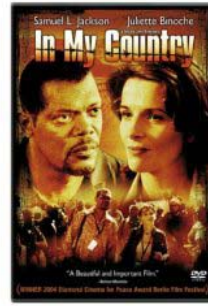


Movie Synopsis:

## In My Country

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When an unjust regime falls, how can a new government provide justice? Whereas the French and Russian revolutions killed off the royal family, the film *In My Country* attempts to explain the South African approach--through a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Directed by John Boorman, who won a Political Film Society award for *Beyond Rangoon* (1995), the movie presents the workings of the commission through the eyes and ears of an unlikely pair--Afrikaans radio journalist Anna Malan (played by Juliette Binoche) and Washington Post reporter Langston Whitfield (played by Samuel L. Jackson), who cover the hearings, share their opinions and reactions, and even question some of the perpetrators privately.

Titles at the beginning and end indicate that 21,800 persons testified before the commission about the past horrors. Those accused of barbarous acts were either put on trial for their crimes or allowed to testify before the commission in order to plead for amnesty. Those who could prove that they were following orders were allowed amnesty; in all, a title at the end states, only 1,163 were granted amnesty. Out of those, 800 testifying from 1996 to 1998, the film focuses on stories of about ten persons, including a White victim.

The movie begins in 1995, as Anna is about to leave her home to cover the hearings. Members of her family are unhappy that she believes in the main concept of the commission and is betraying her own kind; they evidently fear that Black South Africans are out for vengeance. At the first press briefing, reporters ask pointed questions and receive worthy answers. However, when Langston asks, "How can there be any reconciliation when Whites control ninety percent of the country's wealth?" there is no answer. Afterward, Anna runs after Langston. Whereas he focuses primarily on justice, looking through African American eyes, she explains that the African Way stresses reconciliation through the principle of ubuntu, in which the guilty party confesses to the victim and asks for forgiveness.

Perhaps the most dramatic moment occurs when the man who murdered a boy's parents in front of his eyes confesses, pleads for forgiveness, and then the boy hugs him. As they continue their dialog throughout the film, Langston's views change, and the two journalists even have sex at one point, even though both are married. On several occasions, Langston interviews the principal villain, Police Colonel De Jager (played by Brendan Gleeson), whose role in the film is to articulate the principal justifications for the cruelties inflicted on Black South Africans--that they are inferior beings who need to be ruled and to preserve the prosperity built by Whites in South Africa. His reason for using torture is to get information from alleged terrorists. However, when De Jager appears before a court of White South Africans, his application for amnesty is denied because the torture is judged disproportionate to the aim of obtaining information.

The movie also, offers an unpleasant glimpse of contemporary South Africa outside the commission: At the beginning of the film, a Black South African attempts to raid Anna's home; at the end, one Black South African settles a longstanding score with another by shooting him in cold blood in an alley.