

‘Where I become you’ A practical theological reading of Antjie Krog’s concept of interconnectedness

ABSTRACT

An exposé on Antjie Krog’s *Begging to be Black* might be a contribution to this conference on ‘Covert violence and human dignity’. What I present today, is a reading of this book, a practical theological reading. The book itself presents a hermeneutical key to the practices of life, and maybe also the practices of faith. Krog’s hermeneutics is familiar to the four dimensions within a cyclical process of discerning: description, interpretation, normativity, strategy. These hermeneutical dimensions could be found in *Begging to be Black*, and we might even read them in all of Krog’s prose. I start with how Krog describes reality, followed by how she interprets this reality and how she reflects on the interpretation with a normative edge to it, completed with some practical, strategic suggestions. Krog shows that interconnectedness is the only way to survive violence and to preserve human dignity.

maar daar waar ek jy is
jy geword het
sing ek buite myself¹

INTRODUCTION

One of the books I bought and read, when I visited South Africa in January 2010, was Antjie Krog’s *Begging to be Black*,² published at the end of 2009. With this book Krog completed a trilogy, that further consists of *Country of my Skull* (1998)³ and *A Change of Tongue* (2003)⁴.

1 Antjie Krog, Waar ik jou word. Translated by Robert Dorsman and Jan van der Haar. Rotterdam-Amsterdam, Poetry International, Podium 2009, 9.

2 Some have called the title of the book ‘provocative’ or ‘the worst title since decades’ (Max DuPreez). In fact, it is inspired by Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. Mimi, a character in the book, says ‘Don’t teach me about exploitation ... Try being Jewish, female and ugly sometime. You’ll beg to be black.’

3 Antjie Krog, *Country of my Skull. Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*, There Rivers: New York 2000. The first time I visited South Africa, 2007, I bought a second hand copy of *Country of my Skull*, Krog’s ‘extraordinary reportage’ (Nadine Gordimer) and ‘deeply moving account’ (Desmond Tutu) of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC for short). She covered the work of the TRC as a radio journalist, working for the South African Broadcasting Company. The book is devastating, filled with both horror and hope, written in a style that grabs one by the throat and doesn’t let go. The atrocities revealed in the testimonies are shocking. But the examples of humanity are astonishing as well. As a writer, Krog the uncanny ability to disturb and upset the reader. Reality is more complex and ambiguous than we tend to think. But Krog perceives and describes this reality with such an honesty and compassion, that I am often moved by her observations in a strangely comforting way.

4 I only read the Afrikaans translation – ‘*n Ander Tongval*, Tafelberg: Kaapstad 2005 – and the Dutch translation – *Een andere tongval*. Vertaald door Robert Dorsman, Contact: Amsterdam 2009 4th edition –. After my first visit to South Africa I bought the Dutch translation of *A Change of Tongue*. This book

'A gunshot cracks.' That is the opening sentence of the book.⁵ From that moment on, the author became part of the messy business that surrounded a killing in 1992 in Kroonstad, South Africa, the village where she lived. Some ANC friends asked her to give them a lift. She didn't know that one of them just killed a man. They also asked her to get rid of some piece of clothing that was related to the crime scene. Furthermore, they buried the murder weapon in her backyard. When eventually things became clear, she felt misled and used by her allies. It confronted her with an ethical dilemma: was there a political motive to the killing, or was it just personal revenge? Should I report to the police and betray my friends, or should I be loyal to the political struggle of the ANC against the white regime? How can one make a moral decision in an immoral context like the Apartheid system?

I am not interested in the ethical dilemma. The incident of the killing showed that violence is always 'domestic', even when it is 'only' public. Let me explain this. Krog supported the ANC in the armed struggle against apartheid. For that she was exposed to harassments by the police. But the killing not only affected her, but her entire family. The violence penetrated the safety of her private property, and with that, the lives of her loved ones. When her husband tells the children about the killing, she writes how his words 'fall like small unexploded hand grenades in the friendly space among us, finally part of our family's reality. Everybody is quiet.'⁶ In the aftermath of the killing, she became engulfed in the violence between the students at the school where she taught.⁷ She remembers a demonstration where the students defied the police with their loaded guns, which raises the question 'what to teach children who are not scared of death?'⁸ After the court case, where she testified against one of the accomplices of the killing, she and her husband made the decision to leave Kroonstad.

In one of the final chapters of the book she connects the story of the killing with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, especially with its amnesty hearings.⁹ From the TRC hearings she learns about the situation in the years surrounding the killing in 1992. Between 1990, the release of Mandela, and 1994, the first democratic elections, more black people were killed than in the

reflects the changes in South Africa in the post-apartheid era. Krog tries to understand the meaning of 'becoming'. What does it mean to change the political system, to give way to different cultures with different norms and values, to overcome racial division, to bridge the differences in a comprehensive transformation that is a healing for all people? She describes her own becoming a writer in a intensive dialogue with her mother, also an author. Furthermore, she describes how her own family deals with and is affected by the changing situation after the 1994 elections. While the nation desperately searches for its political and cultural identity, at the same time it has to deal with whites, blacks and coloured people who are bruised, battered, disappointed, ashamed, guilty, angry, indifferent. The chapter called 'A Journey' seems to be a key to understanding *A Change of Tongue*. It's a travel story of a group of African poets who find their way to Timbuktu in Mali, 'la Caravane de la Poésie'. The indigenous griots speak different languages and express themselves in a variety of ways, not only through poetry, but also through music, dance, performance, colors, light, sounds. Krog is overwhelmed by the experience, and by the African conditions at the different staging points where the journey takes them. In the beginning she realizes she still has to learn this 'other tongue'. At the end of the journey, in Timbuktu, however, she recites poetry from the San people and performs her own Afrikaner poems. She packs her bags feeling light-footed and loose-bodied, harmonized and rooted. She has no other soul than the one that breathes in the enormous shadow of the African continent. In *Begging to be Black*, Krog elaborates on this feeling she experienced in the heart of African poetry. She uses the concept of 'interconnectedness' to express what is specifically African, what constitutes an African identity.

5 Cf. Antjie Krog, *Relaas van een moord*. Novelle, Podium: Amsterdam 2003.

6 Krog 2009, 43.

7 Krog 2009, 66.

8 Krog 2009, 68.

9 Krog 2009, 254-272.

previous twenty years of Apartheid. While F.W. de Klerk and his Nationalist Party negotiated the transformation to a multiracial political constitution, the security police, secretly, instigated black against black violence by supporting and protecting the forces against the ANC. The TRC brought this scheme to light in her final report. Reading this report, Krog realizes that, no matter what, the killing was a political act, because of the covert violence by state institutions. She also writes at the end of her book about meeting, some years later, the men who were involved in the killing. We see lives ruined by the choices the men made. But, when we read between the lines, we can only come to the conclusion that the lives of these men were shattered by the omnipresence of violence.¹⁰

The characters in the book are exposed to violence in many different ways. Covert violence is one of them. Not in the sense of physical or mental abuse by relatives in the supposedly safe home environment, but as a permanent shadow over one's life, as a second nature one learns to live with. Violence in South Africa was, or is, such an integral part of society that it can't be surgically removed without cutting away vital organs.

Everyone is morally an accomplice. Everyone is guilty. Violence is like poisoned ivy, it holds the walls together by sucking the water out of it. Violence always has a domestic and covert dimension.

PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL READING

Hopefully, this introduction suffices as an explanation why I think that an exposé on Antjie Krog's *Begging to be Black* might be a contribution to this conference on 'Covert violence and human dignity'. What I present today, is a reading of this book, a practical theological reading. I read the book as a practical theologian, and by doing this in the form of a lecture I hope you might get an idea of how practical theologians read public texts. At least how I read this book.

Originally, I intended to show you a sort of practical theological *modus operandi*. However, when I started to read the book again, I noticed that the author herself offers a view on how to read situations and practices. Interestingly, this view, or logic, resembles the way practical theology works. So, instead of reading the book from a practical theological perspective, the book itself presents a hermeneutical key to the practices of life, and maybe also the practices of faith. Krog's hermeneutics is familiar to the four dimensions within a cyclical process of discerning: description, interpretation, normativity, strategy.¹¹ These hermeneutical dimensions could be found in *Begging to be Black*, and we might even read them in all of Krog's prose. I start with how Krog describes reality, followed by how she interprets this reality and how she reflects on the interpretation with a normative edge to it, completed with some practical, strategic suggestions. Krog shows that interconnectedness is the only way to survive violence and to preserve human dignity.

10 The simple and straight manner in which Krog portrays these black men trying to cope with life in the giving circumstances, hurts. The description of the men contrasts with the life of the former police man who was on the case of the Kroonstad-killing and who is now head of security in a big shopping centre. Krog writes: 'He is an Afrikaner; he is as close to me as a population group in South Africa could be. But out of his distasteful past there is nothing that makes him feel that he could have a conversation (mind the use of the word 'conversation'-RB) with me about what happened in the town where we grew up. He has moved from an ethnic position to a class one: where he protected Afrikaner power and interest in the past, he now protects class and money.' (Krog 2009, 266)

11 Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2008.

Begging to be Black consists of several narratives, staged at different settings and locations, and it is written in a diversity of genres.¹² But somehow these genres and narratives intertwine. The book not only tells us about the 1992 Kroonstad murder, but we also read about the nineteenth century Basotho king Moshoeshe, and his first contact with European missionaries. We learn about Krog's stay in Berlin, 2007-2008, at the 'Wissenschaftskolleg', the Institute for Advanced Studies, and the 'conversations' there on African identity and interconnectedness. But she also wrote letters from Berlin to her mother about the city, the culture, the music. And she lets us share in her Berlin diary.¹³ Furthermore, the book contains a journal of her visit to Lesotho, 2008, where she did research on Moshoeshe, and wrote parts of the book. So, the book is a composition of a dialogue between different narratives. Or better, it is a long conversation, or the construction of a long conversation, aimed at understanding the contexts of cultures that produce the historical and cultural texts we read and live. Understanding differences is a first step to recognizing our fundamental interconnectedness.¹⁴

Krog's description of the complexity of reality is quiet confusing, intentionally, because perplexity is beneficial, salutary. An example. In her search for the inherent strength of African identity she brings two worlds together. On the one hand, she pictures the intriguing story of the Mandela-like king Moshoeshe, and writes about her visit to his country Lesotho. She mirrors the world of Moshoeshe and Lesotho with, on the other hand, her diary and the letters to her mother she wrote during her stay in Berlin. There is no other reason for putting these two worlds next to each other in a book, other than the realization that life is utterly complex. But still, why is she so determined to hear the African voice, to put into words an African philosophy of interconnectedness, while, at the same time, she pictures Berlin like a kid in a candy store? She adores Berlin, it is heaven on earth. It is clean, tidy, organized, punctual, coherent, so different from South Africa. 'The cold bites, yet inside it is warm. I'm sheltered. Unreachable. Safe. Inconspicuous. Looked after. Words I have not used for a long time.'¹⁵ The shops sell stuff that is 'authentisch und ordentlich'. Furthermore, Berlin breathes science, art and 'Bildung'. The street names and advertisement refer to poets and writers. The museums are impressive, offering interesting programs and exhibitions. The Humboldt university has the largest department of Northern Sotho in the world. And then, the music. 'Merely entering the Berliner Staatsoper

12 Krog's rhetorical style is 'novelization', a term derived from Mikhail Bakhtin. 'Krog's book is a vital polyphonic response to discursive rigidity – a reminder that in order to maintain dialogic complexity, it is necessary to make space for a multiplicity of voices.' (Ryan Solomon, 'Antjie Krog's Country of my Skull: Resisting the Rhetoric of Incompatibility in South Africa'. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the NCA 94th Annual Convention 2008, TBA, San Diego; http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p257081_index.html).

13 The material seems fairly autobiographical. Nevertheless, everything is filtered through Krog's own memory and subjective interpretation. She often uses fictitious names and places (Krog 2009, vii). From the Freestate storytellers she learned that stories can lie the truth. The 'I' is rarely Krog her self, and the 'mother' not necessarily her own mother (*Een andere tongval*. Translated by Rober Dorsman, Amsterdam 2009 5th edition, 425).

14 'While engaging in these honest, transformative conversations, Antjie Krog does not only write about "interconnectedness", which is the central concept of her book, but also *embodies* it. She shows us that in a complex society like South Africa we have a long conversation ahead of us: a long multi-dimensional conversation.' (Klippiess Kritzinger, 'Tracing the practice of Antjie Krog in *Begging to be Black*. A short conversation'. Paper presented at a seminar on "Begging to be black? In dialogue with Antjie Krog", organized by the Centre for Public Theology at the University of Pretoria on 4 May 2010)

15 Krog 2009, 89.

metamorphoses one.’¹⁶ Krog is lyrical about Berlin. ‘Es gibt sie noch, die guten Dinge’, says her shopping bag. While she is absorbing Berlin, lustfully, all the time she is thinking, talking and writing about the uniqueness of African identity. The effect might be the sure knowledge that she is not naive about some sort of African or black essentialism, as some critics suggest. She tries to balance both worlds in practicing a multiple partiality, the only way to do justice to the complexity of reality. It comes with a non-dichotomous approach to life, and with the intention not to compartmentalize the material and spiritual, and to be more inclusive and more fluid to mankind as a community. She phrases this as ‘interconnectedness towards something more spiritual, more whole, more towards the potential power of everything’.¹⁷ Different worlds connect in the mind and the work of the author. Krog is like a chess player playing at different boards simultaneously. Reality is complex, but we need this confusion and disarray to be attentive to the people involved. There is more than one perspective, also with regard to lived faith. There are multiple constructions of reality possible, depending on our social position. Rendering justice to the complexity of life, and faith as it is lived, implores us to be multipartial, multilingual, and multicultural.¹⁸

INTERPRETATION

How do we understand the complexity once we described it in all its branching? The second dimension is interpretation.

In her Winternights-lecture, the Hague, January 2010, Antjie Krog said ‘do not readily interpret from your own world view, do not identify, nor differ, just listen how things you think you know, are being formulated’.¹⁹ I give two more quotations from this beautiful text, because in its brevity it captivates the heart of her thinking and also the tenor of *Begging to be Black*. ‘In order to have a safe nurturing society we have to transform the borders dividing us, into seams. We have to suture these different pieces of material together through stitching enduring seams. Therefore we have to know intimately that this piece is satin, that piece is flannel and this is part of a crumbling plastic bag – carefully we have to weave this together.’²⁰ And: ‘We always have to question the standard. If we are not constantly refiguring the standard we will die. We constantly need to invent new forms of life and different modes of existence in order to survive. Even if it’s piecemeal – questioning the standard will make space for positive change.’²¹

In her journey to become ‘blacker’²², to become like the majority, Krog suggests that we

¹⁶ Krog 2009, 240.

¹⁷ Krog 2009, 184.

¹⁸ During her ‘Winternachten’-lecture in the Hague 2010 (see note 17), Krog cautioned her Dutch audience to be sensitive about dominating the multicultural debate and setting the rules unilaterally. A couple years earlier, in her Van der Leeuw-lecture she told/asked the Dutch: ‘You have always been known for your irony. But it seems that you have moved from being romantic ironists to traditional irony. Traditional ironists harbour a slightly supercilious sense of moral and intellectual superiority. But romantic irony is an irony of uncertainty, bent primarily on the perplexities of searching for answers. Alert to the plurality of all meaning and the relativity of all positions, the romantic ironist probes the open-ended series of contradictions. Romantic irony is an instrument for registering and accepting the stubborn contradictions of a universe in flux. Can’t you become that again?’ (See note 24).

¹⁹ Antjie Krog, (*Universal*) *Declaration of Interconnectedness OR (Universal) Suggestions for Tolerance*, ‘Winternachten’-lecture, January 14 2010, The Hague, <http://www.luxmagazine.nl/generalinfo.aspx?lIntS tr=36&lIntEntityId=576>.

²⁰ Idem.

²¹ Idem.

²² Max DuPreez called the book ‘identity suicide’. He ventilated his surprise ‘oor Antjie se oordrewe handegewringery oor haar wit vel; oor haar oorontwikkelde skuldgevoelens oor apartheid en

weave and stitch, in stead of building walls and fences that dictate the border between us and them. Interpretation means bringing together different material that could interface and become something new. For that, we need to practice deep listening, bringing the other to speech, listening and speaking conjunctively, 'interconnectedness-towards-wholeness'. This resonates with the way practical theologians interpret practices. What people do and what it means to them is a primary source for theological reflection. One could even say that practical theologians engage with the contexts people live in, and with the actions they make. Particular experience, meaning, perception are accesses to lived religion, to lived faith. Universal standards for religion and faith are no longer viable.

Leaving behind universal standards, there is still an interpretative framework. The critics give Krog credit for the efforts she makes to engage in 'the long conversation' between black, coloured and white people. She enriches this conversation with the knowledge and perspectives of a few theologians, like Gabriel Setiloane with his research on the Sotho-Tswana, or Gerrit Brand with his book on *Speaking of a Fabulous Ghost*.²³ More important, however, are the references to the work of the ethnographers Jean and John Comaroff. Krog's search for a perspective that grasps the essence of African identity, is highly influenced by their analysis of the symbolic struggle in South Africa.

The Comaroffs argue that Christian missionary activity colonized the consciousness of Africans. It not only brought religious conversion, but it also reshaped sociality, personhood, and everyday practices fundamentally. Even if the missionaries themselves were not aware of this culturally modernizing process, nevertheless, the African people became drawn into a 'conversation', the concepts and arguments of which were set by the Europeans. The colonizers gained control over the material and semantic practices through which their subjects produce and reproduce their existence.²⁴ This theory, that Christian conversion implied the modern reconstruction of the everyday worlds of the 'heathens', is behind Krog's emphatic argument for a uniquely African worldview. The dominant framework should not be Western, but African.²⁵ 'What I am trying to describe has NOT been grasped by the West, and if you think what I am saying is the same what these other (European, e.g. Levinas-RB) philosophers are saying, then it simply means we from Africa have not yet properly managed to articulate it succinctly. And it is hard: We have to use Western tools. It is as if we have to help you eat braaivleis with chopsticks, or dhal with a knyptang – the equipment makes you miss what makes the food the food it is.'²⁶

NORMATIVITY

The description and interpretation of situations and practices raises normative questions about the adequacy and truthfulness of life and the way faith is lived. That brings me to the third task of practical theology, normative reflection. To decide what is good, true, and beautiful in a specific situation and context, we need the input from theological concepts and the tradition of the church. In the same way, Antjie Krog looks for a fresh input from African history and tradition into the long conversation. She explores trustworthy and healing words that can help the

kolonialisme; oor haar oorroantisering van Afrika en van swart mense; oor haar naïwiteit oor die politiek van ons streek.' (<http://www.rapport.co.za/Weekliks/Nuus/Identiteitselfmoord-is-beslis-nie-nodig-20091128>)

23 Brands book was defended with credit as a doctoral thesis at Utrecht University. Cf. <http://gerritbrand.blogspot.com/>.

24 Cf. John and Jean Comaroff, 'The Colonization of Consciousness' in: Michale Lambek (ed.), *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, Blackwell Publishing: Malden 2002, 492-510.

25 Krog 2009, 238.

26 Krog 2009, 156.

Afrikaners to be a part of a country that was ruptured by white colonialism and by the National Party politics. In order to find a discourse to express African identity, she defines the concept of 'interconnectedness'²⁷, in close proximity to the African concept of 'ubuntu'²⁸, defined by bishop Tutu as the indissoluble connection between my humanity and yours. Interconnectedness is not a theological concept per se, but it definitely has the theological undertones of the notion of 'koinonia'²⁹. It is beyond the scope of this paper to show the similarities in meaning between koinonia and interconnectedness. I just pass on the perception of Antjie Krog on interconnectedness, in the hope that it will resonate with koinonia in our heads and hearts.

Krog opposes an individualized Christian ethic with a communal ethic, in which the norm is what benefits the community.³⁰ Already the Khoi-San people practised interconnectedness, and somehow this worldview survived and is still visible. Mandela for instance, regards white South Africans as part of his interconnectedness. And Tutu's Christianity is embedded in this world view. Tutu redefines Christian community in terms of interconnectedness. Also the work of Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela on the act of forgiveness by victims is about interconnectedness. This is different from a white, Western worldview. Community is 'more fluid and more inclusive' in African terms.³¹ One becomes human as part of the community and by welcoming the stranger. Central to Krog's experience of interconnectedness is the story of Cynthia Ngewu³², an example of superior humanness. In her testimony to the TRC about the death of her son, she said: 'This thing called reconciliation ... if I understand it correctly ... if it means this perpetrator, this man who has killed my son, if it means he becomes human again, this man, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back ... then I agree, then I support it all.'³³ To Krog this is an amazing formulation. Killing, or violence in general, is related to losing one's humanity. Forgiving opens up the possibility of regaining humanity. Experiencing violence also affects one's humanity. So, when the perpetrator regains his humanity through forgiveness, we could all hope for the restoration of our full humanity.

I like to think that despite Krog's criticism on Christianity, somehow, the concept of koinonia resonates in this notion of interconnectedness.³⁴ Maybe not the reality of koinonia in Christian practices and in faith communities in the past, but still, there is an eschatological potential in

27 Defining interconnectedness is not so much an intellectual exercise as well a reflection on her own biography. From cultivating individualism, she is now 'trying to become others, plural, interconnected-towards-caringness.' (Krog 2009, 200) Being with black people made her feel more human: 'something remarkable originated in blackness or a black world view' (206). Interconnectedness is a way of escaping the cycles of violence.

28 The ubuntu worldview is based on the phrase 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu': you are someone through other people.

29 Rein Brouwer, *Geloven in gemeenschap. Het verhaal van een protestantse geloofsgemeenschap*, Kok: Kampen 2009, 33-71.

30 Krog remembers research that showed that 'a kind of ant that existed as a nest of individuals came from an earlier, more 'primitive' time than ants that function as part of a collective whole'. (Krog 2009, 218)

31 The final scene of the book gives a description and interpretation of a statue of a sphinx in Berlin, that one can read as an image of 'being black'. It is not a hybrid creature, but a harmony of guarding and giving milk. 'She is what she is. Not split, not guarding dichotomies, but presenting beingness as multiple intactnesses, not with the singular self, but with the bodily akin-ness to the vulnerability of being in and beyond this world'. (Krog 2009, 274-275)

32 Cf. Antjie Krog, "'I speak, holding up your heart ...' Cosmopolitanism, Forgiveness and leaning towards Africa', 24th Van der Leeuw-lecture, Groningen November 3 2006. (<http://www.vanderleeuwlezing.nl/2006/2006-krog.htm>)

33 Krog 2009, 211.

34 Koinonia is qualified by gratuity, reciprocity, solidarity, and universality (Ulrich Kuhnke, *Koinonia. Zur theologischen Rekonstruktion der Identität christlicher Gemeinde*, Patmos: Düsseldorf 1992).

koinonia that could be resurrected by the unique contribution of the African interconnectedness to humanity.

STRATEGY

The epigraph of this paper, *maar daar waar ek jy is/jy geword het/sing ek buite myself*, lines from a poem by Krog, sounds in English like this: ‘where I am you, become you, I sing out of my self’. Antjie Krog sings out of her self in this book. She brings us closer to the source of humanity, the cradle of mankind, with the intention to transform us towards interconnectedness. She offers us transforming practices of interconnectedness to help us understand what this interconnectedness means. For instance, she writes vividly about eating and preparing meals. Practical theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson would call these practices ‘homemaking practices’³⁵. Homemaking practices are ‘traditions that do not have a name’. They are mostly performed by women and people with a lower status within the church. They differ from ‘inscribed’ practices, practices that are prescribed by tradition, like worship, religious education, leadership.

Nevertheless, these homemaking practices communicate the essence of community. They help the congregation to incorporate the practices of faith. According to McClintock Fulkerson, they do deserve to be recognized as habituating, transforming practices, as normative practices, because they express care and responsibility, and contribute to a more wholesome dealing with differences and being different.

Antjie Krog gives us a couple of wonderful examples of such homemaking practices that make us understand and experience the meaning of interconnectedness. There is a wonderful story about Krog herself baking boerbeskuit from the family ‘plant’, with a recipe from her mother. The tradition originates from the time that a boer-commando needed to have something to eat that could be carried along in a saddlebag. Krog writes: ‘After half an hour the smell starts to fill the kitchen. It drifts into the neighbourhood. It teaches people the word ‘reeling’. It enables them to spell ‘salivary glands’. My children, who are home for the weekend, appear from their rooms and games and books and homework to stand in the doorway.’³⁶ Obviously, food communicates and connects.

Another example of such a homemaking practice that habituates interconnectedness is the modest meal offered by the mother of the young woman who assists Krog with her research in Lesotho. The meal consists of pap, some sort of green plant, and a glass of water. The water comes from a bucket, which as Krog observes, has been carried from somewhere. ‘How do I do justice to such a gentle and beneficent gesture? Everything on the plate or in this glass has been gathered and processed with great trouble, plus the knowledge of how bodyness will pick and shred and stir and taste and give itself. The perfect texture of the pap, the amount of salt in it, the sharp taste of the maroho that pierces my mind with memories of sitting long-legged with black women under a tree eating from the same pot, the cool water in the scratched but surviving glass. At the same time, it feels as if the gesture is not about the food, also not about giving at all, but about sharing a physical generosity. It is as if the skin containing my body has become porous, as if I am dissolving into a delicate balance with this woman and her daughter,

35 Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption. Theology for a Worldly Church*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 2007, 131-133. Faith is habituated and incorporated in practices as a form of social inculturation. These incorporated practices are bodily proprieties, reflecting the bodily, habitual response to God’s relation with men. We could see this as the domain of practical theology. Practical theology is the ‘habitus’ to read, theologically, situations and practices, and to react on them and transform them in a creative and improvisational way, for the sake of human dignity.

36 Krog 2009, 48-49.

their offered food and all the places it comes from. Maybe it's also even more than that: in this house where a rural mother sits with her university-qualified daughter, unable even to begin to guess the complications of her life, the meal is shared within the context of a deep trust that whatever is shared, now, with me, is not only worth sharing, but confirms what has always been known here: being part of. Not of some thought-out or yet-to-come imagined space, but part of something that is, calibrating heartbeats.³⁷ Practices of breaking, sharing and eating are part of the long conversation that we have to engage with to live our interconnectedness and to confine the violence; the public violence and the domestic or covert violence.

Interconnectedness within a context of faith, however, is not only about practicing conversation, but also about practicing worship, prayer and praise.³⁸ That is why I like to finish with two examples of going to church. In Lesotho Krog sits down in the old missionary church at Morija, and wonders 'why God made sense to me only within these kinds of surroundings? When the church selflessly cares, when it doesn't mind being poor, when it creates a sanctuary of tranquillity, when it tells its message simple, when it indefatigably serves the lives of the marginalised.'³⁹ We are reminded of the church she attended in the coloured township of Kroonstad (Brentpark). She describes how she, when the tensions around the killing became unbearable, drove to church and slipped in through the back door. She listened to the sermon, she sang, standing, eyes closed, till she felt someone beside her, someone she knew very well, and who also was hurt by the killing-incident. They embraced, standing as if drowning. After a while, Krog became aware that they were surrounded by the singing congregation. 'They have their arms on us, embracing us, swaying, all of us singing in Sesotho, "It is spring – the blossoms are on the small branches". And in a way this congregation has over the years become my and my family's only community, the people we feel ourselves closest to, the place where our lives and the world make sense.'⁴⁰

The author leads us into a transforming process of discerning, that starts with describing complexity, followed by an interpretation within the parameters of a conversation, setting the stage for an excavation of truthful and healing words of wisdom, in order to share, to eat, and to praise God, connected with every living being. The prudent reading of practices might be a fruitful theological method, with the potential to analyze and transform, and hopefully to survive the all-pervasive violence. Tasting and testing interconnectedness, as a testimony to God's redemptive reality. Where I become you, we might sing out of our selves, hopefully.

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37 Krog 2009, 181.

38 Cf. Kritzinger 2010.

39 Krog 2009, 233.

40 Krog 2009, 76.