

NOT QUITE RECONCILIATION

Krog, Antjie, Mpolweni, Nosisi & Ratele, Kopano (2009) **There was this goat: Investigating the Truth Commission testimony of Notrose Nobomvu Konile.** Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press. ISBN 978-1-86914-166-0 pbk. Pages vii + 235.

*Don Foster
Department of Psychology
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch 7700*

Here is yet another book reporting on events emerging from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in the years 1996 to 1998. It is an unusual version, which takes as its object a single case: the testimony of Mrs Notrose Konile during the second week of the TRC hearings in April 1996. Her son Zabonke was one of the Gugulethu Seven, killed by the security police in 1986. There is a problem: the testimony of Mrs K does not make sense. The original testimony of Mrs K is confusing, unbelievable, incomprehensible. She talks among other things of a goat looking up, of digging for coal, of rocks falling on her, of unknown people. This book is an attempt, by three rather different researchers, to interpret and grasp the meaning of the nonsensical text: a hermeneutical quest. There are additional texts to explore: further testimony from Mrs Konile at a TRC hearing in November 1996 and an interview conducted by all three authors with Mrs K in isiXhosa in her own home in the village of Indwe, Eastern Cape, some ten years after her official reports. Not surprisingly the matter of translation looms large in this book, as it should in multilingual South Africa. isiXhosa-scholar Mpolweni provides retranslations of the original TRC translations from isiXhosa to English and in so-doing clears up some, but by no means all, of the problems of Mrs K's accounts. The book also gives a full chapter devoted to the issue of simultaneous translation as done by the TRC and interviews some of the official TRC translators: most insightful.

The three authors bring quite different interpretations, skills and positions to this task, and their perspectival differences and debates constitute a major focus of the book. It is intriguing. Krog is of course a well-known literary figure and writer on TRC-related matters, and she also brings a range of hypothetical white interpretations. Mpolweni is the isiXhosa-language expert and is sensitive to cultural and gender issues involved in shaping meaning. Ratele, among other things, brings a reading from the realm of African psychology, including the meaning of dreams and of community responsibilities. Their working together on this project, particularly the journey together to Indwe offers something of a tale of reconciliation among fellow South Africans in and of itself. It is thoughtfully presented here. Along the way the

team of authors solve most of the mysteries of Mrs K's problematic testimony. Readers eventually come to grasp the meaning of the goat dream.

In the view of this reader there are two further substantial contributions made by this book, both of which in a sense go beyond the text. First, is the material issue of poverty. The authors are struck by the fact and persistence of rural poverty and suggest that part of the reason Mrs K cannot forgive, cannot quite reconcile with the enemy is due to the sheer gap of hardship: she is too busy trying to survive. Second, the authors note the role of forgetting in the contribution to psychological healing. A good deal of the partial healing of Mrs K is due to local contextual and community factors, and these are nicely drawn out and noted, but it is not the whole story. In a morality tale which usually offers only one plot line – talking, truth, reconciliation – the “**Goat**” provides us with important alternatives and correctives; not all people want reconciliation. This book reads like a cross between a text of narrative analysis and a racy whodunnit. It certainly forms a most valuable addition to the copious TRC-related library. It reaches places that other books don't quite get to: not bad for a book with some rural goats on the front cover and a rather strange, but ultimately compelling, title.