ANTJIE KROG

COUNTRY OF MY SKULL

GUILT, SORROW, AND THE LIMITS OF FORGIVENESS IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

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Chief Anderson Joyi punctuates the names of every one of his nineteen generations of forebears with his knobkerrie on the floor:

King Thembu begat Bomoyi,
and Bomoyi begat Ceduma,
and Ceduma begat Mngutu,
and Mngutu begat Ndande,
and Ndande begat Nxego,
and Nxego begat Dlomo,
and Dlomo begat Hala,
and Hala begat Madiba,
and Madiba begat Thato,
and Thato begat Zondwa,
and Zondwa begat Ndaba,
and Ndaba begat Ngubenuca,
and Ngubenuca begat Mtikara
(this is the house where Matanzima comes from,
the right-hand house),
and Mtikara begat Gangeliswe,
and Gangeliswe begat Dalindyebo,
and Dalindyebo begat Jongiliswe,
and Jongiliswe begat Sabata,
and Sabata begat Buyelekaya,
and this is where I begin.

The Xhosa interpreters come out of their booths. "Man! That was deep, deep Xhosa. We had to use the King James version of English to give people a real impression of how this old man is talking."

"Why do you start your testimony with your lineage?" I ask him afterward.

"Their names organize the flow of time," the interpreter explains to me. "Their names give my story a shadow. Their names put what has happened to me in perspective. Their names say I am a chief with many

colors. Their names say we have the ability to endure the past . . . and the present."

This goes

The Shepherd's Tale

LEKOTSE: My family was affected since that day.
The woman who has testified before me
is a picture of my wife.
She cannot walk.
She goes for treatment.
I also go for treatment at Botshabelo Hospital.
I took my *last* tablet this morning.

Now my life was affected since that day.
It was at night . . .

ILAN LAX: I want to know about your children first.

LEKOTSE: I have ten children, two have passed away . . . now—

on the day of this assault
I was with three children at home
and the grandchildren—
five in number and they go to school—
some of my grandchildren belong to my son
who is mentally disturbed.
The last-born has a pair of twins.
Their father is also mentally disturbed.

LAX: Just try not to speak directly into the microphone . . . they are very sensitive and will pick up your voice very nicely. Which of these children are still living with you and your wife?

LEKOTSE: I am staying with Thomas Lekotse, my son, he is now the breadwinner and he is also taking care of the one that I just said is mentally disturbed.

LAX: Can you tell us about the incident that happened? Was it in May 1993?

LEKOTSE: Maybe you're right—you know my problem is,
I was a shepherd.

I cannot write
and I forget all these days, but I still . . .

Can I repeat what I said earlier on about the harassment?

Now listen very carefully,
because I'm telling you the story now.

On that day
it was at night,
a person arrived and he knocked.
When I answered, the door just opened
and I said, "Who's knocking so terribly?"
He answered, he said: "Police."

And I said,
"What police are knocking on my door this way?"

He forced his way through with many policemen.
The door was already down.
Three policemen were black and the rest were white
and they referred to us as *kaffers*.
Many of them were white.
They were together with big dogs—
two in number.

They said every door of the house should be opened.
They pulled clothes from the wardrobes.
I said, "When a jackal gets into the sheep
it does not do this—
please unpack neatly and pack them back neatly."

They did not provide an answer.
They pushed us outside.
I fell on my shoulder: *kaboem!*

I asked them, "What do you want?"
but they never provided an answer.

They pushed us outside.
It was terribly cold on that day.
The children were woken up.
I said to them, "Will you provide me with the money
to take these children to the doctor?"
They did not answer.

I said to them,
"Please, the policemen are not supposed to behave this way."
I said, "When a policeman goes to a farm
he stops first at the farmer's house.
If the farmer doesn't allow them entry,
they leave.
Now where do you get the permission from
to come into my house
and break the doors—
is this the way you conduct your affairs?'

When I looked thoroughly,
the door was not just kicked,
it was even broken down with their gun butts.

Even to this day the doors are still broken.

My children took pity on me this year,
they bought a new door and a new frame
and we had to get another person to come and fix the door.

At sunrise life began to be easier.
They wanted to cut open the wardrobes that were locked.
And I said to them,
"How dare you cut open these doors?"

I said to my children,
"Prepare tea,
prepare coffee for these people,
they are hungry."

I asked them,
"Can I offer you beer,
can I offer you drink,
can I offer you *boerewors?*
Are you hungry?"
I said, "These people are hungry.
I have to provide them with food."

I said to them,
"You are not policemen,
you are just *boers.*"
One of them pushed me outside—
that is where I fell on my shoulder and hurt myself.

I was not supposed to speak that way, I admit,
but because I was hurt and disturbed that day
I spoke wrong words.
I said, "I know you policemen are thieves.
You want to take us all outside so that you can implicate us.
I know.
You're going to leave behind diamonds and *dagga*
and you're going to drop them behind and implicate us."

I said, "You bloody policemen."
That's what I said on that day,
because I was hurt.

[audience laughs]

LAX: Please . . .

LEKOTSE: I ended up saying to them: "Look here,
my whole family is standing outside.

It's cold.

I want you to kill all of us now.
I'll be very glad if you kill us all."

They were . . . you know,
it's a pity I don't have a stepladder.
I will take you to my home to investigate . . .

I asked the policemen, "What do you want?"
They did not provide an answer.
I told them:
"I don't have diamonds.
I don't have *dagga*.
What do you want?"
No answer was given.

I said to them, "You want to leave after breaking my doors?
When are you going to come back and fix them?"
They said, "APLA will fix them up."
I asked them: "What is APLA?"
No answer was given.
I don't even know what APLA is,
I am expecting APLA even today to come and fix my door.

Now it was just about sunrise.
My son Thomas said, "No, go and search in my garage."
They said, "Where is the garage?"
He said, "Wait, I have to get a key."
And he said, "You must be very careful—
    don't scratch my car."
They went into the garage with their dogs—
    these were fierce-looking dogs.
After searching the garage, he said,
"You are not yet finished.
I've got another place where you can search.
I have a four-roomed house.
Go and search.
I also have a supermarket.
Go and search it too
because you don't seem to get what you want."
And they left with him.

Now at sunrise they were still at home.
They arrested him for the whole month . . .

There were three *kaffers*
    just like myself,
the rest were white.
They had many vans.
The vans were lining the whole road . . .

LAX: Was your son Thomas connected to APLA[2] or the PAC?

LEKOTSE: Yes, sir.

LAX: Was he charged with anything?

LEKOTSE: I do not know whether they attended a court case. You know—

an uneducated person is just down.
You cannot follow anything.
Just like the whites referred to us as dull donkeys.

I do not know many things.

LAX: He would have told you if he went to court, wouldn't he?

LEKOTSE: Can I give you an answer on that?

[long pause]

I taught these children,
but because I provided them with education,
    the whites used to say we have short hair
    and our brains and minds are just as short.
Now these children do not tell us anything.
They just go on their own,

[2] Azanian People's Liberation Army, an armed wing of the Pan-Africanist Congress.

you just see things happening—
they don't provide you with any information.

[audience laughs]

LAX: You indicate that you injured your shoulder. Did you sustain any other injuries?

LEKOTSE: I was not injured anywhere else—

since that day
that the jackals came into my house to bite us,
I cannot even carry a spade to do gardening.
Otherwise I'm not sick,
it's just the usual sickness of old age.

LAX: In your statement, you mentioned you were injured in your ribs? I'm just helping you to remember.

LEKOTSE: Are you not aware that
the shoulder is related
to the *ribs*,
sir?

LAX: Did you or your son ever make a case against the police?

LEKOTSE: We never took any initiative to report this matter to the police, because

how can you report policemen to policemen?
They were going to attack us.
That is why I said to them,
"Kill us all
so that there is no trouble thereafter.

It is much better to die—
all of us."

It was even going to be easy for the government to bury us—
they were going to bury us in just one grave.
It could have been much better.

If one of these policemen is around here,
I'll be happy if one of them comes to the stage

and kills me immediately . . .