

Truth & Reconciliation in South Africa: Miracle or Model? by Lyn S. Graybill. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2002, 231 pp.

Since coming into existence in 1995, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has given rise to a large number of publications. Consequently, it has become fairly difficult to come up with an innovative piece of writing. It is therefore understandable that this publication on the TRC does not really provide a lot of new information. Graybill's book is no different in this respect, however this volume does provide a very comprehensive overview of the available knowledge on the Commission.

The book starts off by addressing the issues surrounding the setting up of the Commission. In particular, the TRC is compared to other truth commissions, while its unique features and its organisational structures are highlighted. The author continues with two chapters on Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. Some information is given about the lives of these men under apartheid, about their attitudes of reconciliation and about their roles in the TRC process. In chapters 4 and 5 Graybill discusses the concepts of forgiveness and amnesty. In chapter 4 the claim of the TRC that perpetrators would confess and victims would forgive is questioned and chapter 5 deals with some controversial aspects of the amnesty process. Chapter 6 is called 'Storytelling' and it gives the reader more information about the psychological functions testifying has had for some of the victims. Further on, in chapter 7, the experiences of women before the TRC are examined by relying on a couple of illustrative testimonies. Chapter 8 discusses the so-called 'innocent bystanders' and their relation to the TRC. These 'innocent bystanders' are the ordinary white South Africans who did not actively commit gross human rights violations, but who still benefited from the politics of apartheid. More specifically, attention is paid to the health hearings and the business hearings, two of the institutional hearings that the TRC organised in order to confront the issue of these 'innocent bystanders' with their past. The book continues discussing two other institutional hearings in greater detail: the media hearings (discussed in chapter 9) and the faith community hearings (chapter 10). Graybill states that these hearings deserve special attention because those sectors of society have always had wide repercussions on the whole of South African society. In two concluding chapter the author tries to throw light on the future of South Africa and she tries to find out whether the South African TRC is a workable model that can be adopted by other countries.

Throughout this book Graybill clearly devotes a lot of attention to certain specific aspects. Central in her work is on the religious aspect of the TRC. She also spends time to discuss how the USA has perceived the TRC process.

Graybill does an excellent job in dealing with a lot of information. A lot of facts and figures are given and at the end of the book we find a very extensive bibliography, a chronology, a glossary and a list of acronyms. In addition, the reflections of Graybill are supplemented by quotations from often well-known academics and writers who have also worked on the TRC. Graybill has definitely done an outstanding job this work. Graybill does not limit herself to the mere TRC process. Instead, she tries to understand why the Commission came into being and also addresses the post-TRC era. With respect to this latter topic, Graybill often refers to the responsibilities of the present government. She is mostly critical about the government, especially when discussing the possibilities of a second amnesty, the HIV/AIDS controversy, the current day media freedom, the realization of the reparations recommended by the TRC

and the government's commitment to social justice. Graybill is also disappointed about the sacrifices of the whites and their positive involvement in the building of a new South Africa.

For as much material as the author covers, she also leaves out a lot of unanswered questions, especially in the last chapter and in the afterword. Graybill asks which solution holds the most promise for countries moving through a democratic transition: to pardon or to punish? She does not come up with an answer to this question, nor with answers to the other questions posed – is the basis of the TRC religion found in African traditions?; Does individual healing lead to national healing?; and has the TRC actually been effective in reconciling South Africans? These questions have been asked over and over again and by reiterating them once more Graybill puts a touch of repetitiveness into her book. Finally, the author makes some statements that seem rather simplistic, for example when claiming that black South Africans embrace forgiveness because they follow Mandela's example, that there is a general lack of bitterness by blacks or that Mandela and Tutu were crucial for the reconciliation process.

One finishes this book with the rather unsatisfactory feeling that the TRC has opened up more questions than it has solved. Graybill argues that in general, the TRC was a positive achievement, although she clearly shows that every single aspect of the TRC has positive as well as negative features. In sum, this book is very readable and that the profusion of information is definitely a great merit of the author.

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