

For 332 years my family has been living on African soil.

My origin is Flemish and Saxon.

My ancestry is old. It's as old as yours—

An unbroken line of mothers, farmers, bakers, traders, wagon and wheel makers.

Historically, my family has experienced persecution, victimisation, and murder at the hands of the ruling class with nauseating frequency – I am the descendent of Marguerite de Savoye, a 1688 Huguenot refugee and the son of an Indian slave whose father was Snyman, who was later a prisoner of Robben Island. I was a refugee myself.

Unlike my friends and my husband, I left the soft life of Northern Europe and came back home.

There was a new country to build. Babies to raise. Food to grow, and a new nation to feed.

A few years later I was fighting for my life during a farm attack.

A few years after that it happened again.

I lost everything and stopped farming.

Now there is “Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment” (BBEEE) and State sanctioned racism. There is not a single department in government that is not riddled with corruption, fraud or theft, or, in most cases, all three. There is no punishment for this. The perpetrators just given other positions in government, and they do it all over again.

Municipalities are failing, crucial infrastructure is collapsing, and South Africa is in an economic free fall that our current state president calls “radical reform”.

Poverty is rising to untenable levels never experienced since the Mfecane, but unlike the tribal elders of old, who quickly realised that these white strangers with their funny hats and hard lines were valuable assets. The current ruling class, descendants of those very people, has decreed that me and my kind are not welcome here even though much of what makes up South Africa is a result of our collective efforts, knowledge and skill.

I am proud of where I come from. We were not British or Dutch colonists. We were exiled here. None of my ancestors took land by force or trickery. It was by honest labour on other farms, by trade or by mutual agreement hard won fighting side by side against the invading Ndebele or Zulu at the time of the Mfecane, which is when my forefathers and mothers travelled into the South African interior.

We worked hard, built and created. Despite this, all of the French Huguenot descendants still living in South Africa are once again facing persecution – this time because we are white. Even though we came from a country that persecuted us and stripped us – not only of our wealth, property and belongings but all record of our existence. It was destroyed over differing opinions regarding religion that have no relevance to anyone any more.

So, Francois Mitterand apologised to all Huguenots and released a cool postage stamp declaring that France is the Home of the Huguenots, yet I cannot go back there. I have no claim to French citizenship because in 1945 all French Huguenots lost the right of repatriation when the 1889 Nationality Law was revoked. I think this had something to do with the Nazis, but neither myself nor anyone of my ancestors was one of those. Hell, we were not a part of the Broederbond (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afrikaner_Broederbond) either, which left us on the wrong end of the Afrikaans Nationalists too!

It is worthy to note that when the Afrikaner Nationalist Party (Nats) came into power and got South Africa back from the Brits, they did not set about destroying everything that had been built and developed to that point despite their dislike of the British. They set about creating their own, thus increasing the economic strength of this country.

Please don't get me wrong when I say these things. I have much love for my country. At 19 I was an A Status political refugee in the Netherlands. After my return home the Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB) and the security police tried to kidnap my children in 1989, but I got tipped off and managed to prevent it from happening. They even set my house on fire one night while we were all sleeping.

The political environment changed. Apartheid died the death it deserved, and all I had sacrificed and fought for started to materialise. Instead of the reward of a "rainbow nation", I got beaten, raped, stabbed and almost killed all because I am a farmer. There was nothing to steal. No guns, no money. With both farm attacks the perpetrators were never found despite all the evidence, including DNA and shell casings found after the second attack.

The farm I built up from nothing with nothing but my hands and my will is now a squatter camp. The house in which my youngest daughter was born has been long been stripped and the whole farm laid to waste. "Kill the Boer; kill the farmer" is what many sitting in parliament chanted and still do at mass rallies. The chant now though, thanks to the former state president, is "bring my machine gun" (Mashini Wami), but the meaning is the same... it's a popular ring tone if you want to understand where my fellow South Africans' heads are at. Can you imagine walking down your street, hearing a complete stranger's phone ringing and the song that it sings to its happy, smiling-faced, owner is about killing you?

To give you some additional personal perspective:

My father survived two attacks at his place of work. He was beaten, kicked and had an AK-47 pointed at his head and another pushed into his belly. Granted, this was just a robbery, but I have put it in here because, traumatic as it was, the trauma was nothing in comparison with what followed.

Shortly after my attack, Claire, an Nguni farmer from KwaZulu Natal, was horrifically tortured, raped and had her head hacked off. It was never found and neither were the people that hurt and killed her. They never stole a thing.

In 2018 the father of my son's best friend, MD, a child I fostered for a time, was shot in the stomach and died an agonising death trying to protect his youngest daughter from getting raped during an attack on their farm. They raped her anyway while her father lay dying – case unsolved.

My friend and neighbour, Dex Goodman, got shot and paralysed – case unsolved. Another friend, Robin Greaves, lost his farm and talcum mine during a violent land grab last year. His manager and all the staff fled for their lives, leaving all their belongings behind. The farm and mine was stripped and everything either stolen or smashed. The Malane police did nothing to help them although they did assault the owner's son repeatedly for demanding the badge numbers of the police that had been dispatched – apparently not to defend them, as they should have done, but the invaders. The cops went so far as to threaten Robert with arrest when he insisted that the police do something to stop the invasion. They still cannot get access to their farm – case unsolved.

These are just a few stories of those closest to me. If I start adding attacks of the associates and families of my friends, the list will get depressingly long.

Our current national statistic for Gender Based Violence (GBV) is one in two women, but to be honest, myself and nearly every woman I know, across all walks of life, has been beaten and raped at least once, and others, like myself and Jennifer, more than once.

My eldest daughter was sexually assaulted by two boys in the girls' bathroom at school.

My sister was raped by a colleague at work.

My sister-in-law was attacked and raped her home. She was also strangled but passed out, and her attacker left her for dead.

Out of all the women in my immediate family, only my youngest daughter has been spared this trauma, and not a day goes by that I don't pray for her safety, grateful that at least one of us has been left untouched.

In each of these cases, no action was taken against the perpetrators because of their political affiliations, including that of my eldest daughter. Where does that leave the statistic? 90% and this is just in my immediate family. The currently touted statistic for GBV is 1 in two woman but opinions vary greatly on this as most woman don't report

rapes and beatings. I believe we have the highest rape statistic in the world based solely on reported rapes, but nobody really knows the actual extent.

Concerning my friends, acquaintances and work colleagues:

Claire was sodomised and suffocated on the grounds of the Anglican Church – case solved, but only after another woman was raped and murdered.

Jennifer was gang raped on her way home from work – case unsolved.

Cynthia's daughter was raped and then had her head smashed to pulp with a paving stone when she walked to the shop to buy milk and bread. She had three young children – case unsolved.

Edith was raped and shot in the head when three men broke into her home. She was a single mother with a 2-year old daughter that was in her room with her at the time – case unsolved.

Debbie was attacked and raped at the homeless shelter for which she volunteered – case unsolved.

The 78-year old mother of the psychologist that was treating me for PTSD was attacked in their home. She was rolled up in a carpet and beaten with a pole from her head to her feet, over and over again – case unsolved.

In the last year, two women I worked with were badly beaten for no apparent reason. Busi's head looked like a soccer ball she was kicked so hard and so many times – police refused to take statements.

Is this a frequent occurrence in your neighbourhood and amongst your friends and family? Here it is almost normal and that is not normal.

If you want to understand why rape and GBV is not an issue to the entire judicial system, you need to know that our former state president is a serial rapist and a straight out thug and criminal. He sanctioned the routine rape of female African National Congress (ANC) cadres in Tanzania when he was a general in *Umkhonto we Sizwe (armed wing of ANC)*. To politician and ex-president Jacob Zuma and his men, the woman cadres were there to be used and abused at leisure, and a number of these men have proven themselves to be seriously sadistic.

The first woman to speak out on the rapes and other heinous abuses sanctioned by the former state president never made it to the Truth and Reconciliation hearings. She happened to be white and a farmer in Magaliesburg. She was found having been raped, sodomised and tortured to death, then she'd been stuffed into the boot of her car. The violence of her death sent a warning to others to shut the fuck up, and it worked! Even the journalist she spoke to, who has all the notes from their initial interview, has

remained terrified and mute, still afraid for her life. Why? There is hardly a single male comrade that isn't implicated in the rape, or worse, of his fellow freedom fighters, and today they all sit in Government, the Security and Police Services, and the ANC itself.

The #metoo campaign gave voice to just two former ANC cadres who finally spoke out. Everything they said was denied or treated with disbelief, especially by the perpetrators' wives, but it really happened. Feel free to look up and verify the two stories.

Farm attacks and rape is a culture in South Africa. Not even little girls and babies are sacrosanct. Socially, there is no stigma attached to any of these heinous crimes, nor to corruption and theft. If senior ANC leaders can rape, pillage and plunder with impunity and then go on to become State President, so can anyone else. If you think this is a harsh statement, please do your due diligence and look it up – all the evidence is freely available.

In 2019 there were 552 farm attacks with 52 murders. At the time of writing there have been 139 attacks and 29 murders so far this year and we are not even half way through the year, 68 occurred under the covid 19 lockdown, this is 22.2 attacks per month of the lockdown.

If a farm attack was just a case of simple robbery nobody would bat an eye, and I would not be sitting here writing this sad missive. I would still be on my farm singing "The Redemption Song" and the "Mongolian Prayer to the Mountains" to my cows while I milked, but when perpetrators spend hours torturing their victims and killing them slowly – from 98-year old grannies to children, the only rational conclusion that any sane person can draw is that something is very wrong here.

There are journalists who are very quick to point out that crime in the townships is rife, and yes it is. This country is rotten with crime. Nobody is denying this, but torture is not rife in the townships, and to compare the one with the other is just muddying the waters and doing neither shitty situation justice. Having survived two attacks and experiencing the level of hatred and cruelty I encountered in both, I feel I am more competent to judge and comment in this regard than any journalist or statistician.

As a family we have battled extreme trauma and loss, and we have survived. I am not even going to go into the extent of the psychological damage we have suffered.

Despite everything that has happened, not a day goes by that I don't wish that I could farm again. I would give both eye teeth and my left tit to farm here. Realistically though, what are the odds I'd survive a third attack? It's a miracle I survived the first and second ones. Living through that twice in one lifetime is more than most humans ever have to endure – even those in war zones.

I know I will not survive another tragedy brought about because we are who we are. I cannot help the colour I was born, my gender, nor the place I was born. I know my country has no love for me, but it's not in my nature to give up, which is why I am

studying, proactive in finding solutions because, you see, I have Hope that there is a small, out-of-the-way place where I can live without prejudice, fear and insecurity – a place where I can be a fully productive part of a reasonably sane society that does not sanction malfeasance to the extent its occurs here. I just want to be free to grow food, make cheese, bake bread and enjoy a fulfilled life, like any other gran, watching my grand babies grow into well-balanced, strong and beautiful people and my children get old.

I don't believe that this is too much to expect or ask.