also present in the way she gave details of Zabonke's death. She could not narrativise the complete story of Zabonke's death because she was not there. In her memory she had, however, the story of his death from the moment it reached her and how it played, and is playing, itself out for the rest of her life. Every time she told the story of Zabonke's death, she had to make choices – for whom am I telling this, why am I telling this, what are the circumstances of the telling? – and these determine what she is to depict and what to leave out, what to adapt to the moment of telling and what to add.

Response to dreams

Some details stayed consistent. One of them was Mrs Konile's response to dreams. As Kopano remarked in Chapter 3, dreams, within an African context, are often ways in which the ancestors communicate. In the Indwe interview, Mrs Konile again referred to dreams, this time after Zabonke's funeral in Cape Town.

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. . . . Yes, I buried him among the Boers at that place where the Boers did not want him to come . . .

Zabonke, visibly cold, appeared and talked to her in a dream, whereupon she acted. This incident emphasises how Mrs Konile, via dreams and rituals, stayed in close contact with traditional healing practices and beliefs.

At the same time, it seemed that Mrs Konile had forgotten the dream about the goat, the dream she initially told the Truth Commission about:

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.

As the dream was the beginning and the signalling of her trauma during her first testimony, why was it so easily forgotten in the years afterwards? Should we begin to consider 'forgetting' as part of survival? Do we conclude, as Ruth Leys emphasises in her analysis of the work of Pierre Janet, that forgetting is an important survival strategy? As far back as 1894 Janet said that to help a patient to forget would be the most valuable discovery of pathological psychology. He believed that a patient could be cured 'not by the recovery of memory but by the excision of her imputed or reconstructed trauma'; that what mattered in the treatment of neuroses was not the 'confession' of the traumatic memory, but its 'elimination'.

By forgetting the central incident foreshadowing her trauma, Mrs Konile was letting go of the ancestral prediction that threatened her life. With new dreams, the subsequent reburial of her son with its accompanying rites, she was establishing a much more healing and protective relationship with the ancestors.

Identifying Zabonke's body

The way Mrs Konile gestured with her hands when she described how she identified her son in the mortuary, indicated to us that she was seeing the scene in her mind's eye. She described this event in all three narratives, but every time some things were different, some left out, some kept and others added. The well-known 'gap' between the actual world and language is of such a nature that it is not possible to capture faithfully the totality of something in language. In the same way, it would be, if not impossible, then extremely difficult to capture the full extent of a memory, with its aural, olfactory and tactile ingredients, with language. During the Truth Commission testimony Mrs Konile had to select what to 'translate' into words. These choices were determined by many things, such as the scenario in which the narration took place (the Truth Commission setting or being interviewed at home); or the nature and response of the audience; or the creative grasp on language that could, at that precise moment, 'grab' the right word.

It seemed that when we put together all of Mrs Konile's descriptions of her visit to the mortuary, we were able not only to 'see' the scene more accurately, but to detect how Mrs Konile herself had progressed in integrating these details into a story of survival. In every description there was a pronounced change as she chose to bring new details to light and let others fade into the background. Choices of what to use and what to leave out, determined by what she *wanted* to say to those listening *now*, while at the same time needing to say it in ways that she could live with.

OFFICIAL DESCRIPTION (FIRST TRUTH COMMISSION APPEARANCE)
[. . .] so I went and I saw him.

When I looked at him, his body, I couldn't see his body. I didn't want to look at his body. One of his eyes was out, there was just blood all over. He was swollen, his whole head was swollen. I could only identify his legs, because they were just thrown all over the place, one of his eyes was out. His whole head was swollen.

What I can only remember now are his feet, I could only identify his feet, that's how I could see my son. They asked if I am satisfied, I said yes I am.

I went in and I saw him. When I looked at him [*pause*], his body, I didn't look at the body [*pause*] where I looked at him, one of his eyes was out, the-the-the, here [*demonstrating*] the blood, you know what, it had dried out on his body. He was swollen all over, all over here on the head. I could identify him faintly here and there in the way he was lying as they were just thrown out there, as they were thrown in those things, thrown there just like that, thrown there just like that. The eye was totally out. And here [*pointing*] he is swollen like this [*demonstrating*], all over here on the lower – lower parts. The only thing that I could recognise clearly [*emphasising*] were the feet, where I could say, 'Now, this is my child'. They asked if I was satisfied. I said I am satisfied. We went out and left.

TESTIMONY FROM SECOND TRUTH COMMISSION APPEARANCE

When I got there and I saw him, I could not even breathe, I was gasping for air. He was just lying there, dead. There were a lot of bodies, but his was the first one there. I could see that this was my child, Zabonke, but he was filthy, absolutely filthy. All swollen up around the head. I just fell over, I was taken and put on a bed.

DESCRIPTION DURING INDWE INTERVIEW

MRS KONILE: You can imagine, they were just lying there. Yho! Eish! 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: Heke!

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.

In the first testimony Mrs Konile shared that she found it difficult to look at the body; even while she was looking at it, she couldn't really see it. So although the visual spectacle was in front of her, it was as if she could not *see* it as it could be seen. As if her inability to see the body should explain the detail she gave, namely, that she could not do justice to what it really looked like because she couldn't 'see' as a person should see. She described the shattered head, but then skipped the body and jumped to the feet. You could gather that the feet were unharmed.

The second testimony, also starting with the swollen head, moved to the body, emphasising that the body was 'filthy, absolutely filthy'.

When Mrs Konile described to us in Indwe how she had identified the body, she ended the description in triumph and challenge: she not only then left out the shattered head, swollen and filthy body, but described *only* the unharmed feet and then added the penis. The latter was described as if she wanted to shock both the white policeman at the mortuary as well as the dignified professors listening to her. It was indeed the first time that Kopano entered the interview by saying, 'Ooh!'

Kopano asked in one of his first analyses why Mrs Konile was referring to her son in terms of a husband? Here she was indicating that Zabonke was sleeping naked – whether she was referring to the way in which he slept when at home with her, or there in the mortuary, was not clear, yet Mrs Konile did what few mothers would be able to do and that was to identify her grown son by his penis. The challenging way in which Mrs Konile was telling this, and her deliberate use of the word ‘penis’, indicated a freedom she claimed for herself to say that which many would assume should not be said.



During the first Truth Commission hearings, Commissioner Dumisa Nisebeza caused great controversy, by forcing a victim and her interpreter to use the word ‘vagina’. He confirmed that legally, in terms of intent, it was important to know that the policeman aimed deliberately at a vagina instead of her ‘lower body’ as had been testified. This upset many of the older people present at the hearing.



In the presence of the white policemen or the university researchers, Mrs Konile took the liberty to talk about her son in a way that could shock them. This indicated a strong sense of agency, which had transformed a traumatic moment in her life into a triumph of naming her son’s unwounded virility by its proper Xhosa name. Over a period of ten years she had healed, and was still healing, sufficiently to, in contrast to the abject passivity of the first testimony, transform her son from a wrecked and shattered, filthy body without eyes or gums, into a person resurrected with untouched feet and a penis.

Unchanged details

We have now discussed the markers of some kind of movement – coping, forgetting, integrating, progressing – but there was one fragment in both the first testimony and the interview that seemed not to have changed and that seemed to be unchangeable.

In the official version Mrs Konile explained what happened when the details of how her son was killed were conveyed to her:

OFFICIAL DESCRIPTION (FIRST TRUTH COMMISSION APPEARANCE)

So they took me to his place, that is now where – where I saw the mattress.

When I saw him, I had this vision – after I was told and I regained my consciousness, I remember people were praying there.

RE-TRANSLATION OF THE ORIGINAL

I was told that my son, ‘Your son Zabonke has been shot. They were seven.’ I didn’t know now, I didn’t know this place. But it was said they were shot while in the bush. Him, they were two and they were asking for forgiveness, with their hands up like this [*demonstrating*], asking for forgiveness. With both hands up, like this [*demonstrating*], asking for forgiveness. My answer was to ask, ‘And where is he now? Where is his house?’ I lost consciousness while they were explaining to me. I was taken to his house [*pause*]. It is there that when I saw the mattress [*crying*] I could then recall his picture [*crying*], his picture [*crying*]. I had a picture of ... I had a picture of ... [*sniffing, long pause*] After I had been told, after I had recovered and there was a big prayer session.

DESCRIPTION DURING INDWE INTERVIEW

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.

From these three quotes (with our emphasis added), it is evident that Mrs Konile has a visual image of Zabonke’s death that has not changed since the first testimony. In the first official quote, the Xhosa was translated as ‘vision’ and then regaining of consciousness, as if the vision was taking her into the

'not real', the not-conscious. The re-translation used the word 'picture' and from the para-linguistic information (the video footage and Nosisi's retranslation), we noticed that it was during these sentences about the picture, that Mrs Konile started to cry inconsolably. In the third quotation, she herself volunteered the most painful debris of the death of her son, 'the picture'. It was the returning picture that made her cry, *but* she declares, 'It is not to say I'm still in pain. . . . No, I'm not in pain. No.'

Recent research into narrative trauma suggests that it was unhelpful to distinguish between traumatic memory and narrative memory (as do some renowned researchers into trauma) if it was assumed that the victim (the survivor) could completely transform the traumatic memory into a narrative memory and so integrate it into the survivor's life story. Ruth Leys suggests that trauma would always resist the resolution or collapse of the mimetic experience into the anti-mimetic and our observation of Mrs Konile's inability to integrate the 'picture' of her son's death into her narrative seems to bear this out.

Underlining the trauma that photographs could and did produce, Kopano quoted David Marriott, who describes the camera as 'a type of devouring eye'. Marriott formulates the specific feeling a black man has when looking at the pictures of lynched black men taken by the lynchers:

To look as a black male spectator, at such an image, is to be aware of a leash around your neck, one formed by racial fear and sadistic fantasy and the terrifying-satisfying spectacle of castration.

The hysteria among the mothers and families that the police video caused was clearly underpinned by this 'leash' of racial fear for the sadistic fantasies of whites – the latter were moving with elated energy and even posed with hunter's pride alongside their 'trophies'.

As we have said before, the video news footage of the Gugulethu Seven had come to brand the incident. Every presentation or discussion about it, started off with either a reference to or with the footage itself: the familiar, authoritarian signature tune for the apartheid news broadcast, the newsreader presenting the nation with the fact of terrorism, a familiar anchor on the scene, and then disrespectful angles on bodies as they were lying like rubbish

in the dust, two of them turned around by long ropes. This was followed by a news report about the lowest temperatures ever measured in Britain.

This was 'the picture' the Gugulethu mothers had when they talked about the deaths of their sons. This was the part they discussed over and over, this was where they started to cry, this was the picture they kept on mentioning: the television news, the pulling with the ropes, the mutilated bodies on their television screens.

Mrs Konile did not have a television, so it was not known when she saw the footage for the first time: did somebody record it and show it to her when they were telling her about it? Did she see it for the first time at the inquests or at the amnesty hearings? Were there many photographs around so that she could form a picture from them? Judging from the documentaries and other material, there seemed also to be no existing photograph of a living Zabonke John Konile, which meant that if Mrs Konile used the word 'picture' it could only be of a dead Zabonke – whether as part of the television footage or a news photograph or biopsy material from the mortuary.

We do not know. What is clear, however, is that it was the pictures, implying the iconic nature of the visual material in her head, which made it impossible to engage or deal with it. Not only for Mrs Konile, but it was also impossible for the other mothers, as could be noticed in the near-obsessive way they all referred to it and how their descriptions of it did not seem to change, nor their interaction with it.

It seems to us that if the mind is absorbing the raw material of an incident, it is able to find ways to process it so that the person can live with it. But, if the incident has *already* been processed by somebody else, the victim finds it nearly impossible to access it in a way that enables integration. Looking at the testimony of the Gugulethu mothers, we feel that it is precisely because the raw event had already been processed into an iconic form by somebody else – in this case, the apartheid police and public broadcaster had already decided what to bring to light and what to leave out – that the mind found it hard, or impossible, to come up with creative interventions to interact with it. So the mimetic-inducing 'picture' with its frozen and unproductive nature, resisted Mrs Konile's narrative – despite the fact that it no longer induced pain.

Survival strategies

Until recently, a neglected field in testimony studies has been survival strategies. In their analysis of the narratives of Aboriginal victims and survivors, Beverley Raphael, Pat Delaney and Daniel Bonner found that the traumatic experience should be explored for evidence of the strengths within indigenous cultures that assist post-traumatic growth:

[O]ne's own culturally determined beliefs, values and behaviours and cultural awareness, knowledge and respect [...] *should* not [be] judged against western models. There is a need for acknowledgment of the holistic conceptualisation of health, the relation to land, genealogy and kinship, and the quite specific 'country', tribal and family issues of the community or region.

They especially pointed to voices that were often interpreted as hallucinatory and delusional, while they were, in fact, spirits guiding a person to healing.

Mrs Konile's first testimony before the Truth Commission had indications of possible sources of survival. The dream of the goat signalled her close connection with the ancestors and their guiding spirit. She also heard voices telling her to go and pick up coal. While she was lying there, pinned down by a rock, she heard her daughter calling her. These voices of ancestors, spirits and children were guiding her through a succession of awakenings. She might not have known what to ask of the Commission or the perpetrators, but she had a strong bond with the ancestors.

Despite Raphael, Delaney and Bonner's request not to use Western models, it is interesting that the whole issue of awakening has produced a large amount of literature in trauma studies. What does it mean 'to awaken' asks Cathy Caruth when writing about the dream of one of Freud's patients?

Awakening, in Lacan's reading of the dream [of Freud's patient], is itself the site of a trauma, the trauma of necessity and impossibility of responding to another's death [...] To awaken is thus to bear the imperative to survive: to survive no longer simply as the [mother] of a child, but as the one who must tell what it means not to see [...]

Mrs Konile's constant references to becoming conscious, to waking up, to feeling like being asleep, are all signs of efforts to deal with the encounter of the real, to wake up to the external world, to awaken to the death of her child. During her first testimony Mrs Konile was dealing with this imperative to survive in order to tell of her son's death. In her second testimony, she was a little more focused on survival by asking for the help of the Commission to get a house and to look after Zabonke's child. With ten years between the first testimonies and the interview, the interview is, despite the obvious poverty, brimming with survival strategies as well as careful control not to slip (back?) into what Raphael, Delaney and Bonner describe as negative cycles of psychological processes manifesting in 'learned helplessness, a loss of social control in self-damaging ways'; a loss of social support 'in which cultural rituals that may have facilitated healing as they were evolved to do, lost practice and potency'.

Mrs Konile's (regained?) control of her life and narrative was carried by several markers. It was obvious how carefully, yet firmly, she refrained from confirming Nosisi's references to God or Christian faith as a source of strength. She also seemed to avoid admitting that *ubuntu* was playing a role in her life. She was strident in her rejection of the Boers and said openly that she had refused to forgive Thapelo Mbelo, the killer who asked for forgiveness.



Every time I [Antjie] read the passages where Mrs Konile rejects the Boers, I feel strangely unsettled. She said it during the interview while I was sitting with her in her house. Her treatment of me was impeccable: not hostile, not too friendly, as if I was just a person who simply did not understand Xhosa. And yet I wished I'd known that she was saying that. I am not really clear why. Every time I think I think of Bellingan's arrogant, cruel and snarling face, I feel revolted, not by the monstrousness of his dead eyes and small animal-like teeth, but by the complete lack of humanness in him right through the amnesty process. No one should ask forgiveness on his behalf. He shouldn't be forgiven by anybody. But then, what about Derrida's 'miracle' of forgiving the unforgivable? Does Mrs Konile perhaps feel a need to forgive a white person in order to finally

'normalise' – Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's term – her life? What do I do with my desire that she should have another kind of Boer face in her mind's eye? What is the difference between forgiveness and saying that you are sorry? A neutral academic study does not have the space in which to say that you are deeply sorry for what your people and, through them, you yourself, did to her, to her life and those of the people she loves. Am I out of my mind, I wonder? If I wanted to ask forgiveness it should be because I could not speak Xhosa.

I [Nostisi] think that maybe Mrs Konile's words, 'Yes, so much so that I began to pray for myself and punished myself and told myself that it is high time that I teach myself to accept somebody's plea for forgiveness', might be an indication of her belief in God and ubuntu. Her initiative in community development at the very same time she was rebuilding her life, could be seen as a commitment to ubuntu. The forgiveness her daughter and granddaughter extended, made her soul-search and here she is indicating that it was wrong not to forgive as it does not reflect ubuntu. In our conversation at Indwe she mentioned that she was an active member in church and a founder member and leader of the women's manyano [association].



Mrs Konile's unforgiving stance flew in the face of the Gugulethu Seven's fame for the remarkable and consistent ways in which forgiveness had been formulated, especially by Mrs Ngewu. During the first testimony, Mrs Konile expressed her complete helplessness even to begin imagining interaction with the perpetrators.

I wouldn't be able to talk to them, it is their fault that now I am in this misery, now I wouldn't know what to do them – to do with them. I wouldn't know, I would never be able to say what – I can never tell them what to do, I've just given up everything, I don't know, I don't know anything. I will be just – be grateful if I can just get anything, but I personally cannot do anything.

Forgiveness, or any interaction for that matter, was completely out of the question. In the documentary *Long Night's Journey into Day*, Mrs Konile cuts an unforgettable figure, encompassing fury and rock-hard resistance to forgiveness. Her face mirrors bitterness and scorn as she turns her body away from Thapelo Mbelo, the man who 'looks like somebody who had a knife broken on his face'.

Was non-forgiveness and a refusal to interact with the perpetrator, part of her initial survival strategy?

In her book *A Human Being Died that Night*, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela gives several reasons why a victim would want to interact in a non-revengeful way with those who violated his or her rights:

We are induced to empathy because there is something in the other that is felt to be part of the self, and something in the self that is felt to belong to the other.

In a discussion about the forgiveness scene in *Long Night's Journey into Day*, Gobodo-Madikizela refers to the fact that the pendulum swung away from anger and forgiveness the moment that Mrs Ngewu linked the perpetrator to her son:

'It is as if you are my son – you are the same age as my son,' says Cynthia Ngewu in welcoming Mbelo and opening the door for him to re-enter the moral realm of humanity. [*That happens when*] she is able to match part of her son's identity with that of the man who murdered him [...]

Maybe the difficulty Mrs Konile had in forgiving, lay in the fact that because of her impoverished and marginalised position, she could not recognise any part of her *self*, or her life, as being part of another person. The doctor who refused to treat her, said to her, 'You are no-one, you are nothing'. Whereas Mrs Ngewu could point out similarities between her son and Mbelo, Mrs Konile, at that stage, could not find any connection between her devastated and impoverished life and the life of the perpetrator who was paid 1 000 rand for each of the killings.

Mrs Konile used the word 'forgiveness' in interesting ways. In isiXhosa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was known as the Truth and

Forgiveness (*ixolelwano*) Commission. Mrs Konile used the same word (*ixolo*) for Zabonke's action as he was coming out of the bushes with his arms raised, indicating that he had no guns in his hands and that the police should refrain from shooting. For Mrs Konile, her own child was asking for forgiveness and was killed. Now it was expected of her to forgive those whose response, to a similar request, was murder. She was expected to do what they, who had so much power and resources, couldn't do.

The opposite could also be true Kopano suggested. Mrs Konile couldn't forgive Mbelo because she couldn't recognise any humanity in *him*. She told him, and she repeated it to us, that he showed no humanity as he shot her child who was also asking for forgiveness (with his hands in the air). So there was nothing in herself that she could recognise in him. The way in which she says several times (in *Long Night's Journey into Day*), 'I will never forget your face', is as if she was seeing an inhuman creature. She was asked by Mbelo to recognise the human in the inhuman and that was impossible for her.

As her surroundings became more secured, however, it seems as though she could start thinking about forgiveness. During our interview in Indwe it was evident that, although she was not yet forgiving, she had moved from her previous position – the victim as object to the victim as agent. Most importantly, as Nosisi picked up, she suggested that it was 'wrong' of her to be unforgiving. This remark seemed to be instigated as much by her own convictions as by the examples of children and fellow Gugulethu Seven mothers.

MRS KONILE: ... When we were now brought together with these whites in front of the judge, I had a question to the killer that when Zabonke approached, 'Did he not ask for forgiveness?' [*with his hands in the air*]. Here he [*Mbelo*] 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 [*Mbelo*] 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.

Mrs Konile was past being a susceptible person at the mercy of manipulations. As the truth about Zabonke was revealed and the wheels of justice started to turn, she became more and more empowered to 'wrest away from the perpetrator the fiat power to destroy'.

Despite asking forgiveness from *all* the mothers, Thapelo Mbelo didn't kill Zabonke. Sergeant Riaan Bellingan, chosen by Vlakplaas head Eugene de Kock to lead the operation, applied for amnesty for the killing of Zabonke Konile. (But as Mbelo was the only perpetrator who interacted with her, Mrs Konile treated him as if he were Zabonke's killer.) During the amnesty hearings Bellingan, who also applied for amnesty for killing his wife, treated the process with open scorn. Interviewed for the documentary *A Long Night's Journey into Day*, Commissioner Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela said that she would not like to see Bellingan get amnesty because he displayed no sense of regret or sympathy towards Mrs Konile or any of the other Gugulethu mothers.



ANTJIE: We have explained how Mrs Konile's changing view on forgiveness can be read within an *ubuntu* ethos, but I still do not know how to place it, how to understand where it was sometimes hidden, for example, in attacks on other Africans in the townships.

KOPANO: Most people in the township are still rooted in the rural areas. I Decembers they go 'home'. Where we live now, is not really home. And suddenly you see others moving in, as strange as you . . .

ANTJIE: Somebody said to me: it is only South African black people who are always harping on the fact that they are African. People from Africa know that they are African, so they would say that they are Somalian or Nigerian. I also read a paper that suggests that black South Africans kill other Africans because deep down they fear becoming African – Africa means failure and these Africans bring failure with them and so will make all of us fail too. Killing them is to exorcise failed Africa.

KOPANO: The expression 'I am because you are', does not quite capture the complexity of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* also has an element of the unexpected, it challenges the expected. People in the township would offer you what they don't have. Njabulo Ndebele's word for this complexity is 'counter-intuitive'.

NOSISI: *Ubuntu* is everybody's, all humankind's, everybody has that element. All creation was made by one person. When He created us, He put that element in all of us. It may be suppressed or dormant, but it is there. But in some cultures it is nurtured, in other cultures it is done away with. The African kind of interconnectedness is much more open than the community sense of other cultures. It opens up all the time, it broadens. First we take care of the person next to us, then it opens up to the family, you share, then it grows to the community. Whatever we do, we don't do it alone. The rituals are not for the family alone, we have to consult the clan, then it grows, so it spreads. When the ritual takes place anybody can come, if there is somebody who is foreign he is also welcome. One of the Xhosa chiefs decided to give land to some white people so that they could also plough and grow with us. Unconditionally he gave because he assumed that they were human beings . . . What has changed now is the infiltration of other cultures with their ways of looking at humanity. *Ubuntu* started to break up, churches divorced us from *Qamata* [*Almighty*], in schools you have to become an individual. Everything depends on money and no longer on caring. But *ubuntu* can never be gone, it is still there, but dormant.

KOPANO: Because we live so closely together, close-knit, but in networks that always include more and more people, becoming wider as Nosisi says, you grow up enmeshed in such a complexity of relationships and all of them are constantly changing. So you grow up and live in the cracks as it were. You look at what is happening around you and you decide this is the right one, this is the wrong one and you make sense for yourself. So the people in Alexandra already saw several changes and now people from elsewhere move in, so things which helped yesterday are not helping today. And the voices of politicians are louder than others and they don't make it easier to cope with constant destabilisation.

The maze of networks in which we, and also Mrs Konile, are finding ourselves is so layered, is of such complexity, you cannot begin to imagine the world they carry in them. Apart from the fact that Mrs Konile is formed by all the relationships, myths, histories, goats and dreams, her son was a political activist and remember, race is a modern concept, the notion of black is modern, previously it was African, indigenous, native, Bantu.

ANTJIE: If there are so many relationships why would she then fall apart when her son dies?

KOPANO: Because several relationship lines crossed through the dot of Zabonke, crossed through the dot of her husband, her daughter, her brother. Many of these interconnected relationships had been affected by the many deaths in her family, in most families actually.

NOSISI: I would say she wasn't consciously not-forgiving, her own humanity needed time to recover.

ANTJIE: How is a sense of self formed within such an interconnected community?

KOPANO: I was an only child for quite some time and grew up with a sense of being alone, even loneliness. Then we moved into my grandmother's house where eight others already lived and suddenly there were people all over me, in my face. You want to climb away, close yourself up, but you cannot ignore

them, their farts, their smiles, their own insecurities, their anger at each other. The mere fact that there are no different bedrooms but that everybody sleeps together, brings an excess of emotions. It is swirling around in the shack and you can simply not deal with the amount of it. When it is night time, you want to run away, but where to? You have nowhere to run away to.

ANTJIE: So your sense of self is not formed by you thinking about yourself, but by how others relate to you?

KOPANO: You are always formed by others, not by yourself, but because in, say, the black community, everybody is so close, you cannot make out what 'you' is. You share everything, there is no such thing as this is my cup, this is my blanket, there is no self without the family.

ANTJIE: It means there is no border. You cannot say, I who am Kopano, stops here.

KOPANO: To ask how the self is formed, to ask about borders, are the wrong questions. You should ask, what is the self in the family? Within the networks, the maps of networks, where is the dot that is you? There is no dot without a connecting line. The self is a combination of things that are connecting. When the lines are removed there is no self. That is the troubling thing. It is as if I want to pull back, I don't want these lines connecting me. Part of me cannot run away from them, they are the me.

ANTJIE: Could you look at it the other way round? Could you say that because the self needs the community to be the self, then the fact that today's black community is crushed by HIV/AIDS deaths, by foreigners moving in, by more regular confrontations with the individualism and selfishness of whiteness, by more successful family members moving away into the middle class, that the self can now no longer be formed. People find they have to function without this self. So how can the self resist when things go wrong?

NOSISI: You follow your conscience.

ANTJIE: But this conscience is formed by the community.

KOPANO: This is what you sometimes would like to call an African psychology, an indigenous psychology, because the dysfunction is not in the self, but in the family. The sense of self lies in the community. What is wrong is wrong because it hurts the family. Your morality depends on who you are.

NOSISI: It must be instilled from home.

KOPANO: It is displaced. It is hyper-aware of one another, but the community looks the other way. It doesn't know where to anchor, how to benchmark, because they have to make a new morality. Make it up as they go along. So doing wrong is not decided by the self, but by the community and, in our case, by a community in flux. But you, Antjie, pretend that the white community somehow knows the values. You also don't. How did the self get to these values? Where did you learn that? Where does the self learn its self-questioning?

NOSISI: I always make my children aware that I am a member of a larger community. Children would ask me why family members who want to borrow money always ask me first. Then I say I am a member of a family and you must remember how I lived, prepared to sacrifice. You see that often, now, how young people when they get a job just think of buying a flat, buying a car, they just think about themselves.

Remember that Zabonke's daughter and his sister, Thandeka, did forgive. I think it says a lot not only about how they were raised, but about how Mrs Konile judged herself in the light of their willingness to forgive. Her words do not indicate that she thinks *they* were the ones making the mistake.



Many doubts have been raised about the value of testifying before the Truth Commission for the victims and survivors. Questions were also asked about narratives given under particular circumstances, but afterwards being made permanently available in the public arena. Strong criticism has been formulated against what was described by Brandon Hamber and Richard Wilson as the Truth Commission's pressure on victims to forgive.

In *Historic Trauma and Aboriginal Healing*, prepared for the Canada-based Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Cynthia C. Wesley-Esquimaux and Magdalena Smolewski describe the healing process as a

recovery of awareness, a reawakening to the senses, a re-owning of one's life experience and a recovery of people's enhanced abilities to trust this experience. In a successful healing process, this will be coupled with the recovery of a social ability to create a new cultural paradigm, to bring order out of what has been chaos. The aim of a healing process is to recover a full person (culture) and to develop anew lost capacities for feeling and expression. The goal is to recover and reintegrate the past into the present.

According to them, the treatment of trauma usually has three main components: processing and coming to terms with the horrifying and overwhelming experience; controlling and mastering physiological and biological stress reactions; and re-establishing secure social connections and interpersonal efficacy.

From the changes that we noticed between Mrs Konile's first testimony and the Indwe interview, we cannot but come to the conclusion that, however slow and incomplete, it was those first Truth Commission hearings that in a way compelled Mrs Konile into processing her intense experience of loss. The Truth Commission's investigative team professionally assisted the process by digging up a hitherto unknown link between the Gugulethu murders and the Vlakplaas death-squad. Even the amnesty hearings provided the mothers finally with a different version of the events as had been given before the court that found nobody guilty. Mrs Konile, who sounded at the first hearings to be overwhelmed and in a state of 'learned helplessness', could start to integrate the real facts of Zabonke's killing into something that made sense to her own isolated, impoverished life in Indwe. In the second testimony, she was already 'mastering' her stress reactions by being able to formulate her needs, while the final interview carries ample evidence of secure social connections and interpersonal efficacy.

The first Truth Commission hearings pulled Mrs Konile in from Indwe; they provided a space, however manipulated, for her story; they classified her

as a victim/survivor; and reparation, however meagre, had been paid out to her. A monument had been erected in Gugulethu to remember and honour the deaths of the seven young men. Zabonke's body had been brought back and was respectfully buried with an impressive tombstone in Indwe. Today Mrs Konile is a person of note in her town. Although poor and still grieving, she is recognised and respected. Cars with foreign registration plates are often television crews or journalists on their way to interview her at the cop in the hotel. The Truth Commission did not bring her son back, she was not properly compensated by the government, but we have to concede that the hearings changed her life – for the (slightly) better.



We have come to the end of our journey. What started as a one-off discussion during tea-time became a two-year long conversation and in-depth interaction. Mrs Konile's testimony unlocked a thirst within us to explore the place of her ruptured and dreamlike narrative within a world that all three of us were experiencing intensely, but differently, and we wanted to understand her as an integral part of it. We found ourselves equally matched in interesting ways that allowed us to speak with unusual frankness across race and gender lines.

As the discussions took on a focused form we started to present papers and then published them. The texts became more than simply the input of three people about a fourth person's testimony, they began to have a life of their own. They became more than the sum total of our individual efforts. After each paper we didn't just know what each of us was thinking, we understood something broader, something more accurate, closer, becoming a new pulse as it were, accommodating the fact that in its un-understoodness, Mrs Konile's heartbeat was like a pacemaker, profoundly influencing, and perhaps saving, the rhythms of our lives. Although we were different, we were no longer separate. Out interaction made us calibrate our lives towards each other – not to become one another, but to enhance our awareness of our living-together-ness with her.

In the car returning from Indwe, we realised that the journey was beginning to become a book.

Dear Notrose Nobomvu Konile

You have spoken on the morning of 23 April 1996. We have heard you. Your words have occupied us for more than two years. We want to pay tribute to the courageous and tenacious way you came to the Truth Commission to tell your story. In the interview we had with you in Indwe, we realised how you fought to re-establish your life in such a way that it reflected your beliefs and priorities.

We take our fingers from the computer keys. There is much more that we could have said, Mama, but we are humbled by you – who live a humane life beyond the theories and knowledge of this world.

We wish you, who should not have been made poor, much softness, kindness and good health.

Antjie Krog
Nosisi Mpolweni
Kopano Ratele
16 November 2007

Epilogue

It was to be our last meeting. Kopano flew in from Johannesburg where he had a new post at the University of South Africa. Nosisi had just received an MPhil in translation at Stellenbosch University, Antjie had returned from a fellowship in Berlin the week before, and Andrea Natrass flew in from Pietermaritzburg to finalise details around the manuscript. In our old discussion room, we talked about the title, the photographs and the possibility of using Mrs Konile's face on the cover. Kopano was taking a call outside when Antjie asked Nosisi how we should go about informing Mrs Konile that our work on her had finally materialised into a book. Nosisi's mouth took on a strange shape. With difficulty she said, 'I don't know how to tell you this, but Mrs Konile has passed away.'

It was as if a hand-grenade had exploded. Everybody uttered noises, jumped up and became busy with something – anything – else. Nosisi spoke. She said she had heard of Mrs Konile's death by chance when she had phoned Thandeka, Mrs Konile's daughter, to hear how her mother was. By then it was already some weeks after the funeral. She had immediately sent a message via SMS to Kopano and Antjie. They both mumbled that they hadn't received any message. But then they were both often outside the country. Nosisi said that she had been surprised by the lack of reply. Nobody responded to her

comment and we all left as soon as possible, absolutely avoiding each other's eyes.



Sitting alone in my office, I [Antjie] was at first upset with Nosisi. Why hadn't she told us earlier? I had spoken to her regularly during the past week. I suddenly felt surrounded by loss. It was a curious feeling that I found hard to explain. It was a physical loss in my inner arms – as if skin had been ripped – a sense of failure and absolute futility.

I [Nosisi] was confused that Antjie and Kopano didn't mention Mrs Konile's death at all. They simply continued with the project as if nothing had happened. It didn't occur to me that they hadn't got the SMS I had sent.



That evening Nosisi took control. She phoned Antjie and Kopano and suggested that Kopano contact Thandeka to offer our condolences. She herself phoned to inquire about the tombstone and other rituals, but heard that Thandeka had returned the previous week from Indwe where everything had been taken care of.

All three of us were as if in suspension: saddened, shocked and the closest we had ever been to losing the trust we had so carefully built towards one another.

Where does the death of your research subject and the strong emotions it causes, fit into the academic scheme of research? We not only knew Mrs Konile's words by heart, but her face, her clothes, her intonation, her loneliness, her immense loneliness, her bravery and her tenacious thinking through of her life and its options. She had not only changed our academic views, but also our relationship towards her, towards each other and towards the world in which we live. What are the phrases, which are the theories, what is the hypothesis within which we can truly capture Mrs Konile changing for us as she changed our ways of observation?

It all started as an academic research project – when did it become something else?



KOPANO: But did it change into something else?

ANTJIE: I think so, because I feel we have failed her. Whatever we were doing didn't save her, didn't change her life, in fact, didn't do a thing for her.

NOSISI: I know that our visit meant a lot to her. The fact that we visited her *did* make a difference, the fact that she knew what we were doing. Thandeka said that her mother spoke about us with fondness.

KOPANO: 'Fondness' – it's a good word, isn't it?

ANTJIE: I feel bereft of an opportunity to be a person to her, to present to her some other kind of whiteness.

KOPANO: Now, that is not a person who is part of this team talking. That is the Antjie in you that speaks. Or let me re-phrase: it is the white Antjie in you that speaks.

ANTJIE: What's your problem? Didn't you say in your 'First Black' and 'Second Black' conversation that you would like whites to ask for forgiveness?

KOPANO: The problem is this. I am angry at white people. Very angry. Because they refuse to acknowledge how much they have benefited from their whiteness. But we have interacted with you as an individual, a person, and on that basis we have negotiated and become simply human beings with one another. But the moment you decide you want to become the collective white and want to act on behalf of the whites, you blunt my anger.

ANTJIE: But isn't that exactly what I should be doing?

KOPANO: No, because my anger should not be blunted until white people in general have changed, and not because one white has become a person for me.

ANTJIE: I don't understand. Black people are proud of their interconnectedness, their collectiveness, and yet you don't think it is precisely my African-ness that makes me feel collective with Afrikaners.

NOSISI: Let us meet Thandeka, and we can all say to her what we have inside us.



After two failed attempts to link up with Thandeka Konile, she suggested that she come to the UWC campus after work.

It must have been a strange sight: three rather serious and anxious-looking academics sitting on the dark maroon chairs in a mundane office and in their midst a young woman who, in her cream and ochre blouse and pencil skirt, looked positively golden, soft and beautiful. Thandeka's hair was delicately plaited, her dark eyes shined and when she smiled, she was a young Mrs Konile. A radiant Mrs Konile. She talked about the illness of her mother: how Mrs Konile came to Cape Town and how she went back to Indwe with her mother, and how Mrs Konile had died on 6 November 2007 in Indwe of a heart attack in the house she had built for herself through the assistance that Zabonke's death had brought her.

As we looked at Thandeka, we were completely enchanted. Marks on her hands and legs made visible the hard life she had led when she was younger. But she sat with us exuding an exuberant warmth. All three of us could pick up that we were moved, and deeply so. That in a family so persistently destroyed, so driven from deprivation to despair, the last remaining member could be so . . . shiningly – not only a survivor, not only becoming middle class – but that she could be so humane.

That is the miracle this book never captured.

Notes

Introduction

PAGE 1: Note that 'Gugulethu' is the correct spelling of the name of the township – and the spelling that we have used throughout this book – although the official spelling during apartheid years is given as Guguletu.

PAGE 1: The men known as the Gugulethu Seven were Zandisile Zenith Mjobo, Zola Alfred Swelani, Mandla Simon Mxinwa, Godfrey Jabulani Miya, Themba Mlifi, Zabonke John Konile and Christopher 'Rasta' Piet.

PAGE 1: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) testimonies of Cynthia Ngevu, Irene Mxinwa, Notrose Konile and Eunice Thembisa Miya on 23 April 1996 can be found at www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/heide/ct00100.htm (accessed on 25 August 2008).

PAGE 2: The TRC testimony of Nonzwakazi Juqu on 23 April 1996 can be found at www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/heide/ct00712.htm (accessed on 27 August 2008).

PAGE 2: The TRC testimony of Joan King on 23 April 1996 can be found at www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/heide/ct00603.htm (accessed on 27 August 2008).

PAGE 2: The TRC testimony of Ms Quay on 23 April 1996 can be found at www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/heide/ct00707.htm (accessed on 27 August 2008).

PAGE 2: Mary Burton's comments can be found at www.sabctruth.co.za, under 'Bones of Memory' (accessed on 1 November 2008).

PAGE 3: The TRC testimony of Tango Lamani on 23 April 2006 can be found at www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/heide/ct00304.htm (accessed on 27 August 2008).