

Antjie Krog:

Country of My Skull

Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa

>> [Review](#)

Chapter One

They Never Wept, the Men of My Race

Sunk low on their springs, three weathered white Sierras roar past the wrought-iron gates of Parliament. Heavy, hamlike forearms bulge through the open windows—honking, waving old Free State and Transvaal flags. Hairy fists in the air. I run across the cobblestone street—clutching notepad and recorder—to the old parliamentary venue where the Justice Portfolio Committee is hearing public submissions on what to include in the draft legislation establishing a Truth Commission.

The faces are grim in the hall with its dark paneling, old-fashioned microphones hanging from the ceiling, hard wooden gallery, and green-leather seats. "Bellington Mampe ... Looksmart Ngudle ... Suliman Salojee ... Solomon Modipane ... James Lenkoe ..." A slow litany of names is read out into the quiet hall. The names of 120 people who died in police custody. "Imam Abdullah Haroon ... Alpheus Maliba ... Ahmed Timol ... Steve Bantu Biko ... Neil Aggett ... Nicodemus Kgoathe ..." The chairperson of the Black Sash, Mary Burton, concludes her submission in the same way the Sash's meetings have been concluded for years: name upon name upon name. They fall like chimes into the silence. Journalists stop taking notes, committee members put down their pens—stunned by this magnitude of death that is but a bare beginning.

The double doors snap open. The marching crunch of the black-clad *Ystergarde*—even on the carpet their boots make a noise. The Iron Guard, elite corps of the far-right Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB). Black balaclavas worn like caps, ready to be rolled down over the faces. Three-armed swastikas on the sleeves. Then, dressed in ordinary khaki clothes, in walks Eugene Terre'Blanche as if taking a stroll on his farm. Suddenly another kind of noise fills the hall. Members of Parliament, secretaries, messengers, even a minister or two, shuffle into the already crowded gallery.

"We've asked for all the committee meetings to be adjourned," whispers a black senator. "We have to see this man with our own eyes—how real he is."

Expectation fills the air. Does Terre'Blanche's adjutant want to say anything? He jumps up. Salutes. "No, I say what my leader say!"

The chair of the Justice Portfolio Committee, Johnny de Lange, shows Terre'Blanche to his seat. "Mr. Terre'Blanche, what would you like to see in the Truth Commission legislation?"

It is so quiet you can hear an alliteration drop. Terre'Blanche stays seated. Barely audibly, he asks: "*Is hier waar ek vandag sit, hierdie sitplek, is dit die plek waar Sy Edele Dr. Verwoerd dertig jaar gelede vermoor is met 'n mes in sy hart?*" ("This seat I am sitting in, is it the same one where Dr. Verwoerd was murdered with a knife in his heart thirty years ago?")

We look at one another. "Indeed," says the chairperson. Terre' Blanche stares at his hat until the changed context of blood and betrayal is dominating the silence.

He gets up. He moves out of the bench. Away from the microphones, the guards. He stands alone on the carpet. And the first word that enters the mind, despite the neatly trimmed gray beard, is "poor." The man is a poor Afrikaner. His khaki shirt is bleached, its collar thread-bare. But poor as he is, he is a master of acoustics. He drenches us with sound—every tremor, boom, reverberating corner of that space, under his command.

"*Laat. Die soldate ... Huis toe gaan!*" he shouts. Let the soldiers go home. Then in a normal voice: "*Agbare Meneer die Voorsitler, Agbare Lede van die Parlement ... Laat AL ... die soldate ... HUIS toe gaan ... [whispering] Laat. MY ... soldate ... huis toe gaan ... [in a crescendo] sodat die weeklag van wagtende vroue en die wringende hande van kinders kan einde kry ... my klere is nat van hulle trane ...*"

Members of Parliament ransack desks for translation equipment. They don't want to miss a word.

"Amnesty is a gift! But for the political prisoner who has never known the coldness and the bleakness [*die koudheid en die kilheid*] of jail cells, whose life has always been woven into the wide waving veld of freedom, for him, Honorable Chair, for him amnesty is ... a fire of joy."

Terre'Blanche asks for the cutoff date, now set at December 6, 1993, to be shifted forward, so that AWB members who committed violence right up to the first democratic election in April 1994 will qualify for amnesty. Then the AWB will cooperate with the government.

When Terre'Blanche is finished, committee member Jan van Eck praises his Afrikaans. Carl Niehaus, the Afrikaans-speaking member of Parliament for the African National Congress (ANC), is less enthusiastic. What does Terre'Blanche mean by the term "cooperation"?

"It seems Mr. Niehaus himself has mastered only Standard Two Afrikaans," Terre'Blanche sneers.

Someone starts to hiss. Dramatically Terre'Blanche throws two fingers in the air. "Two bomb-planters! The one drives a Mercedes-Benz, and the other one, like me, drives a Nissan bakkie [pickup truck]. The Nissan. Comes late. Five minutes *after* twelve his bomb goes off. But the Mercedes. Arrives on time. And that bomb explodes. Five minutes *to* twelve. Now *because* he drives a Mercedes, and not a Nissan, *he ...* gets amnesty!"

Dene Smuts, another Afrikaner MP and a member of the Democratic Party, calls for a point of order. "No, Mr. Terre'Blanche, your Nissan did *not* come late. It burst with deafening noise through the glass windows of the World Trade Centre in Kempton Park. I was there. And your deeds were not aimed at the Big Stealer—as you insist on calling F. W. de Klerk—but at the negotiations for a democratic dispensation. Your people are in jail not because they drove Nissan bakkies, but because they refused to accept democracy."

Incensed, Terre'Blanche gasps for air. "That a woman—and my mother was also a woman," he shouts, "that a *woman* does not understand what I *say!*"

He ends his submission. "If the shifting of a date can bring peace, then you must shift the date ... If justice rules ... I will talk peace... because that is all that I am ... a simple farmer from Westransvaal who has come to you to put my case."

The contrast between client and advocate is striking. General Johan van der Merwe, former commissioner of police, sits collapsed in the front row. Whether it is part of a calculated strategy or simply an effect of seeing him out of uniform for the first time, I cannot say. His color is yellowish, he blinks constantly, his mouth nibbles at times like a geriatric, and when he touch-touches the bandage on his finger, his hand trembles. But his case is taken up with a flourish by a rosy, confident, English-speaking lawyer from Natal. He is not taking up the general's case because he agrees with what happened in the past, the advocate assures the Justice Portfolio Committee, but because he believes the general has a point. And the point is politics. The mere fact that a deed must have a political motive to qualify the perpetrator for amnesty is proof enough that the politicians should be the essence of the Truth Commission's inquest. It is not the police who came up with apartheid, he says, but the politicians.

With an instinct for the dramatic, the advocate gestures in the direction of Van der Merwe. "Yesterday afternoon when we were flying to Cape Town, the general was staring out of the window of the plane. The sun was setting and he said to me ... he said in this choked-up voice: 'The politicians have prostituted the police. Once I was a proud policeman, but here I am today—humiliated and despised. My career, to which I dedicated my entire life with such pride, is ending in this horrible shame and dishonor.'"

"We all know that the ultimate reconciliation should be between Afrikaner and African," Freedom Front leader General Constand Viljoen tells the committee, "and this could happen if the Truth Commission does not vilify the Afrikaner into being worse than we are ..."

All of us have failed, Viljoen goes on. "We all used violence to get what we wanted. The terror of the tyrant invited the terror of the revolutionary."

Submissions from across the board. Orgies of alliteration. In the press, Afrikaner intellectuals point out that thanks to apartheid the new government inherited the most sophisticated infrastructure in Africa. Thanks to apartheid political prisoners all obtained quality degrees while on Robben Island—with the result that the ANC's senior leadership is better qualified than any other political party on the continent. Fewer people died under apartheid than were killed in Rwanda. So how bad could apartheid have been?

The oppressors are weary; the oppressed, foam-in-the-mouth angry.

This is the theme for a kind of overture—but at the time we could not hear it.

From the beginning of March 1995, the Justice Portfolio Committee, under the chairmanship of Johnny de Lange, meets daily to debate the submissions and draft the legislation. The civil servants, who physically write the law, sit somewhat apart. They work late into the night to have alternative formulations ready for the next day. "If I personally had to draft this legislation," one of them complains, "it would have been a lean, simple law—completed weeks

ago. But because this has to be a *process*, it is developing into a hell of a unique but impossibly complex law."

As if back into a womb, I crawl—the heavy-light eiderdown, the hot-water bottle. Through the window, I see the sleeping farmyard washed away in moonlight. A plover calls far off. Overcome with the carefreeness of my youth, I doze—safe in this stinkwood bed, safe in this sandstone house, this part of the Free State. Everything so quiet.

Stars roar past the yard.

A sudden sound. Harsh. "*Hendrik, kom in! ... Hendrik, kom in!*"

It must be around midnight.

My brother Andries, who lives on another part of the farm, is calling Hendrik, our younger brother, on the radio. The line crackles. "*Kom gou!* [Come quickly!] People are stealing cattle ... don't switch on your lights—and bring your rifle."

The screen door of the *rondavel* slams as Hendrik leaves and drives away in the dark.

The radio crackles again: "How many?"

Andries: "Two and a dog. They have taken five cows and have just passed the *windpomp*. Do you have bullets?"

I put on my gown. In the dining room next to the radio, my parents are already sitting—in sheepskin slippers, each covered with a blanket—nervous and as if pinned down. I sit next to them. We do not talk. My mother brings a blanket for me. The night is suddenly filled with menace.

"What's going on?" I ask.

My mother explains. Andries's wife, Bettie, would now be standing on the roof of their house, from where she has a large part of the farm under surveillance with a night-vision scope. Bettie shouts the information down to nine-year-old Sumien at the radio, and she has to pass it on to her father in the *bakkie*.

It's nearly one o'clock. We wait.

Sumien: "Pa ...? Pa, come in ... Ma says they have turned toward the road, but she can't see you ... Where are you?"

Silence. My parents sit humped up—in the gray moonlight their faces seem carved to pieces.

Sumien: "Pa, where are you? Can you hear me?" Anxiety in her voice.

Only the silence zooms down the line ... We wait in the dark.

After a quarter of an hour, the radio comes to life. It's Andries. Breathless: "We've found one, but the other got away. Tell Ma to get down from the roof and lock the doors."

We wait. Then we think we hear shots. The dogs bark. We wait. Who did the shooting? Who has been shot? And which is worse? What fierce scenes are being played out in the veld?

The family photo catches my eye. I look at my smiling, *borselkop* brothers. I remember how Hendrik clutched my mother's arm when she was paging to the bookmark in the children's Bible. "Please, please don't read the bit about that guy who wants to cut his child's throat in the veld."

What are my brothers experiencing tonight that I cannot even imagine?

We wait an eternity. At last, the line finds its voice: "Call an ambulance and tell them to come to the dam."

It is one of my brothers. But the voice sounds so tense that we cannot tell who's speaking. We three are sitting there—the moon has lost its abundance. We sit—each with our own disproportionate thoughts. My mother gets up with a tired heaviness. In the kitchen, she makes tea. My father and I sit without speaking. I take my tea to my icy bed. My eyes dry in the dark.

"The idea of a Truth Commission goes back to ANC decisions," Minister of Justice Dullah Omar says in an interview. "When the National Executive Committee of the ANC discussed what had happened in the country, and in particular what happened in ANC training camps like Quatro, there was a strong feeling that some mechanism must be found to deal with all violations in a way which would ensure that we put our country on a sound moral basis. And so a view developed that what South Africa needs is a mechanism which would open up the truth for public scrutiny. But to humanize our society we had to put across the idea of moral responsibility—that is why I suggested a combination of the amnesty process with the process of victims' stories."

Victims, and not perpetrators, should be the beginning, the focus, and the central point of the legislation, the ANC argues. Victims should have several points of entry into the process. Should losses be categorized? So many rand for an arm, so many for a leg, and so many for a life? Should compensation be available immediately or should the government wait for a coherent assessment?

Every discussion opens up new problem areas. Amnesty takes away the victim's right to a civil claim. Does compensation make amnesty constitutional? What about the state? Should the state ask for amnesty? Because victims who receive compensation could still decide to sue the state.

The Democratic Party also wants to shift a date: the starting date of the period the commission is mandated to consider. The workload is impossible, says Dene Smuts. This is the first Truth Commission required to investigate nearly four decades, and to look not only at disappearances, as in Chile, but at other gross violations such as murder, kidnapping, torture, and severe ill-treatment. Not only would a starting date of June 16, 1976, shorten the commission's area of

research by sixteen years, but it would have symbolic resonance, because it ushered in the famous cycle of resistance and oppression.

But as possible scenarios are spelled out and the pressure mounts to finish the legislation, the parties start to work on one another's nerves. National Party member Sheila Camerer has the energetic chairperson collapsing onto his forearms, muttering next to the microphone: "Ag, *God help my*, the woman is driving me out of my mind!"

Between Johnny de Lange and the National Party's Jacko Maree there is nothing but total war. The solidly built chairperson with his working-class Afrikaner background and the skinny-looking Maree with his bow tie and delicate spectacles cannot stand each other. The moment Maree opens his mouth, the chair's facial color intensifies a shade.

One morning a note is sent to the media: "Don't leave too soon—promise to provide you with a row and an underhand ANC deal."

That someone has already shouted "Fire!" is clear the moment the room suddenly fills up with ANC faces never seen on the committee before. An unexpected extra National Party member also appears. The two parties are gearing up for a fight.

And it happens. Mr. De Lange says members should vote on the shifting of two other motions to the top of the agenda. Mr. Maree interrupts him. He would like three minutes to explain his request that the indemnity given to ANC members by the Currin Commission be discussed first. De Lange refuses. He is interrupted again. By NP member Danie Schutte, also asking for time to motivate Maree's request.

De Lange refuses again. Red in the face by now. He is the chair, he says, and this is his ruling. If Mr. Maree is not satisfied, he can go and complain to the highest authorities. As chairperson, he is not going to allow Mr. Maree to turn the Justice Portfolio Committee into a media spectacle. "You can make clowns of other people, but not of me, the chairperson."

"Please, Mr. Chairman," pleads Inkatha Freedom Party member Koos van der Merwe, "do not let the poison between you and Mr. Maree destroy the good relations the rest of us have built up over the year. Can't you resolve this in any other way?"

Maree thrashes around in his chair, his hand raised. In his other hand, he is waving a thick pile of documents, representing 100 ANC members who, he says, were stealthily granted indemnity just before Christmas by the Currin Commission.

De Lange is adamant. "We still have eight draft bills to discuss. We argued this agenda last week for more than an hour. We have accepted it. I will allow no discussion. I am putting it to the vote. Read my lips: I am putting it to the vote."

Whereupon the ANC outvotes the other parties by fifteen to seven.

As Maree storms out, Koos van der Merwe mutters: "The heavy hammer of democracy ..."

But the rush to finish the bill has to take a backseat for a day or two.

"A blink and a wink—and it was all over," I report on that afternoon's current affairs program. "After weeks of publicity—peaking this morning in a hysteria of upper-class British accents in the corridors of Parliament—the queen came, and saw, and left."

As always, the Cape knows when to behave herself. The southeaster meekly calms down, the sweepers sweep up the last bits of paper, the pupils line the streets, and the red carpet bleeds down the steps. Inside the Assembly Hall, the atmosphere is predominantly that of ... how shall one put it? ... dressing up for the queen. An opportunity to show off your traditional dress, your designer contacts, and your gravy-train menu.

Either shiny African-print dresses with puffed-up angel wings for sleeves, or shimmering Indian robes streaming over the shoulders, or a traditional beaded apron rounded off by the most massive flesh-colored Maidenform bra ever seen in the houses of Parliament. One of the visitors from the Free State seems to be hiding in some purple and gold shrubbery; another one from Stellenbosch wears a *potjie* like our own Johanna van Arkel. Two Hare Krishnas chant Queen Elizabeth II into the foyer with stained muslin pockets on their bare breasts.

The men, of course, are wearing traditional male dress: the expensive woolen suit, the loud tie, the gold-framed glasses, and the indispensable thick neck.

Then they enter.

In front walks the colored sergeant at arms carrying Parliament's golden traditional weapon in his white gloves. Then follows the black Black Rod—yes, for all these years, Parliament had a white Black Rod ... but the times they are a-changin' ...

The media have been fighting for weeks for the best seats in the press gallery. I stretch my neck. Blink my eyes.

Can it be true? She looks like anybody's auntie, complete with a clasp handbag and thick little shoes from an upmarket department store. Under any other circumstances, the brooch on her left shoulder could only be a fake, but we know, oh yes, we know, it is realer than real. She clips open her handbag, takes out her glasses, and puts her speech on the speaker's desk.

She speeches.

Can it be true? It sounds like something one would find at any small-town women's society meeting. Typed out on ordinary notepaper, one paragraph per page. With her gloves, she battles like other mortals to fold the pages into dog-ears to turn them more easily.

But don't be mistaken, the content may be ordinary, but it is delivered in the Accent that has intimidated half the earth for centuries. When last did Parliament hear the phrase "doughty champion"?

Then she folds up her speech, puts it in her handbag, and off she goes.

With bags flying, we ambush a taxi passing the gates of Parliament—"we" means the editor and myself.

"Go!" shouts the editor. "To the waterfront, to the *Britannia!*" We turn our bags inside out, pull down zips, rip open blouses—the taxi driver looks panicky.

"Go!" I yell. "We meet the queen in seven minutes."

"*Watter queen?*" He sounds skeptical.

"Princess Di's *skoonma*, but you must fly."

He turns right round in his seat: "We are talking about the queen, the one with"—he touches his head—"our diamond in her crown? The one who wears lead in her seams?"

"Yes, yes, yes," I yell in a strangled voice.

But nothing escapes my *op-en-wakker* editor: "Why lead?"

"So that the wind cannot blow her dress above her knees," says the taxi driver smartly.

He grabs the steering wheel as if possessed. He has a mission. He has a skill. He wants us to be on time. We scour bends; we cut corners. The man drives like a demon.

He asks sternly, "Why are you late?"

"Because," the editor shouts while dialing on her cell phone with one hand and fastening an earring with the other, "we had to report on the queen's speech in Parliament, to two hundred news bulletins and in eleven languages, and now she has invited some journalists for cocktails on her yacht ..."

"And what did she say in Parliament?" he asks.

"Nothing ..."

Our legs shoot past him in new charcoal pantyhose.

"So what did you report?"

In the heap of rubble on the backseat, we dig up prehistoric lipsticks, rouge that needs quarrying with fingernails, mascara brushes clogged with gravel, empty perfume bottles, buckled bangles—and apply them all, to the tune of howling tires and a racing engine.

"We asked how such mediocrity could stay so luxuriously swaddled. We said to live like her you need to plunder your own people for centuries and thereafter suck half the world dry."

The taxi driver races down the jetty and skids to an impressive stop just behind a group of Solemn Male Political Analysts in Deep Conversation, fondling their old school ties.

We tumble out. We have made it.

On the deck of the *Britannia*, our names are called out with the proverbial imaginary roll of a drum; our ordinary names are treated with the Accent: "Rrrina Smithhh: Afrrikaans Stereo!" And one walks up and puts one's hand in the white glove. ("And how did it feel?" my friends ask afterward. I can't remember; my eyes were nailed to the seam of the queen's chirpy yellow dress.)

A man walks up to us. He is the spokesperson for the palace. He says the queen will move from group to group. He says we will speak only when addressed. He says no one will ask her any questions. He says we will not report on this friendly royal gesture.

The gin and tonic is deadly accurate. Next to the railings, I become drunker and drunker. A sailor with a lot of golden rope on his shoulders tells me the problems of sailing the *Britannia* so that the Queen could arrive in South Africa *twice*. Unofficially by plane, the first time; then helicoptered to the *Britannia* for the official arrival—the second coming—sailing under a rousing twenty-one-gun salute into the harbor. During all this, his mustache never moves. Not once.

General Constand Viljoen of the Freedom Front asks the queen to visit the Women's Memorial in Bloemfontein and to apologize to Afrikaners for what was done to them in the name of the British. But her schedule is already full.

The Justice Portfolio Committee spent 61/2 hours on the Truth Commission Bill before any public submission was made. It listened for more than 20 hours to submissions, and it discussed, compiled, and drafted the various clauses of the bill in 100 hours and 53 minutes. Many a time, the civil servants turned up at the meeting with red eyes and wrinkled clothes, having worked through the night to prepare a new discussion document. All told, the committee spent 127 hours and 30 minutes on the Truth Commission Bill.

Eventually the legislation to establish the Truth Commission is introduced in the National Assembly. Over time it has earned different descriptions. It is regarded as the most sensitive, technically complex, controversial, and important legislation ever to be passed by Parliament. It is also called the Mother of All Laws. For the occasion, the visitors' gallery is packed with schoolchildren and—so the speculation goes—possible candidates for the commission.

Just as it did in the committee, the discussion of the bill quickly turns into an emotional spectacle. After a sedate plea by President Nelson Mandela not to use the Truth Commission to score political points, the theme of injustice incites speakers to oratorical heights.

Everybody has a story to tell—from members of Parliament whose houses were firebombed, to friends' children whose fingers were put in a coffee grinder, to criminals already walking the streets while right-wingers languish in jail. Most of the speeches are in Afrikaans. It is with this group, in this language, that they want to wrestle it out.

A journalist from one of the Afrikaans newspapers, *Beeld*, reminds me: "Do you remember that the finalizing of the legislation by the core committee was done in Afrikaans?" I frown. "It was Johnny de Lange as chair, Willie Hofmeyr from the ANC, Dene Smuts of the DP, Koos van der Merwe of the IFP, Danie Schutte for the NP, and Corné Mulder for the Freedom Front. I like it," he says, "those responsible for the past working to rectify it."

It is late afternoon when Johnny de Lange concludes the debate. What makes this piece of legislation so unique, he says, is that it really is a patchwork of all the viewpoints of the country.

"I can point out a Dene Smuts clause, a Danie Schutte clause, a Lawyers for Human Rights clause, a victim clause, a police clause—and for this all of us should proudly take credit." All but Jacko Maree, says De Lange, who used the committee discussions only to get cheap publicity.

Then it is time to vote. All those *for* the legislation should put their cards in the slots in front of them and push the buttons.

Everybody does it.

"Something is wrong," says the Speaker. All cards to be taken out. Put back in.

It seems the electric current that has to register the cards isn't working. The Speaker asks members to wait a few minutes.

Finally, the Speaker asks those members in favor of the legislation to put up their hands in the old-fashioned way to be counted—those who say yea (African National Congress, National Party, and Pan-Africanist Congress) and those who say nay (Freedom Front). The Inkatha Freedom Party abstains.

Then the legislation flails around for some time in the Senate. To prove that they are not mere rubber stamps of the Assembly, the senators insist on some changes. They want two non-South Africans on the commission; they want blanket amnesty to be discussed.

Through clenched jaws, the civil service law-writer hisses: "It's a web of a law—a *moerse* web. If you change anything, you have to change every single clause."

It is Dullah Omar's task to get the legislation passed by the Senate. When a colored National Party member tells how he was tortured and hung upside down by the security police, ANC members shout him down. Crying, he relates how he was repeatedly thrown on the cement floor. Amid raucous laughter, an ANC member shouts, "That's where you got your brain damage from."

Omar stands up. "We can make a distinction among perpetrators, but I hope this law will teach us all that we cannot make any distinction among victims."

At last the legislation finds its way to the Department of Justice in a building previously known as the Verwoerd Building. A building where most of the civil servants are white and speak Afrikaans. And those blonde ones with the orange-peel nails—you can't find better secretaries, a deputy minister confides—it is they who process the legislation. And it is the middle-aged Afrikaner men with their slumping shoulders, making bitter jokes in the elevators ... "See you later?" "*Ja*, God—and the Constitution—willing" ... who get it to the minister, the president, and the printers.

The Truth Commission Bill was signed into law by President Nelson Mandela on July 19, 1995.

They come for breakfast—my two brothers. Laugh, talk, eat, and dismiss the night before as just another normal night. Their politics, I notice, are still moderate National Party.

"Who fired the shots?" I ask. But I know Andries is one of the best shots in the district.

They explain. Every week before full moon and every week afterward, they patrol the farm. Since the 1994 election, they have caught more thieves than the whole stock-theft unit of the Kroonstad police. Andries usually drives the bakkie. Hendrik stands at the back with the spotlight. The moment they see the thieves, they switch on the light.

"Then we shout: *`Staan of ons skiet!'* ['Stop or we'll shoot!'] Or something in Sesotho," says Andries. "But at this point, you are full of sickening fears. The greatest fear is that the thief is armed, that he will shoot unexpectedly; then you also fear the moment they decide to split and one runs for the farmhouse and the other to loot. Most of the time, they don't stop when you warn them."

It is quiet in the dining room. "But the moment they run away ... it is then that I am overcome by an indescribable cold fury ... He who is trespassing and breaking the law—by running away, forcing me to shoot him—he is forcing me to point a gun at another human being and to pull the trigger ... and I hate him for that.

"First I try to shoot into the ground next to him. If he's close to a mealie patch where I won't be able to find him, I try to wound him in the legs ... all the time petrified that I might kill him and then have to live with it, deal with it for the rest of my bloody life ..."

Hendrik adds: "But the worst is that they don't think Andries is deliberately trying to miss them; several of them told us that Andries *couldn't* hit them because their *muti* was too strong!"

"What do the police say?"

"Man, the moment the police come, all is well for them—they go to the police station, tomorrow they get bail ... Most of the time, they get a suspended sentence. You leave the court together. Or on your way home, you pass them on the road. I told the magistrate it is not the value of the things they steal, it is the value of my life they steal, the value of my farm, the value of my future plans, the value of my peace of mind ..."

In one of the first Afrikaans novels written by a black man, two black vagabonds murder a Jewish shop-owner. When someone squeals on the murderers, the main character condemns the stool pigeon. I drive up to interview the author.

"Why does your main character condemn the splitter and not the murderers?"

"Because black people must always stick together."

"But the woman who saw a white man running away from Chris Hani's dead body didn't say, 'He was white, so I'll shut up.' She said, 'The deed is wrong, so I'll speak out.'"

He looks at me. "No one can destroy whites—they have survival in their bones. But for us, if we don't stand together no matter what, we'll be wiped out."

Hendrik touches the knuckles of his right hand lightly. They are swollen. "Do you hit them?" I ask, numb.

Hendrik nods. "At some stage, we realized we were catching the same thieves over and over again and we thought we had to do something, so that if they want to steal, they'll decide to steal on any other farm except this one."

My brothers tell me that stock theft on the farm has increased five-fold since the election.

"How long will you be able to take this?" I ask Andries.

My brother shakes his head. "I don't know. I become aware of things in myself that I never knew were in me ..."

"Like what?"

"Like feeling daily how my family and I become brutalized ... like knowing that I am able to kill someone with my bare hands ... I am learning to fight, to kill, to hate. And we have nowhere to turn. Some years ago, we could pick up the phone and talk to the highest power in the country. Now my home town is run by a guy whose name I can't even pronounce."

"*Ja*, but it was always like that for millions of black people."

"Exactly ... I thought what was coming was a new dispensation for all ... what I see now is that the brutalization of ordinary people that was previously confined to the townships is not disappearing, but instead spilling over the rest of the country." He stops, but then flings it out: "When Mandela was talking about white and black morality, how whites only care when whites die, he should have added: blacks don't care if whites die ... but what is worse, they also don't care if blacks die."

My last free weekend before the Truth Commission starts its hearings in the eastern Cape. Mondli Shabalala picks me up on the farm on his way to Johannesburg. Mondli is a colleague of mine at the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

"Mondli, Moshoeshoe's name means 'He who can steal as swiftly and silently as cutting someone's beard.' How can the deftness of stealing be a mark of honor? Why did Dingane ask Retief to steal back the cattle stolen by Sekonyela? Why would Mandela write in his biography about the cattle he and his cousin stole from his uncle? Do we understand the same thing when we talk about stealing?"

Mondli is silent for a long time. Then he says, "I don't know. But what I do know is that I grew up with the notion that stealing from whites is actually not stealing. Way back, Africans had no concept of stealing other than taking cattle as a means of contesting power. But you

whiteys came and accused us of stealing—while at that very same minute you were stealing everything from us!"

I remember how my parents and I sat the whole Sunday behind closed doors. How we stopped talking when the dogs barked. "They prefer to come on Sundays ... when they think you are in church," my mother said. Later, when I left for Johannesburg, I looked back to wave and I saw them standing in front of the sandstone house of my youth. And as we drove out, my father locked the gate and turned the dogs loose.

(C) 1998 Antjie Samuel All rights reserved. ISBN: 0-8129-3128-9

>> [Antjie Krog: *Heimat meines Schädels* – ein Zeitdokument](#) 2014.