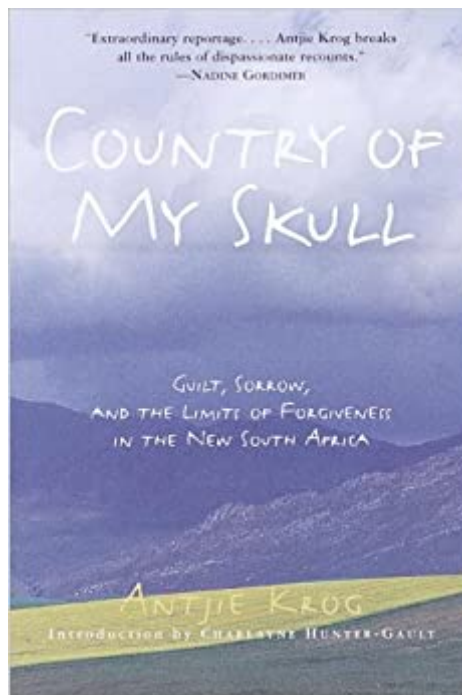




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Country Of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, And The Limits Of Forgiveness In The New South Africa



Synopsis

Ever since Nelson Mandela dramatically walked out of prison in 1990 after twenty-seven years behind bars, South Africa has been undergoing a radical transformation. In one of the most miraculous events of the century, the oppressive system of apartheid was dismantled. Repressive laws mandating separation of the races were thrown out. The country, which had been carved into a crazy quilt that reserved the most prosperous areas for whites and the most desolate and backward for blacks, was reunited. The dreaded and dangerous security force, which for years had systematically tortured, spied upon, and harassed people of color and their white supporters, was dismantled. But how could this country--one of spectacular beauty and promise--come to terms with its ugly past? How could its people, whom the oppressive white government had pitted against one another, live side by side as friends and neighbors? To begin the healing process, Nelson Mandela created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, headed by the renowned cleric Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Established in 1995, the commission faced the awesome task of hearing the testimony of the victims of apartheid as well as the oppressors. Amnesty was granted to those who offered a full confession of any crimes associated with apartheid. Since the commission began its work, it has been the central player in a drama that has riveted the country. In this book, Antjie Krog, a South African journalist and poet who has covered the work of the commission, recounts the drama, the horrors, the wrenching personal stories of the victims and their families. Through the testimonies of victims of abuse and violence, from the appearance of Winnie Mandela to former South African president P. W. Botha's extraordinary courthouse press conference, this award-winning poet leads us on an amazing journey. *Country of My Skull* captures the complexity of the Truth Commission's work. The narrative is often traumatic, vivid, and provocative. Krog's powerful prose lures the reader actively and inventively through a mosaic of insights, impressions, and secret themes. This compelling tale is Antjie Krog's profound literary account of the mending of a country that was in colossal need of change.

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Customer Reviews

In the year following South Africa's first democratic elections, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to investigate human rights abuses committed under the apartheid regime. Presided over by God's own diplomat, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the first hearings of the commission were held in April 1996. During the following two years of hearings, South Africans were daily exposed to revelations and public testimony about their traumatic past, and--like the world that looked on--continued to discover that the relationship between truth and reconciliation is far more complex than they had ever imagined. Antjie Krog, a prominent South African poet and journalist, led the South African Broadcasting Corporation team that for two years reported daily on the hearings. Extreme forms of torture, abuse, and state violence were the daily fare of the Truth Commission. Many of those involved with its proceedings, including Krog herself, suffered personal stresses--ill health, mental breakdown, dissolution of relationships--in the face of both the relentless onslaught of the truth and the continuing subterfuges of unrelenting perpetrators. Like the Truth Commission itself, *Country of My Skull* gives central prominence to the power of the testimony of the victims, combining a journalist's reportage skills with the poet's ability to give voice to stories previously unheard. --Rachel Holmes --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This wrenching book tells the vital story of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the body charged with exploring human rights violations in the apartheid past and with recommending amnesty and reparations. Krog, a poet who covered the TRC's two years of hearings as a radio reporter, presents a national (and personal) process of catharsis, cobbling together transcripts of testimony, reportage and personal meditations. The TRC, headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, gave voice to the anguished, often eloquent stories of numerous victims of apartheid, most?but not all?of whom were black. It put faces on stealthy killers and torturers seeking amnesty. And while it exposed the evil of the apartheid state, it did not ignore the dirty

hands of Nelson Mandela's African National Congress or of his ex-wife, Winnie. Krog, who, like some other journalists covering the TRC, experienced psychological strain, presents Tutu and the TRC as heroic. While her partisanship is mostly excusable, this book has other flaws: published last year in South Africa, it lacks analysis of the TRC's October 1998 report and recommendations. More troubling are Krog's somewhat muddled meditations on the slippery nature of truth and narrative and her implication that small falsehoods are permissible—even necessary—for the discernment of a larger truth. While *Country of My Skull* shows evidence of an enduring racial divide, its ultimate hopefulness counterpoints Rian Malan's powerfully pessimistic *My Traitor's Heart* (1990). In both books, Afrikaner authors, members of the tribe that instituted apartheid, seek a place in their tortured, beloved country. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Antjie Krog is a South African writer and poet who covered the South African Truth and Reconciliation commission hearings. She wrote this book about the experience, from the particular point of view of a South African of Afrikaner background. I found this book both difficult to read, and difficult to put down. Krog chooses extremely compelling stories to highlight, and the impact is visceral. She asks some very smart and difficult questions about what truth and reconciliation can possibly mean in a country burdened with such a history. *The Country of My Skull* does an excellent job in providing possible answers to these hard questions, while acknowledging that she may not be the person to either have an opinion or have an answer. She seems to continually ask who are judges and who are victims, given the situation. While I liked that she shared her own experience of the Commission honestly, there were times when I felt that the focus on her personal life weakened the book. Made it overly poetic, somehow. When she discusses the Death Fugue of Celan, she makes the point that there are some subjects that poetry cannot and perhaps should not touch. I sympathize with the desire to use that kind of precise and metaphoric language, but it increases the distance. This seems to me an important book. Four and a half stars.

Country of my Skull is an excellent read for those interested in what happened in South Africa, and the truth and reconciliation commission held in the 1990s. Krog offers a number of perspectives, including her own as she wrestles with the realities put forward during the commission's work. Her writing style allows for some creative elements that enhance the writing and the material, while not taking away from the facts. This is a must for students who are interested in peace and conflict studies, or anyone interested in South African politics.

This book provides a window into South Africa after the Apartheid, of how to deal with the all of the fall out from all the crimes against humanity the former Regime had perpetrated, it can get rather depressing and I feel that I cant give it 5 stars because of how just sometimes it gets so uncomfortable to read

This book was assigned reading for a Comparative Politics course. It is a truth report on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Committee. To fully understand it, you need more South African cultural literacy than I have, but it still provides a picture of what happened there during and after the struggle against apartheid. Readable, but not a page turner.

Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa by Antjie Krog

One of the greatest social laboratories of change in modern times was the collapse of apartheid and the birth of the modern democratic Republic of South Africa. Out of the civic catharsis embodied in this collapse and the subsequent racial and political somersault of South African society, a unique and classic venue for human rights, The South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), was created. In this deeply moving book, Antjie Krog, South African poet and child of the Free State, has compiled a compelling record of the TRC. The reader will receive an immediate and powerful exposure to Bishop Edmund Tutu's Ubuntu theology (the harmony between individual and community) as an embodiment of the ancient African Weltanschauung (a person is human precisely in the community of other human beings). Again, it is the poet who elucidates for the rest of us the heart of man-as-community. Utilizing a first-person dialogue within a keen observational and lovely prosaic style, Antjie Krog enables us to enter both the foreheads of perpetrators of violence and the hearts of its victims. It also includes rare insights into the indifference and guilt of both white and black citizens during the apartheid regime. In this chronicle of the TRC, we witness an abiding desire to expose the dark past in constructing the crucial accountability to future generations. This, as Antjie Krog so lovingly describes, is the miracle rebirth her "wide and woeful land." This fascinating journaling of the petitions before the TRC - the angst in seeking a common unity - reveals a redeeming Phoenix of truth in the ashes of apartheid. Antjie Krog's unique documentation of the proceedings of the TRC is a valued record of modern South African history. This is a beautifully written and classic case-study of essential "transparency" in global constitutional democracy.

Jess Maghan, Chester, Ct. 05 February 2002

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been the finest if most supremely difficult exercise in healing a deeply wounded and divided country. With the intensity of voice, word, and naked insight that is characteristic of her poetry, Antjie Krog has written a volume for the people of all nations coming to terms with the horrifying elements of their past.

Extraordinary true life story with fact based information about Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa. The writer lived the process and interviews of those seeking amnesty and portrays the aspects of this Apartheid Era outcome with clarity and perspective.

Here is a complex book that scratches the surface of a very complex ordeal; Apartheid. Krog gives a very personal report on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a Committee charged with hearing the crimes of perpetrators in Apartheid and deciding on their amnesty respectively. Her language is very emotional at times, even suspiciously involved. You can sense in her writing her own struggle to explore the apathy of her own ethnicity, the white Afrikaaner, in the face of such atrocities. Overall, a very complex book. I couldn't put this one down and finished it in about 3 days. If you have an interest in Apartheid you may gain new insight on the matter after having read this.

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