

For All Voices, for All Victims” by Antjie Krog

[Human rights](#), [South Africa](#), [White people](#)

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In 1996, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) started holding public hearings on the gross human rights violations that occurred during the apartheid era. Both victims and perpetrators shared stories at the TRC about violence, suffering, oppression and torture. Antjie Krog bore witness to these narratives as one of the journalists that reported on the TRC hearings. In her literary work Krog expresses her conflicted feelings towards the past in general and the hearings of the TRC in particular. Her poem “For All Voices, For All Victims” was written in response to these hearings and explores the relationship between reconciliation and national belonging.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was a commission that was assembled in South Africa after the abrogation of Apartheid. People were then allowed to talk about their experiences during Apartheid, as well as given testimonies. Staging public hearings was a sign of democracy and transition, to show that all people will now have the same rights and will be treated equally. The TRC was cultivated through three committees that lead to these interviews with people and their testimonies:

* The Human Rights Violence Committee (human rights abuses that occurred between 1960 and 1994). Their hearings were held all around South Africa. * The Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee (charged with restoring victims’ dignity and formulating proposals to help with rehabilitation). * The Amnesty Committee (they considered applications from people who applied for amnesty in accordance with the provisions of the Act). Their hearings were held all around South Africa.

If the crimes were politically motivated, the Commission would grant amnesty to those who committed abuses during the Apartheids era.

“For All Voices, For All Victims” by Antjie Krog is a poem which is reflected on The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and all the testimonies and experiences of the people that experienced Apartheid. It is a breakdown on what the Commission’s responsibilities are and the changes that they bring. Krog, is a South African poet who likes to interpret and understand things on her own way, and then to write what she feels. In this poem she feels for the need of belonging, and she feels that only after the TRC, she can find this sense of belonging. This

poem is about the struggles against apartheid, the human rights that got violated, changes that will occur because of democracy and the speaker's role in history. Her experience as a white South African that is relative to the TRC, as well as her role as a poet and someone who is trying to make sense of her country's past.

In the first line of this poem, Krog addressing someone, "because of you / this country no longer lies / between us but within" she is addressing the victims who got victimized and abused during the Apartheids era. The structure of the address suggests that reconciliation and forgiveness are necessary for her to belong to post-apartheid South Africa. The victims have the chance now to speak their minds and share their stories with the world. She is addressing these victims to make her poem more personal, personalizing this shows us that she cares and she has hope for these people, saying they all, including herself and the rest of the economy can live amongst each other now.

The way Krog uses the tone of the poem is significant to the themes of reconciliation and belonging. The tone of the poem is equivalent to the mood or attitude of the speaker. It is how the reader interprets the poem, whether he/she is going to have the same attitude towards the poem as the speaker. Krog has the need to belong in this country and her guilt is making it difficult for her. She feels guilty for how white people had treated black people, for what they had done to them. She expresses empathy towards these black people. The pace of the poem starts off fast but later on it slows down. It starts off fast so the readers can understand this emphasis of seriousness Krog is giving about the Apartheids era and all that has happened during this time. She wants the readers to realize and accept what happened and to understand her feelings and opinion about it. When the tone slows down, Krog is asking for forgiveness from these victims. Repetition of the words "forgive me" are used. This emphasizes her sense of belonging, if she is forgiven she can belong. The narrative is often intense and spirited, she writes about her feelings towards the TRC and the Apartheids era. Her choice of words are powerful, it lures the readers to understand the seriousness of this events. She is trying to heal the nation through speech. Rhythm and word choice are significant in the formation of the nation to which she wants to belong.

In the poem Krog explains what has happened to South Africa, the change that had occurred in 1994. Krog is personifying our country or nations by giving it human characteristics. At first she saw the country as a "wounded" place. If a human is physically hurt, he is wounded, Krog is personifying a wounded person with this wounded country. Therefore saying the country is broken. Where there were only feelings of sadness and despair. This gives the readers an image of South Africa as a place of cruelty. Hearing the horrible testimonies of all those people that were abused during Apartheids era, she had the feeling of despair. After democracy in 1994, where Aparthied was distinguished, Krog felt a sense of relief, she felt like the country had calmed down, "it breathes becalmed." Only humans can calm down, it is an emotion which humans can feel, thus personifying the country again. There is a sense of hope, the country has changed to a place of democracy where there would be no more abusing of people and violence. This is an image of a country with hope and happiness. An image where all the people, no matter if you are black and white, could live together, where everyone had equal rights. Because of this democracy there is no more Apartheid, nothing separating people from each other, but all the people living amongst each other as South Africans.

The act of speaking and listening and asking for forgiveness that dominated the TRC hearings is evident throughout the poem. She speaks her mind and she wants her readers to listen, in other

words she writes what she feels and what she wants the readers to read and she is hoping that they would “listen” that they would read this poem and “hear” what she is trying to express to her readers.

The significance of “skin” focus on the fact that Krog as a white South African woman, was the woman who reported to the TRC. At first she was “scorched” by what she had heard from these victims, so she said “a new skin” which is a new beginning, a new country and a new life, where skin colour does not matter anymore. We are all the same and we all have the same legal rights. This is what Krog is trying to make her readers understand. She feels guilty because of her skin colour and she wants to move forward as an ally but is struggling with her own guilt. She wants a country where there would be no more violence, but only peace. Since 1994 there was a change in South Africa, democracy have had occurred and Apartheid was no more. Referring to “a new skin” means that there is a new chapter in people’s lives. It is a new country with new sets of rules and new legal rights. Using the word “skin” is significant, because of Apartheid, because there your skin colour mattered. “A new skin,” a new country is born.

Krog reflects on the importance of the TRC and the stories that was shared. She terrified with the testimonies she had heard. She wanted to share this with the outside world so they could know about this and express their own feelings about it. At the heart of this poem is the concept of belonging and reconciliation. How people can move on after being victimized and abused. How forgiveness comes into play and how to heal after these events that had occurred during the Apartheids era. As such, the poem has much to say about the human condition in general, how we consider what we inflict on each other, and what comes after that deep, abiding pain. This is what is important to Krog and this is what she is trying to explain is this poem. She wants to be forgiven for the past years in South Africa and she wants to be accepted by all the people, no matter their skin colour. She wants to belong, she wants to call these people her family and South Africa her home. She hated the feeling of not belong in the post-apartheid South Africa.

Thus is the poem “For All Voices, For All Victims” written in response to the hearings and testimonies of the victims of the Apartheids era it and explores the relationship between reconciliation and national belonging.