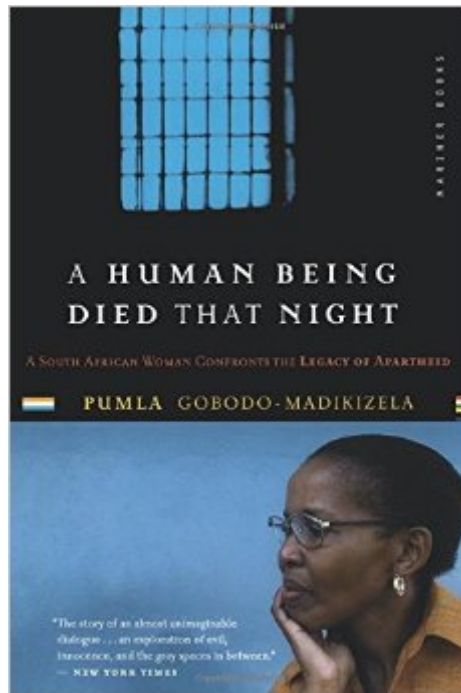


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A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Woman Confronts The Legacy Of Apartheid



Synopsis

A Human Being Died That Night recounts an extraordinary dialogue. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, a psychologist who grew up in a black South African township, reflects on her interviews with Eugene de Kock, the commanding officer of state-sanctioned death squads under apartheid.

Gobodo-Madikizela met with de Kock in Pretoria's maximum-security prison, where he is serving a 212-year sentence for crimes against humanity. In profoundly arresting scenes, Gobodo-Madikizela conveys her struggle with contradictory internal impulses to hold him accountable and to forgive.

Ultimately, as she allows us to witness de Kock's extraordinary awakening of conscience, she illuminates the ways in which the encounter compelled her to redefine the value of remorse and the limits of forgiveness.

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Customer Reviews

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela reflects on central human issues such as the nature of individual and social evil, the possibility of social reconciliation, the individual's ability to move from participation in violent evil to remorse, and the capacity to meet one another with forgiveness. As urgent as these issues are, her narrative makes compelling reading -- both her accounts of her face-to-face meetings with de Kock and her reflections on her personal story. She raises important questions. How are we to achieve reconciliation in an environment of demonization and divisiveness? Is the Nuremberg model of seeking justice for crimes against humanity actually a way of moving towards reconciliation? While she does not come to clear and definitive conclusions, her experiences and reflections raise some of the most urgent questions facing us as a human community.

I read this book shortly after returning from a year in South Africa, when the Truth and Reconciliation Hearings were just waning. I originally bought it because of the timeliness of my visit. But I was also beginning the process of divorce. This book is a fascinating insight into the mind of a ruthless, apartheid murderer, but most important to me, the book has an underlying theme of the concept of forgiveness. We all have been taught that forgiving is the right thing to do, but is it? The author lets the reader decide. Terrific book!

I was born at the same time as the author, however as a middle class White, English speaking citizen who was politically aware and supported and worked for the official opposition - the Progressive Party and then the Democratic Party, I was completely in the dark as to the full horror of what the government was perpetrating in the name of all the Whites. This book is so interesting and so full of wisdom. It tries to make some sense of the times we lived through and the beliefs which led some people to such evil. A very good read, but remember, there were some of us who did not support Apartheid, but fought for a changed political system within the law and the moral code.

I expected this to simply be a narrative about the struggle to overcome apartheid in South Africa. In reality, to me it was more an explanation of how forgiveness happens - and the best one I've ever read. The author (although a PhD in psychology) writes in a very readable style that was both a fascinating book and study in practical theology, but also one which haunting theme stays with me. An excellent read! Purchased at .com on the recommendation of a friend

I am a Bostonian who has read this gemlike little book in the weeks following the Marathon Bombings, and only a few months after the massacre at Sandy Hook. It describes how in the years after apartheid one of its henchmen struggles - along with the author, a black South African woman - to absorb and come to grips with the unthinkable crimes he committed. The author opens her heart and mind to her subject, exploring the cultural conditions that encouraged him into criminality. With lambent intelligence and compassion, she concludes that our only hope of preventing such crimes is to fully see their perpetrators, so as to understand the culture that turned them into criminals. I wish to thank you, Ms. Gobodo-Madikizela, for so clearly illuminating this dark but miraculous corner of the heart, a part of our humanness that we must never forget.

Gobodo-Madikizela has written an amazing book which is undoubtedly one of the most probing,

honest, and compassionate examinations of the human character I've ever read. The details of her work in South Africa's post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission is an exercise in historical storytelling and an expansion of what it means to be human. Tasked with finding ways to mend the myriad cracks in the shattered social landscape following apartheid, the author emphasizes the power and strength in compassion, forgiveness, empathy, compromise, and humanness as viable alternatives to punishment as reparation (in the context of the victim-victimizer relationship in systems of state-sponsored violence). One of the things which I thought the author did most effectively here was to make me question the underlying humanity at play - or not at play - in the powerful and unwanted relationship between a criminal and victim. One of the most powerful questions asked here was: what does it mean to forgive a killer? What does it mean about them? What does it mean about you? The illustration of what's happening psychologically in the forgiveness process is very interesting. This book, from an aesthetic perspective, is written wonderfully, with pointed prose, careful storytelling, and no fluff. There are so many quotes in this work that are so powerful. I certainly intend to give this a second reading so that I can take better notice of the author's original, self-reflective, and socially critical perspectives.

I bought this book because it's pertinent to my studies. I started reading it with the expectation that it would feel like work. It did not. The writing style is engaging; the narration awakens empathy; the subject matter is fascinating and rendered so. I highly recommend this, whether philosophy or psychology is your subject or whether you are just looking for an engaging thoughtful read.

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