

Short Stories of Apartheid

By

Ilan Ossendryver

Forward

As a young boy, a White young boy growing up in South Africa, I saw many strange things happening around me. These strange things were happening to the Blacks and not the Whites as far as I could see.

Distinctly, I remembered the days when around my house, in the White suburbs where the quietness of the day would be broken by loud whistles and shrieks of run! Then came the ugly Bedford trucks carrying police. They would brake with a screech and out would pour police with batons and whips in hands, running after terrified Blacks, mostly old women. They would be caught and violently shoved in the back of the waiting Bedfords. Then it would be quiet again until the police came around again to search for Blacks without permit - passes - to be in White areas.

I remember the day I wanted to play jazz in my garage with the gardener who was a jazz musician. When I got around asking him to come play, he said he couldn't because he was Black and that according to the laws of Apartheid, it was forbidden to socialize with Blacks in White areas. The laws of racial segregation. I remember being extremely angry and confused. As a White living in South Africa, it became difficult to look into the eyes of the Blacks, the African majority ruled by White minority.

The turning point in my life, came when I was still a young boy. After teasing and teasing and teasing my Black nanny one night when she was babysitting us, I called her a 'Kaffir.' As long as I live, I shall always be ashamed of what I said to her. I knew at the time the word was bad, but I used it to hurt, to cause pain. And when I saw that pain in her eyes, I felt as though someone had ripped my heart out. It hurt, and when I think about it today, it still brings back that hurt. Through this, I learnt about the horrors of Apartheid, the system of race segregation and its sickness, its leaders, the corruption of the legal system, the health system,

the transport system - the whole South African system. The church system probably was the worst of all the false ideology that spurned Apartheid as right and righteous. In the name of G-D these men of the cloth called Apartheid right for the people, using the Bible to promote the system of Apartheid as a G-D instruction. And that G-D had created Blacks unequal.

Only when Apartheid began breaking down and eventually ending did the religious leaders come out to pronounce Apartheid as an evil and anti-Christian practice. They probably came out with this to save their own skins in case of a violent Black uprising against the Whites, which of course never happened. I must point out of course that many religious leaders did not support Apartheid, and were vehemently against it. Many risked their lives.

And so goes with the Truth Commission. Everybody trying to save their own by coming out to be 'healed.' Mostly to avoid some kind of prosecution.

As a White growing up in South Africa, we lived a privileged life, mostly at the expense of Blacks. They dug the gold, we ate the results. We lived in a lifestyle almost untouchable by many countries around the world. Our standard of living was high, the food the best, houses enormous, swimming pools, tennis courts, garages and the servant quarters. Jobs for the best. Schools for the best. Whereas the Blacks were dealt the worst of everything, excepting the exceptionally lucky.

June 1976. The Soweto riots. They were great. I was at Damelin College, when the riots broke out. When the teachers told us to stay indoors, I went outside to cheer them on. Probably, I too did not want to study Afrikaans.

I remember the Market Theater. It was one of my havens. There I would meet Black and White political activists of all kinds who fought against Apartheid. The theater was excellent. But going there in itself was a play. At night, I'd get into my car, drive through the loneliness and desolate streets of Johannesburg's CBD district, under the M1 bridge until I would arrive at the Market. The feeling at the theater was rather than watching theater, you were being watched. All eyes on you. It was scary and challenging. And when you did sit down to watch a play, you had the feeling that of the 100 people in the audience, 99 of them were security police.

Then I left the country to study in the United States, getting a degree in journalism. I returned to South Africa. My haven in the midst of the racism around me was the Bensusan Photographic Museum, in Parktown, in an old wonderful double story house. The bottom floor with its wooden floors, had the museum, housing old cameras of all formats and photographs. On the top floor was my synagogue, the library housing thousands of books (it seemed like thousands of books). And as it goes, the house was demolished and the museum moved to a new home. I have never been back

I had a job at the Jewish Herald, edited by Morice Dorfman, one of the best editors in the country. There my photography became more important to me. Whilst working there, I was told more or less to keep my mouth shut about speaking out against Apartheid. It could be dangerous. This in conjunction with many feelings I was having, I left South Africa and emigrated to Israel. A year later, in 1985, a state of emergency was declared. How many people were rounded up and arrested, murdered, tortured, disappeared for life. I wonder what would have happened to me had I stayed.

Nelson Mandela is free and Apartheid gone. And there is even now a new President of South Africa, after the Mandela era. (An era the world cannot forget. South Africa is a free country with equality for all. A new and wonderful flag flies in the blue sky. But there is a new fight on the horizon that must be taken care of very quickly, like starting yesterday. Crime that is so out of control that it appears unstoppable. The tragic result of Apartheid must be dealt with to ensure the future of South Africa. South Africa is a wonderful country with lots to look forward to.

My work in the next pages deals with an ugly past. Some of the images can still be seen today in various parts of the country.

My only hope is that for the country and its children, and people, that they may live in harmony without suffering. And that they may all live a wonderful life.

Ilan Ossendryver

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Closed for Business

Before the villagers rise from their beds to begin their day and long before the hummingbirds have taken flight, darting from bush to bush in search of worms, Joseph is already walking the natural path that eventually leads to the front gate of his bakery.

Darkness still covers the early morning as he makes his way along the uphill winding path that overlooks his tiny village. Somewhere halfway - only he knows where - he'd sit himself down on a large rock that has been worn down over the centuries into the shape of a chair. There he'd take a sip of water, staring at the same time at the horizon to watch the change. In minutes the day would come. The sky would unfold, giving way to a pastel coloured painting, wet brightly as the sun pops up from behind the blackened hills. Joseph would stare in amazement. Then, just as abruptly, he would close his eyes as the sun whisks upwards, allowing its strength to fall on his face.

As though from a thousand flashlights, the streaks of rays would cut through the low-lying clouds, giving Africa its first light. And every time this happened, even when the sky was clear, Joseph always concluded that Africa was arising: the clouds that made misty overtures would be gently pushed out of the valley, letting in the sunlight as the dew sparkled like wealth and dripped off leaves to form dozens of little, silver trickles of streams, gurgling away. Now the mountain showed its true colour, a rich vibrant green, with the deep blue of the Indian Ocean now quite visible on the horizon.

Slapping his thighs in approval, he'd pick up his lunch and continue to the bakery.

At the entrance, Joseph would take one more look at his world, knowing that once inside he would not come out until his quota of bread had been baked. Below him, he could see the dense valleys, walled to the top with trees and other subtropical vegetation, the path he had taken, sandwiched between neat patches of banana trees and squared clumps of sugar cane. From where he stood, tiny puffs of smoke could be seen from freshly lit fires by the women

of his village far below. The children would be playing freely. Then his eyes would swing upwards towards the distance where lay the “White city”; its buildings and smoke smudging the days’ creation.

It was time to work.

Today was Friday. Joseph knew that he would work twice as hard because the hotel in the “White city” ordered double the amount of bread to satisfy the guests that came as far as Johannesburg, 700 miles away. Fifty-five loaves of bread to be exact, to be delivered by noon sharp, at fifteen cents a loaf. The price never changed. Only the quality of the bread improved, though the same recipe was always used; passed down from father to son for many a generation.

Inside the bakery the air felt thick with the rich smell of baking bread that lingered on after Joseph had finished they day’s work. It seemed over the years, if not centuries, that the white walls had managed to suck into its cracks all the sweet smells, sealing them in shut.

Joseph would start by digging out the mielie cobs which he had placed a foot into the ground to dry out. Along with them, he’d grab a huge bunch of sugar cane sticks. Together, this would be his coal for the fire to heat the clay handmade oven. Once the construction was completed and set alight, he’d make his way over to a nearby fresh spring to fetch water.

Seeing the fire well ablaze, he’d break into a broad smile. The construction of the coal meant that the heat would last for hours, enough to make the fifty-five loaves of bread and more than enough to feed the families of his village.

Placed underneath the wooden table, overnight stood a container of water filled with tiny shoots of sugar cane. Joseph would add to this the exact amount of yeast, mixing it together until diluted. The container would then be placed on the window sill for six minutes to allow fermentation. To prevent overheating, the container would be covered with layers of wild banana leaf.

Next, with precision Joseph would scoop eighteen handfuls of flour to which salt would be added and placed into a corner of the table that had been accurately chiseled out to form a bowl-like indent. The eggs came next previously beaten and mixed with olive oil: not too much though because he knew of the overpowering strength of this oil; and then the yeast mixture with its sweet base would be added.

Vigorously, he’d agitate the mixture into the flour, his hands a blur of motion. The dough now would be placed onto the table ready for kneading until smooth and then placed in a sunny part of the bakery. In the hour or so it took to rise, the bakery would undergo a cleansing and preparation for the next round of baking. Once in a while he’d peak to make sure that the dough was fine.

Seldom did he make mistakes.

Time passed quickly now as Joseph fashioned the dough into half-moon shapes. The loaves were soon removed from the oven, well before the noon deadline demanded by the hotel in the “White city.”

Sitting patiently outside the bakery, the children of the village waited. They had come to help Joseph carry the bread six miles to the hotel whose view overlooked the neatly crashing waves that rushed up the clean beach, used by White bathers only

The door opened.

“Ten loaves for you....Three for you....Wait until you are older, then you carry more.” The procession would march off, in fine line, in playful spirit, behind their leader Joseph.

They'd pass through the village handing out the excess bread to the waiting women who would scurry off in all directions to feed their families. The procession would continue down the natural path to the main road that led to the city. By midday, they'd gathered at the back entrance of the hotel waiting for the owner to inspect the bread - as if the bread ever needed inspection. But Joseph knew the sales ritual all too well. He had gone through it for many years, like his father and uncles.

“Joseph, boy!” Pik Vaan, the owner of the Holiday Heights, a two star hotel, blurted out in a stern but friendly tone.

“The bread better be bloody good otherwise I'm not taking it,” he said, breaking off a piece and chewing on it. Joseph, his hat held to his breast waited for the answer and payment.

“Ja it's lekker man, tastes good. I don't know how you do it. But Joseph, listen here, listen carefully you hear? I don't want your bread no more. A baker from Bloemfontein moved into town and from now on we are going to buy from him. So look after yourself, Joseph.”

The door to the back entrance to the hotel closed, leaving Joseph staring at it blankly, confused, holding his payment tightly in his fist. His eyes glistened softly, but red with hurt, the children chasing one another, waiting for their elder to lead them home again.

All that had become part of tradition suddenly became a closed book, the dismantling of a gentleman's agreement, He had feared this, that a White baker would come to town, but not this soon. After all, he knew he was Black and the entrance for him was at the back of the hotel; his most important customer whose regular orders of bread helped him buy the the few odds and ends that the members of his village needed so badly.

Joseph ordered the children home, instructing them to say he'd be back late in the night. Joseph walked to the front of the hotel, painted fresh pink with the outside beams and window panes in a strong blue. Up the stairs he climbed onto the verandah that looked into the dining room, where guests were seated at lunch.

He watched in silence as they spoke, some cutting into his bread and stroking each slice with a generous amount of butter, stroking every corner of his bread until evenly overly thick.

He watched as they ate, some with their eyes closed, others reaching for seconds.

At one table at the back of the dining room stood the owner, one hand on the shoulder of a guest. Both were laughing. Then by chance he looked up to where Joseph stood, stared back and then turned away. Joseph turned away. It had been the first time that he had ever seen his bread eaten by someone other than the people of his village.

The town was small with not that many streets and had only one main street. The townsfolk knew Joseph well, greeted him as he went. He stopped outside the new bakery, bright, clean with its shelves stuffed full of freshly baked bread and cake. The owner was chatting away with some of his customers while one son packed the bread, the other working the till.

Joseph stepped inside, into a world of difference, but one he knew so well. What struck him was the aroma that seemed to escape at every opportunity rather than stay in. Everything, the counter, the oven, the glass cabinets, all sterile, reminding him of a hospital he had once visited.

“What do you want?” The owner asked rudely. Joseph turned, reached out for a loaf of bread and placed it on the counter. Quickly like the automation of the bakery itself, the son working the till thunderously ordered Joseph never to touch the shelves again.

“Kaffir boy, you want bread, you knock on the door and I’ll think about giving it to you there. Give me thirty cents and get out.” Without a packet, he left. Everything outside remained the same. “Howzit Joseph...Hey, how’s the village?”

Across the street from the gleaming bakery, Joseph sat in silence. Tearing a piece from the loaf, he ate and the tears came to his eyes, the first time since his father had died nearly five years back. And he cried, remembering his father’s words to him, “My son, the bakery at the top of the hill is now yours. Teach it to your children so that they may teach their children and so they may sustain the life of our village.” With those words, Joseph saw his father die beside him.

For weeks he sat idle, sometimes staring up the hill. There was no need to wake up before the sunrise, to enjoy the glory of watching the African awakening. It had once given him strength but that seemed unimportant to him now. Mostly he could be found lying in his hut, occasionally coming out to help fetch wood for the fire his wife made every morning. The villagers were worried about him.

Joseph was in a deep sleep when a sudden commotion outside his hut woke him.

“Where is Joseph the baker?” boomed a voice, one he immediately recognized as that of the hotel manager in the “White city.” I want to speak to him now!” Half asleep Joseph stumbled outside to greet the visitor. This was the first time a White had ever set foot in the village.

“Look Joseph, my guests are complaining about the bread we buy from the new baker in town. They prefer yours. I have decided that I shall only buy from you and I have even told the new baker that I don’t want his bread. Friday, noon, fifty five loaves of bread and don’t be late.” The hotel owner smiled as he walked off.

There was dance and song in the village. Joseph rubbed his eyes. "Today is Thursday. Friday will be hard work."

That night the sky was clear, the stars bright, the moon full giving depth to the valley, illuminating the ocean faraway. The village was peacefully asleep as the smoke drifted downwards towards the bottom of the valley, passing its way through the village.

Then the screaming began.

"The bakery is on fire....The bakery is on fire....Joseph, come quick!"

Like a leopard about to catch its prey, Joseph shot up that path, passing his rock, cutting his feet, panting out of breath, running towards the gleam of red, his bakery now crumpled, caved in and burning fiercely; dying. The wooden table on which he worked had fallen at an angle, black in colour.

The seal of aroma had escaped from the walls. In its place the stinking smell of burnt bread left in the oven for days, blackened to a powder, now rotting the air. Joseph sat down in front of the gate, while the villagers encircled him. A cloud covered the moon and a light drizzle began to fall as the villager, exhausted, knowing that nothing could be done, turned back and headed for home, leaving Joseph behind.

At noon the next day, the backdoor entrance of the hotel opened. Joseph's wife stood there.

"Master, Bass, something bad happened. The Gods took bakery away by fire. Joseph has not made bread.

Mr. Pik Vaan the hotel owner, stood silent. In all his years of running the hotel, it was the first time that a delivery had not been made.

"Come sit inside, Elsie." He ushered her into the hotel lobby where she sat, watching the guests, her head sometimes bowed in embarrassment.

The new bakery was thriving, customers coming and going. Mr. Vaan walked in. "Goeie more Meneer Vaan, I see your hotel needs our bread today," laughed the owner, his sons joining in.

"Do you know that Joseph from the nearby village had his bakery burn down last night?"

The son working the till laughed even louder. "It was easy to burn that Kaffir's bakery down. You think we want Kaffir competition? No way. Mr. Vaan you know the people this city wants our bread and not the bread made by dirty black hands." The silence was icy, and some customers began to walkout, followed by the rest, none of whom took their orders.

Mr. Vaan boomed out to the people that happened to pass by, to notify everyone in the town to a meeting urgently at the hotel. Within an hour, the people of the town had gathered most not knowing what for.

“Joseph, the baker from the village p on the hill has supplied this town and my hotel with his bread for many years. Last night, Joseph’s bakery was destroyed by fire, deliberately burnt to the ground by our newcomers, the Botha’s to avoid competition, especially from a Black. My friends, as you all know, the people of the village and our town have always maintained an excellent relationship. We must keep it that way.

The meeting went on for another two hours with many people having something to say.

On top of the hill, by the gate, sat Joseph, cold as he had not moved all night. Behind him a noise grew louder and louder until it was upon him. To his utter amazement, he saw coming up the hill hundreds of Whites, from the town, old and young, men and women, some of the guests whom he had seen eating his bread, carrying buckets, spades, cement and bricks. By nightfall, a new bakery stood.

That Friday at noon, Joseph knocked on the backdoor of the hotel. Mr. Vaan appeared smiling.

“Joseph, boy, the bread better be good and tasty, you hear. I’m counting on you, you hear?” he said, pinching off a piece from the loaf and placing it into his mouth. “Bloody good. Just as always. How do you do it?”

From now on, payment on your bread will be thirty five cents a loaf. Friday by noon and don’t be late, we have new guests.

Joseph smiled and his followers as always, took to their line. They marched down the street passing the new bakery. On the door it read, “Closed for Business.”

Quickly Joseph slipped thirty five cents under the door and continued home.

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Echoing

A ghostly mist rises above the sun-parched ground, burnt dry by lack of rain.

An agreement appears to have been made - no life in this motionless arena called the homeland will be allowed to exist. The soil, once fresh, now cakes of hardened sand, creviced like an old man on his death bed, his once youthful expression, now a hanging portrait, displays lines of age.

Layers of sand loosened by harsh wind float upwards in chaotic whirls, spurred on by the hot air, silhouetting dead trees, broken raggedly-black. The ground in the far distance bears movement - at first thought a mirage - slow and morbid, a symphony of the final gasp of air.

Straggling onwards, they walk, trudging in pain with each footstep to the destined resting place, that final place to bring new life to life. The distance comes closer, the images larger

than previously thought; and the movements slower. Eyes wander aimlessly, as though time had ceased or had never been invented at all.

Skeleton fingers clutch the beloved. Breasts have nothing to offer but try, painfully, bitterly, in hoping for a miracle.

Everything looks fish-eyed and distorted; the world as seen through cataracts. Whimpers and whines play the air, echoing strongly, but the soul too weak to allow for its continuation. There are thousands bodied the same, the murky colour of the blazing sand that tones their skin, as they drift endlessly to death.

She looks down unable to do anything, quite helpless; nowhere to run but she can't run. She's too weak. And so she sits, exhausted, waiting for time to finally come. Yet she continues to believe, she will not give up nor accept the prospect of needless death. Here eyes bear the sign of immense pain, a pain without tears, for there are no tears left to drip.

One a beauty but now grotesque and shrunken, the woman clutches her life in her arms, cradles it as though all were well, holding it tightly, afraid of losing it. But she knows defeat is nearby and stops fighting it. Death. Still, she continues to swat the buzzing flies off her child's mucous-covered face. In a while she stops, realizing that it is of no use and that they, the flies will become the eventual winners in the morbid battle for survival.

Her strength dried up from the blazing hear, she stares helplessly down, the child's eyes gazing back, confused by the pain. The child, the only child that she loved and that enrobed her in love, now numbs her days, that moment, that petrified moment. Slowly, with extreme difficulty, determined with courage, she bares her skin, all chapped and broken, as she removes the cloth strung over her body so thin, on the verge of transparency.

Her hand reaches for her breast - flat and shrunken like a popped balloon that had been trampled on by people at a carnival - it now dangles as though there had not been a use for it at all. Her fingers reach out for her child to draw it closer to her breast, softly, as though it knew it would no do its duty. But just giving that child one last chance to live, to smile, to burst, with happy laughter.

The child gazes up, never blinking - only on the touch of a fly - moves his head forward, towards life, hoping for the expected. His mouth pulls harder, sucking harder, twitching. The mother frantically pushing her breast deep into his mouth, pushing and panting for results. It is her only child, both of them fighting for survival, a brand new existence. The ballet of movements slows to a trickle. Her child's eyes close with tiredness and pain. Too much energy spent.

She, too, closes her eyes, exhausted with the effort - not before the tears drop, the first in a long time. The child's eyes remain shut. She begins to sing the eerie hymn of death in that hot sandy air for her deceased. And is joined by others. Echoing, echoing...

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Family Reunion

The Umuzi -- village -- of Lwako, surrounded in the distance by slowly rising hills with a thick running river flowing through it, had always been considered a tiny place.

Of the 150 families that had inhabited Lwako, only 90 remained. Those who had sought other ways of life, traveled far distances, arriving in large city centers, hoping to find work. Some were successful while others who did find success or who did not, felt the same longing for Lwako's serenity, decided to return. There, they had a pleasant way of life, farming the rich soil, their culture intact, and a family bond both strong and unbreakable. Tradition glued the Umuzi together, on their land that they owned for over a century. They valued it with a strong passion for they thanked it for having never failed them. Even during periods of drought, the fields of Lwako yielded and the river somehow always managed to flow. Their farming methods were still primitive, yet their fields sprouted some of the finest crops in the country, bringing handsome wealth to the members of Lwako. Although, new ideas were readily available to increase yields, thus wealth, they slipped by like the annual migration of birds passing through. The villagers weren't against new ideas, only wary of the consequences they would have over the Umuzi's lifestyle, if introduced. Happiness was their prime concern together with their eternal relationship between the land and their family unity.

It was quite early one morning , the time most of the villagers were well on their way to begin the days' work, that a car entered the Umuzi, winding its way to the house of Indala, the Chief of Lwako.

Indala opened the front door of his simple home to welcome the unexpected visitor. He had come from Johannesburg nearly three hours away. Both men nodded without shaking hands. For a few minutes they exchanged conversation and while doing so, the visitor pulled out an official envelope, handing it over to Indala who watched his visitor, a representative of the South African Government return to his car. Indala, the Chief of Lwako, feeling weak, silently stared at the envelope then raised his tired eyes to watch the trail of dust lifted by the car as it vanished into the distance.

Inside the house, mostly decorated by colourful beads and traditional artwork, crafted by his villagers; as well as gifts to Indala, waited his wife to hear the news that the White stranger had brought. She followed him into the kitchen, where he sat by the fireplace. His wife took the envelope and placed it on the shelf next to a family portrait. Indala now in his late seventies knew well about life. He had provided well for his family, took care of the children when they became sick;

and showed much love for his wife, never having during their long marriage, his voice raised against her.

With all life's experiences, and education, Indala had failed in but only one thing; he could not read nor write so the official letter inside the envelope remained unread.

"What's the matter my husband, you look disturbed?" She asked worriedly.

Indala nodded, his wrinkled face fixed on the shelf.

"The White man says that in three days, they are coming to take our Umuzi from us." The Chief stopped, turning to his wife.

"He says that our land belongs to the White people and we must give it up and that the people of our village will be moved to a new place not far from Pretoria."

"Pretoria! But my husband we have never been there. We were born here."

Indala shook his head unknowingly, got up without a word and went to the back of his house where stood a huge Willow tree. This was his private domain, not to be intruded by any outsider, unless invited. So powerful was it for Indala that not even his wife dared to disturb him whilst he sat in contemplation, under its wavy gracious branches.

The sun rose quickly, killing the early morning black shadows cast by a clump of nearby trees that during the afternoon heat served as a welcome retreat. It was under these tall trees that all functions were celebrated, excepting matters that fell under the jurisdiction of tribal law or matters of great concern. These were held under the Willow tree.

Soon after the White man's departure, word spread out, calling all men to a meeting. Such abrupt callings, quite irregular, ensured full attendance. It did not take long for the surrounding vicinity of the Willow tree to be host to many men, talking to one another in short low whispers. Most had gathered that it had something to do with the surprise visit of the White man. Talk ended abruptly, making way for Chief Indala to make his entrance. All eyes concentrated on him as he motioned the

meeting in session by waving his knobkerrie back and forth. Slowly raising his head, Indala began to speak, his voice a little shaky, in a tone that tinged with anger and sadness.

“My brothers of Lwako, we are faced with great danger for we are about to lose our Umuzi to the White man.”

“This was informed to me this morning by a member of the government. The choice for us is hard but clear in what action we must take to prepare ourselves. If we surrender to the White man, then no harm may come to us or our children. The second choice is to stand fast and fight for Lwako which may result in violence and even death.”

The men of the Umuzi remained quiet in thought, absorbing the Chief’s words. Nearby the women had gathered just within hearing range of what Indala was saying. Whatever their fate was to be, it was going to be decided by their husbands, brothers and boyfriends.

“So my brothers of Lwako,” Continued Indala, “After more than a century of family ties to this Umuzi, we are now faced with forced removal to a place far from here, a place that you and I have never seen. I believe it to be near the big city of Pretoria in a valley that has no river flowing through it and whose land is unfit for planting seeds.”

“No river!” queried the men, their voices becoming louder. An Umuzi without a river is a place of doom for they quickly realized that without water nothing could grow and their families would be faced with certain starvation and deep thirst.

The meeting intensified. They saw their position as precarious and whatever action they would eventually undertake it would be limited because they understood the strength of the government. The discussions and arguments wore down to a decision that was clear; they would for all it was worth resist all attempts of removal. On principal they would fight for what belonged to them, against a power whose aims it was, was to secure White domination over all the land and its peoples.

The Chief announced that the next meeting would take place after the White man had returned and that full attendance was required. A path opened the way between the seated villagers, allowing Indala to walk through. Then the villagers rose to carry on their day.

It was a sweaty hot afternoon without a comforting breeze. Clouds bulged quickly, developing into soft drizzle. Sparks of lightening cracked the air and the drizzle became vicious, turning the soft sand road that led to Indala's house into a pack of moving mud. On it making its way up slowly sliding every few feet, a car stained brown and dripping came to a slithering halt. The unexpected visitor had reappeared, jumping out and dashing up the few stairs. Out of breath, he banged on the door.

Waiting, he turned and faced the land that opened in front of him, which shone bright green that melted into the purple wet sky. The land he saw was very fine, its wheat fields scatteredly planted. His eyes settled on the river that rushed by strongly from the gushing rain, whose banks were lined of unkept bush and trees where birds of all sorts had settled; where flowers bloomed, radiating vibrant colours.

"Nothing like it." The White official chuckled under his breath.

"Soon it will be ours."

He was about to knock for the second time, but standing there between the open door, stood Indala, watching his visitor for a brief moment. He turned and led the visitor through the house into the kitchen where his wife had been cooking. As they entered, she left, taking their youngest son with her. Their eldest had left home to attend university.

Indala and the White official sat at opposite sides of the table, eyeing each other out in an uneasy silence. The official sensing that Indala was not about to offer a drink, pulled out a pack of cigarettes, offering one to Indala. He shook his head. The official shrugged his shoulders, lit one for himself and took a deep draw, exhaling loudly. He gazed intensely at the Chief, wiped his forehead using his arm and began to notify him that officially within two days, everyone in the Umuzi must be packed ready to leave.

"Trucks will arrive early to take all your belongings. You must be ready, not to waste our time." The government official paused. "If you are not, you will be defying the law and all of you will be arrested and taken to jail."

Indala's consistent silence had been spent preparing for this moment. Slowly, he raised his weary head.

“We of this village have decided to stay and fight you. As you can see our village is a simple one. No weapons can be found here. Our only weapons that each of us have, are our hearts. With this, we shall fight you even if it means the end of us in death. This Umuzi, a village to you, has lived in peace for many years. Never have we bothered or antagonized anyone and with all the White farmers in the area, exists between us an excellent relationship.”

Indala paused, clearing his throat.

“For this, you want us to give up our land? Our homes? Our birthrights? You want us to move to a place we do not know? I say no!” Indala’s fist smacking the table in defiance.

“We shall fight you in the very way we teach our children. Dignity. His is our weapon from our soul within our hearts.”

Indala stood up walked over to the window, staring at the Willow tree. The slight wind rustled the branches.

“If you and your villagers do not leave peacefully, then there will be sorrow.”

“That will be on your government’s conscience, nor on ours. Your government has forced us into a situation that for the first time we may resort to violence, if need be.”

Indala stopped, rubbed his eyes and twisted his head in the direction of the official who had not budged from his seat.

“We shall defy you even if it means that our blood must run all over our land.”

Indala opened the kitchen door that led to the back of his house. For as long as he could remember, never before had a guest entered through the front and left out the back. As he out the White man stopped and turned to the chief.

“In two days be ready.”

Outside, Lwako had the aroma of being clean and new. The rain had stopped. Switching from harsh streaks of lightening, hovered a twin rainbow wide and vibrant. Birds lifted off flying in zig zag patterns, whistling their tunes, backed up by the splattering sounds of water dripping from roofs and trees. The dense clouds began to break up, revealing a brilliant sun that began its work drying up the earth.

Outside, the people had gathered.

Indala, the Chief of Lwako spoke to his listeners. For so many years they had put their trust in him. Even at this moment of crisis, they would continue to respect his decisions, whatever the cost.

“Tonight,” Paused Indala, looking at his people, “When the moon is high up and the stars full, each family shall gather up their most valuable possessions. These must be placed into a thick plastic bag, strong enough to keep water out. Only those things of value must be placed inside, nothing else. Furniture, pots, and pans, and other large things must remain inside you houses. With our horses and donkeys, we shall carry our valuables down to the river where it curves, the spot where our women do our washing. It is there we shall bury them for safe-keeping. Go now my brothers. Go now and inform you families to start packing. Remember only small important things.”

Silence fell hard on Lwako that night as though a sudden vow of silence had been thrust upon each villager. Packing began earnestly. Indala held a portrait of his family posed in front of their house.

“We look so proud and happy.” He thought to himself, placing it in the last of his plastic bags, securing it tightly shut.

The night crept in. It was pleasantly cool. High up now, the moon, almost full and the stars flickering gently as though touched by a whiff of cold air, groups of people began streaming towards the river, carrying their plastic bags over their shoulders. The strongest men of the Umuzi had prepared holes to bury the bags. The carrying, the walking, the digging went on deep into the night. By the first glimpses of sunrise, the villagers began returning home, exhausted and hungry. At least their possessions would be safe.

During the remainder of the day, only the sprinklers, feeding the crops worked hard. The out-of-date tractor remained idle and as if a curfew had been slapped on Lwako, the villagers remained indoors.

Indala occasionally went out to sit under the shade of his Willow tree. There he would meditate, take short naps and then rejoin his family inside.

As the sun sank slowly bringing in the night, restlessness and apprehension overcame Lwako. Children, puzzled by their parents' sudden change of personality, cried. Husbands and wives held one another in comfort. They touched their children, fed them and sang them to sleep. Sleep came uneasy, but so exhausted were the minds from the fear of the unknowing that when it eventually took over, it was heavy.

The ground was dewy soft. One or two lonely patches of cloud drifted by swiftly. Chickens in the backyards began their crowing whilst running in circles and figure eight's. In the kraals, cows began to walk about with goats jumping and skipping in between them. Dogs began to bark loudly, then growl menacingly, then bark loudly again.

Indala opened his eyes.

"They are also different today." He told himself, turning over to face his wife, placing one hand on her soft breast.

Not far from the Umuzi, a rumbling noisy convoy was inching its way towards the village.

The noise became deafening, sending villagers out of their beds to peer out their window, where before them stood a dozen or so vehicles filled with army and police riot unit squads. Out of Ratel APCs' pointing in all directions, policemen took aim. Some carried shotguns loaded with salt-filled cartridges. Others had in their magazines, live rounds, while others had teargas and rubber bullets. Every policeman had attached to his belt, a long plastic whip. Second in line to the riot units, stood a row of bulldozers, their engines running. Behind them were Bedford trucks and vans ready to carry the belongings and people away.

Groups of four policemen began scattering in all directions taking up positions in front of the houses. A Colonel heading the operation climbed out of his car.

"People of this village, you have exactly five minutes to gather your things and come outside." He ordered, his voice showing a deep Afrikaner accent, as he spoke using a loudspeaker.

“If you come out now, no harm will come to you. But if you don’t, then we will take you out by force.”

The payoff was stifling as policemen with fingers tightly wrapped around the triggers stood by waiting for orders to go in. Inside the houses, nobody moved, but for the house of Indala, where a minute to go before the deadline, he came out. The Colonel watched his approach carefully as he made his way over to him. Indala the Chief stopped, looked at the Colonel with hate beaming from his eyes, then announced.

“If you want us, then you must take us out of our houses by force. Otherwise we shall not move from this land.”

Indala began walking back to join his wife and son.

“Stop!”

Indala walked.

“Stop!” if you don’t I’ll shoot!”

Indala walked.

A shot rang out, whizzing passed just above Indala’s head that crashed into the wall of his house.

Indala walked.

“If you don’t stop right now, the next one will be for real,” The Colonel shouted out threateningly.

Indala taking no notice continue to walk.

The second bullet was fired, hitting Indala in the left leg, causing him to cry out and slump to the ground. Slowly, picking himself up, he stumbled as if drunk towards his front door. His old legs could not keep him up for long and eventually made it to his door. There his wife pulled him in and slammed it shut.

The Colonel surveyed the area, looked at his watch, then with a chilling cry, ordered the police to attack. Frenzy broke out as policemen surged forward, firing teargas through windows and indiscriminately firing off live rounds. Some of the villagers, panic stricken, came out running blindly. A few managed to escape into the nearby tall bush while others were beaten or shot.

On one side of a house a group of villagers stood ready waiting. As the policemen reached the front door, they dashed out with speed, hurtling rocks, some of them hitting policemen in the heads. Before they realized what had happened, the villagers disappeared behind the house to re-organize.

A unit of about six policemen sitting and waiting were called to help and once again they approached the house. This time the attack came from above, as boiling water and bricks came falling down from the rooftop, causing some to scream out in agony as they retreated. A third attempt was made. With a helicopter carrying army sharpshooters, firing with precision, and with the help of the forces on the ground, , slowly each house fell victim to the strength of the government forces. After what seemed many hours, the villagers realized that all was lost. Dogs were brought in, snapping viciously at the villagers, bleeding and limbering towards the waiting trucks, their hands behind their backs handcuffed painfully tight.

The Colonel running out of patience and angry over the performance of his squad, ordered the bulldozers in to destroy the houses, regardless of some of the people that had chosen to remain behind. Their engines revved energy and they began to roll forward, clearing everything in their paths. As walls began to cave in, hysterical screams began to emerge from amongst the rubble. One by one the houses were flattened, leaving traces of dust floating in the air.

Indala's wife had carried him to safety as he watched, his eyes soaked with tears, the bulldozers clawing away at his only home he ever had. His wife held him tightly, knowing that her husband, tough but a gentle man had been destroyed.

As the end of the day approached, the peaceful Umuzi of Lwako no longer existed, reduced to nothing.

Indala's oldest son had arrived from Johannesburg on hearing the news of the removal. He rushed to his father, throwing his arms around him, holding him for a long time. He gazed at the remains of his home where he was born and raised. Slowly leaving his father, he began to walk towards the his house, remembering how the Umuzi once looked, On the ruins he sat. Amongst the torn bricks and cement he spotted the official letter that was once delivered to him by the government official. He picked it up, tore it open and began to read.

Suddenly he screamed, jumping to his feet.

“My God! What have they done my father! They have destroyed the wrong village.”

The branches of the standing Willow tree moved in the wind.

.....

The Law

Tuesday, June 16th, the anniversary of the Soweto riots. The packed courtroom, heavily guarded by security police wheezed with apprehension. Some of the people present were stiff with fear, others had their heads raised high, displaying talent for thoughts of violent retribution.

In the dock, their eyes protruding wildly, glancing around nervously, soundlessly stood the three young accused. Their foreheads glistening with sweat, fists clenched tightly, they waited for the White magistrate, the custodian and keeper of Apartheid law to appear. Amidst the solemnity of the warm morning and the blue skies outside, there was low chatter and whimpering from the families and friends who had arrived very early and managed to find a seat. Those wanting to attend the trial had lined the stairs leading into the courthouse building, along the corridor to the courtroom itself. Many of them were rudely turned away by policemen, most of whom were carrying loaded automatic weapons.

Weeks before the trial, the press, on both sides of the political spectrum, had given it much editorial play. The right-wing newspapers, usually pro- Nationalist government, played heavy on the premise that this trial would prove Apartheid a sound policy, the only means of keeping Blacks happy and the Whites in control. The left-wing newspapers wrote that it

showed the wickedness of Apartheid and that no decent nation could implement such racist policies.

Among those attending the trial were the foreign press corps and local journalists. Some whom the government considered 'antigovernment', were denied entrance without explanation. Photographers and camera crews were barred from entering the courtroom. Only police photographers had the privilege and with it made a nuisance of themselves photographing everyone present. Their intention; to update their files, record faces for future investigation, carry out further harassment to 'reveal' the individual's political ideology.

By eleven a.m., the courtroom doused itself to a trickle of sickly coughing, then fell silent as the inside of a morgue. The accused stared straight, as though permanently paralyzed. Now and again, they would break their posture to glance at the people in court.

"Will the court please rise."

There were shuffles to comply with the order, to honour the entering magistrate. Some of the elderly Blacks, not fast enough to rise remained seated, provoking ugly frowns from the police. The White magistrate of Afrikaner extraction, cumbersome in his actions, took to his chair, heaving as though he had forgotten to breath.

"You, Nelson Matshala, Moses Moteba, and Alfred Tambana, are on trial for the most violent and brutal murder, the most violent that I have ever come across in my twenty years as a magistrate. The cold-blooded murder of Professor David Goldstein, a man who devoted his entire life to medical care for the Black people of this country. Your people have lost a great man, a man who was generous, passionate and kind. You three are facing charges of outright murder."

The atmosphere in the courtroom remained tense as the magistrate continued.

"Do you...Nelson Matshala...Moses Moteba...And you, Alfred Tambana, plead guilty or not guilty to the murder of Professor Goldstein? Remember that at all times, you must speak the truth and nothing else."

It came as expected: "We are not guilty. We not do it."

With that the spectators coughed, spoke earnestly amongst themselves and re-positioned themselves on the hard wooden benches. A court bailiff swiftly ordered quiet. The magistrate looked to the accused as they stood helplessly, the White world and a system playing against them.

"Can the prosecution please call upon their first witness."

"Thank you, Your Worship, I would like to call upon Sergeant Vries."

A burly blonde man in his early thirties approached the stand.

"Please state your name."

"My name is Sergeant Janis Vries."

“How long have you served in the South African Police Force?”

“Ten years.”

“Where did you discover the body of Professor Goldstein?”

“I was patrolling the streets of Soweto with my partner. We’d been tipped off by one of our informers that a group of ANC leaders were preparing a demonstration against a planned hike in housing rents. The demonstration was to be held close to where our unit was stationed. So we went up to check. As we approached the street, we saw a White man’s body lying on the ground. That’s where we found him. “

“What else did notice?”

“We saw three Black youths running away from the scene.”

“What did you do next?”

“First we went to check the victim, but he was dead and then we chased after the three and brought them in on murder charges, under the Terrorist Act Number 83 of 1967.”

“Can you point out to the court the three youths you and your partner arrested?”

“Yes sir, they’re sitting there over in the dock, sir.”

The faces in the courtroom shifted to the accused and then back to the police officer as if watching a tennis match. The expressions of the accused turned pallor, their eyes blinking epileptically.

“Please describe to the court how Professor Goldstein was murdered.”

“He was lying face up in a huge pool of blood. His throat had been slashed seventeen times, according to the coroner’s report, by a twelve inch razor sharp knife. Both his hands had been chopped off, from the wrists up with a hatchet, and one of the hands had been placed in his mouth. His clothes had been ripped off and the lower region of the body had been mutilated beyond recognition. His testicles had been placed in the hand that stuck out from his mouth.”

The courtroom erupted into a wild array of noise. The magistrate shouted loudly for silence, threatening to charge anyone making more noise, with disturbing the course of the law.

“Where were the weapons found?”

“Next to the body.”

“Were there any fingerprints on the weapons?”

“No, they had been wiped off by the blood.”

“You mean the three accused used the blood to wipe clean any markings of fingerprints?”

“Objection! The prosecution is leading the witness by linking the accused to the murder.”

“Objection sustained. Will the prosecution deal only with the facts. Strike the previous evidence from the record. Please continue.”

“Thank you, your Worship. Sergeant Vries, why weren’t there any fingerprints on the weapons?”

“There was so much blood covering the weapons that any dirt or fingerprints were washed off.”

“Thank you, Sergeant. May I call my next witness, Your Worship?”

The magistrate, briefly looking at his watch, looked up and nodded.

Warrant Officer Pik Smit was called to take the witness stand.

An oldish man, with very thin facial features, his head bearing little hair, approached the stand. As he passed his partner, Sergeant Vries, he gave a quick wink and smile.

“Warrant Officer, Pik Smit...How long have you served in the South African Police Force?”

“Going on twenty-five years now.”

“Would you say that the murder of Professor Goldstein was pre-planned?”

“Sir! Only an animal could be capable of such a horrendous act against a fellow human being. This murder, this murder must be the most gruesome case that I’ve ever come across. I’d say it was definitely pre-planned.”

“Objection! Your Worship, the prosecution is leading the witness again by linking this case to others.”

“Objection over-ruled. The prosecutor’s question is valid and so is the answer.”

“But Your Worship....”

“Mr. Ginsberg, my decision is final. Can we get on with this trial?”

Advocate Ginsberg, recognized for his successful defense of political

detainees, sat down and continued to scribble notes. He knew that in almost all the political trials that he had undertaken, the court always favoured the side of the police. It had always been alleged that Judges and Magistrates in South Africa, had been put under pressure by the

BOSS -The Bureau of State Security, to come out with a ruling that would not undermine the Apartheid system

“Where were the three accused when you saw them?”

“They were near the body.”

“Then what happened?”

“We shouted at them to remain where they were, but they ran.”

“When you brought them into custody, did they confess to the murder?”

“Yes. We have it down on a confession sheet, which they signed.”

“Can you describe to the court the attitudes of the three accused after their confession?”

“They seemed very proud of what they had done. They said that they would undertake more such terrorist attacks on Whites until the government fell and that the country was back in the hands of the Black majority.”

“Thank you. That is all. You may step down, Warrant Officer Smit.”

With a triumphant look, rubbing his hands together, the prosecutor declared that his case was closed. The magistrate summoned the Prosecution and the Defence to the bench. After a few minutes of huddling together, he stood and declared that the court was adjourned until the following day. Almost tripping over his chair, the magistrate waddled out. Immediately, six policemen pounced on the accused and marched them away. The spectators took their cue and began to discuss the trial amongst themselves: “They’re guilty.” “They’re not guilty.” “There’s not enough evidence.” “This trial is a fucking scam by the government, fuck them.” “They confessed and that’s good enough.” Reporters ran out to file their stories and police photographers again became a hellava nuisance.

In one corner of the public gallery sat an elderly woman. Throughout the proceedings she had remained still, as though cast aside to live alone in the world. Continuously, for hours, her eyes were riveted tightly upon the the wall in front of her. Her sullen face revealed her misery. With deep sadness and regret, she knew she had to be there.

Wednesday 17th June

By nine a.m. the next morning, the courtroom was filled to capacity. In the same corner sat the elderly Black woman, wearing the same clothes as the day before.

“Please rise....!”

“Will the defence please present his case?”

“Thank you, Your Worship. I’d like to call Sergeant Vries to the stand.”

Sergeant Vries approached the stand as confident as ever. Strolling across the courtroom, with a huge smile, Advocate Ginsberg greeted the sergeant who was evidently taken aback by his friendly approach.

“What’s it like to patrol the streets of a township like Soweto?”

“At first it was tough because it was new situation for us. Some of us had never set foot in a Black township before. But after a while, it became easier. You know, the communists want this country.”

“What do you mean, it became easier?”

“Well, whenever the Blacks saw us, they backed off as if they were scared of confronting us. Also we were well-equipped with riot gear.”

“What does riot gear comprise of?”

“Most of us carry whips, truncheons, teargas, shotguns and rubber bullets. If we found ourselves in extreme danger, we can resort to the use of pistols or assault rifles to protect ourselves.”

“What constitutes a dangerous situation?”

“If rocks, petrol bombs or other such missiles are thrown at us.”

“So you mean, if a ten year old girl throws a stone at you, this constitutes a dangerous situation?”

Sergeant Vries remained silent.

“Well... Does it or does it not constitute a ‘dangerous situation’?”

“Yes it does.”

“And therefore, you have the right to shoot that young girl dead because she supposedly puts your life in danger? Is that true or not?”

The officer, worried by the line of questioning, stared down to his feet and answered, “Yes.”

“Could you please speak up. The court did not hear your answer.”

“Yes! Yes! I have to protect myself and this country... That’s why I chose to be a policeman!”

“So what you’re saying is that there is no difference in danger whether one person throws a stone or a thousand throw stones?”

“I have to protect this country.”

“Look, I didn’t ask you what you thought of this country. I simply asked if there is a difference between one person or a thousand.”

“There is no difference.”

“Was there a difference after the press was banned from areas of violence?”

“It’s easier to carry out riot control procedures, free from interference. The press got in the way all the time.”

“Objection! Your Worship, the defence is asking questions that have no bearing on this case.”

“Your Worship, the prosecutor knows damn well that my questions are relevant.”

“Objection sustained, Mr. Ginsberg, but if your questions diverge from the subject again I will have to overrule the. And if you continue to use such language in this courtroom again, I will have you removed.”

“Sergeant, you said it was easier not to carry out riot control. Now you can do as you like, you’re no longer under the scrutiny of the public and press. What time did you discover the body?”

“Nine thirty am.”

“What was the first thing you saw?”

“We saw the three accused standing by the body.”

“How were they standing?”

“They were looking over the body.”

“What was their behavior like? How did they act?”

They appeared to act quite normal. In fact they seemed quite happy.”

“The length of the street is 755 metres. And halfway down, at 377.5 metres away, you saw the expressions of the accused? You must have very good eyesight Sergeant Vries.”

From the public gallery came a short burst of laughter. Sergeant Vries fidgeted

“So you saw the accused standing there, first? Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“Why did you tell the court that the first thing you saw, was the body and not the accused.?”

“I meant the accused.”

“Sergeant Vries, you have served in the police force for ten years. You have much experience, and now when three young men’s lives are at stake, you say you made a mistake. Are you suggesting that you’re not sure of what you saw?”

“I am sure we saw the three Blacks over the body and then they ran away.”

“What puzzles me and everyone sitting here in this courtroom, is how you and your partner saw all this from half way down the street, and not at the beginning of the street. The only entrance to the street is at the beginning or the end, or maybe you climbed a few houses to land in the middle of the street. Maybe you rented a helicopter....Tell us, was the professor dead or alive when you reached him?”

“He was dead.”

“Your partner, under oath, in this courtroom, said he was alive when you reached the body. So whose telling the truth here?”

“Blood was still pouring out of him when we got there.”

“Plainly, Sergeant, that means the professor’s heart was still functioning and that he was alive. Therefore he was not dead as you said. Is that correct?”

“I don’t remember.”

“It looks as if you can’t remember a thing today.”

Sergeant Vries remained silent, his face white as though never having been touched by the sun.

“Where were the weapons?”

“They lay in the pool of blood.”

“Did you at anytime see the weapons in the hands of the accused?”

“No”

“So there is no real evidence that the accused carried out the murder. Can you prove that my clients committed the murder or not?”

“Yes, they were by the body and they confessed to the murder. That is proof alone.”

“If your only proof is a bunch of lies, then I have no further questions.”

“Would you call the next witness, please?”

“Thank you, Your Worship, but before I do that, please let me convey to you and this court, something that has been worrying my clients - the structure of the court. The

principles of justice apply to every man, woman and child. But, here in South Africa, my clients are intimidated by a White magistrate, a White prosecutor, many White policemen, and myself, a White defence lawyer. They feel that true justice cannot be performed. We who work within the judicial system hope to believe that justice is beyond political belief and ideologies, but we find it painfully difficult to convince our Black clients they'll receive a fair trial. As citizens of this country, they are denied the right to vote so they feel they have no right to stand in this court which they see as an instrument of an Apartheid regime that ensures political and economic wealth in the hands of the white minority."

"Advocate Ginsberg!!! We are here to deal with the sadistic murder of a man, not to discuss the politics of the country. According to the law of this land, every man, woman or child, regardless of skin colour, religion or political leaning will be given a fair trial. Beyond that, let me tell the accused that all men are equal under the law and that includes you. The court is adjourned until 8:00 a.m. tomorrow."

Thursday 18 June

"Will the court please rise."

"Will Warrant Officer Pik Smit please take the witness stand."

"Do you swear.....?"

"Good morning, Warrant Officer Smit, how often have you testified in a murder case?"

"Many times."

"Then you realize the extreme importance of your testimony and you acknowledge that the three young men standing in the dock are dependent on your moral standing as a policeman in the South African Police Force, to speak the absolute truth. The sentence will determine whether my clients receive the death penalty or will be awarded their freedom."

"Yes, I do realize that."

"Good. Tell me, was Professor Goldstein dead or alive when you found his body?"

"We found him still alive."

"But your partner testifies that he was dead when you reached him."

"He looked dead but blood was still pouring out of his body. My partner must have taken him for dead."

"Did you shout at the accused?"

"Yes, I ordered them to remain where they were."

“What was their reaction?”

“They began to run.”

“Why didn’t you try to stop them? You could have shot them dead.”

“They were too far away and we wanted to inspect the body first.”

“I don’t believe what I’m hearing!” You’re able to determine the expression on a man’s face, to see if he’s smiling or crying from halfway down the street, but he’s too far away to be shot at. So far, the evidence given by you and your partner borders on the ridiculous. The street in question is so long that even at halfway it is impossible to distinguish the expression on a man’s face. It was your scream that made them run away? Wasn’t it!...Tell us the truth....You wanted them to run away, so as to make them look guilty.”

“No! No! They ran away because they, they’re fuckin’ murderers.”

“Order, there will be no foul language in this court whatsoever do you hear me?” thundered the magistrate.

“When armed police approach a group of Blacks, do the Blacks usually stand around waiting?”

“No, they usually disperse.”

“So they were acting normally?”

“Not in this case. They were standing around a dead White man.”

“If there had been no murder, would their running away seem normal?”

“Yes.”

“So what you’re saying is that you and your partner, armed with riot gear, frightened them away?”

“I said it before and I’ll say it again....They ran off because they’d committed a crime.”

“Okay, lets begin again. You and your partner entered the street because you were told, a riot had been planned?”

“Yes that’s true.”

“Was there any indication that something was about to occur or had occurred?”

“There was nothing unusual happening in the street.”

“Could the accused have been trying to help the professor?”

“Of course not. Why should Blacks help a White man?”

“Officer Smit, I care little for your racist remarks. When I ask a question, I’d like an answer.”

“No, they couldn’t have been trying to help the professor. They confessed to the killing.”

“Tell me Officer Smit, do you know the population size of Soweto?”

“No and I don’t care.”

“Too bad, I’m going to tell you anyway. Its over a million people but it’s not found on any map because only Blacks live there.”

“Who needs to know where it is?”

“At nine thirty a.m. was anyone walking the streets?”

“No, the Blacks were indoors.”

“Do you mean to say that in a city with over a million people, the streets were empty?”

“I suppose they’d gone to work.”

“Let me remind you, Officer, that the murder took place on Sunday 7th June and as far as I’m aware, noone works on a Sunday. So how do you explain the absence of so many people?”

“I don’t know.”

“On the street where the murder took place, there was noone around?”

“I didn’t see anyone.”

“Officer Smit. How many policemen are there in one unit?”

“I can’t answer that, it’s confidential information.”

“Could you ever find yourself in a situation where you were confronted alone?”

“One of our standard orders is never to be alone. Usually there’s a back-up ready in case crowds get out of hand, for safety as well as for a show of force.”

“So why did you and your partner patrol that street alone?”

“We weren’t patrolling, just checking.”

“In my language, Smit patrolling and checking mean pretty much the same thing. How far were you from the rest of your unit?”

“Three streets away.”

“If something had happened, how would you have notified your unit?”

“By blowing a whistle or firing into the air.”

“Why did you go alone if you expected to find a riot?”

“We didn’t feel there was any danger.”

“Even before you reached the street?”

“Yes.”

“So can you tell us what’s going on three streets from this courtroom?”

No word has heard from the officer. His face bore a child-like expression as if having been scolded for bad behavior.

Ginsberg continued, “So you come to a place where a group of Blacks are standing around. There are no signs of a riot but by pure instinct, you feel the situation is explosive. So you call the rest of the unit by firing into the air. The people panic at the sounds of gunshots, and run for their lives. The rest of the unit pitch up and start shooting as well as arresting Blacks who didn’t appear to be posing any threat. Your presence and your so called instinctive action, turned innocent people into criminals.”

The magistrate was quick to interrupt. “Advocate Ginsberg, I don’t know where your line of questioning is leading but it seems irrelevant. I’ve warned you before...”

“Your Worship, my final questions do pertain to the subject”.

Turning to the witness, he added, “Officer Smit, could anyone else account for the actions of you and your partner?”

“Noone but ourselves.”

“So whatever took place out there was only seen by you and your partner?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Are you sure there was nobody else on that street?”

“Yes, I’m sure.”

“How long did it take for the accused to confess to the murder?”

“A week.”

“Your Worship, please note that it took a week to extract a confession. I will not pursue this matter but merely wonder what methods were used to obtain the confession. Warrant Officer Smit, let me point out what you said earlier - that only the accused could have murdered the Professor because they were standing next to the body. And with a highly developed level of instinct and excellent vision, you knew they had killed him. Is that correct?”

There was a chilling stillness about Warrant Officer Smit as he looked wistfully at the magistrate, then to his partner for reassurance. Without looking up or waiting for an answer to his question, Ginsberg abruptly announced: “You make me sick. Step down. I have no further questions for this witness, Your Worship. Now I’d like to call to the stand a witness who can testify that my clients were nowhere near the body of Professor Goldstein and did not commit the murder. For reasons of her age, her name cannot be revealed.”

From the public gallery stepped a tiny Black girl, dressed in a bright pink dress, who looked about ten years old. As if they were watching a magician performing tricks, the people in the court gasped in wonder and disbelief that a child was going to testify. The and his two apprentices sat idly unimpressed. When the public quietened down, the magistrate beckoned to the girl, placed his hand on her head and whispered in her ear. Her head nodded up and down in agreement. With a glowing smile, he told the girl to approach the witness stand, where a high chair was placed for her.

Then the defense took over.

“I will not ask you too many question. If the questions seem hard, I’ll speak slowly until you understand them. If you do not understand, don’t be afraid to tell me...”

She nodded and a babyish voice, squeaked: “Yes.”

“Do you like policemen?”

“No not like.”

“Can you tell us why?”

“They come here, hit everybody, my brother, hit my mother very hard. They say we are Kaffir.”

“Do you understand what ‘Kaffir’ means?”

“Not understand, but brother of mine say it is no good word.”

“The big policemen hit your brother and your mother. Who else do they hit? ”

“They hit everybody in the street. Everybody run and scream. My mother, she cry all the time. Some of them who police hit, they sleep on ground. Everybody tries to wake them up when policemen go, by they very tired. People take them to bed.

“Not like policemen.”

“Do you remember the White man on the ground?”

“Yes, he good man. Mother take me to him many time. He give me chocolate. He smile and laugh to me. When he sleep on ground, he cry and scream. Police hit all the time.”

“Who did the policemen hit?”

“Hit doctor man, hard.”

“Do you remember how many policemen hit the doctor man?”

“Two.”

“Look very carefully. Do you see the policemen who hit the doctor man, in the big room?”

With her tiny hand just reaching over the rail of the witness stand, she pointed to Smit and Vries.

“They two hit doctor man.”

All eyes in the courtroom were fixed on Smit and Vries. They grinned broadly as if they had just won a fortune. To show how little they cared for this accusation. The defence turned to the girl and asked:

“Are you sure you saw those two policemen hitting the doctor man?”

“I see doctor man cry all time when they hit the doctor man?”

“What did the policemen do after they hit the doctor man?”

“They go to house, take them away from house.”

“Who did they take away?”

She pointed to the accused.

“Your Worship, I have no further questions.”

“Would the prosecution like to cross examine the witness?” asked the magistrate.

The prosecutor nonchalantly answered: “No, I don’t need to ask this girl anything.”

The magistrate adjourned the court until a verdict was reached. Outside the courthouse, in Johannesburg, the press mobbed the prosecutor who stated that he was confident that the Blacks would be convicted of terrorism. Ginsberg was greeted with calls of; ‘Black Lover’. ‘Communist’, ‘Don’t trust the bloody Jews.’

Monday 22nd June

The magistrate announced that he had reached a verdict. When the court reconvened, the public gallery was full as usual. The old woman who looked tired, as though she hadn't slept in weeks, took her usual seat.

A strange silence fell inside the suffocating courtroom.

The accused stood, trembling with fear and confusion.

The magistrate entered gracefully, with a verdict.

“I have heard all the evidence put forward in this trial and this evidence have I studied it with great care, down to the last minute detail. Professor David Goldstein, a man of good public standing who dedicated his career to serving the poor, died in a needless act of terrorism. It is difficult to know what motivates a human being to cut down the life of another. What can be understood is the basis of acceptable moral behavior, as laid down through our code of ethics and law. This set of rules determines how society should live and protect the individual as well as his property from harm or exploitation. The law also serves as a deterrent. When individuals place themselves above the law, the social structure is reduced to chaos. This must be dealt with quickly and firmly. This is what this trial is about. To show that when a crime has been committed, justice must be carried out quickly.”

The magistrate paused briefly, readjusted his glasses and continued, “I believe in the law strongly and I believe in the South African Police whose task it is, is to uphold the law, to see that it is obeyed.

You Nelson Matshala, Moses Moteba and Alfred Tambana, thought of yourselves as above the law and in a horrific fashion, murdered Professor David Goldstein in cold blood. I hereby sentence the three of you to death for the crime that you all committed. ... Do you have anything to say for yourselves?”

“No, Your Worship. My clients have instructed me that they refuse to speak in this racist court. Then only words they wish to express is that they are innocent to the charge of murder. Let me add one thing, Your Worship - this verdict reached today is a moral outrage and disgrace - Fuck you Your fucking Worship.”

“Get him out of here arrest that man!” screamed the magistrate as the courtroom remained densely quiet. Advocate Ginsberg, his face lowered into his hands was quickly taken away by the police guards. The old woman turned slowly and left the courtroom, alone. Vries and Smit embraced. The courtroom emptied quickly. All that remained were the discarded notes of the journalists that had been in attendance.

Two weeks later, after the hanging had taken place in Pretoria Central Prison, two policemen were found shot dead in the streets of Soweto. An old Black woman was arrested, charged with murder.

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On the Other Side

The day could be described as gray. Too gray. Wintry days take hold of a blueness, as though the ocean, turned upside-down and its cold hue of late afternoon, had begun to drip down on the location - but just that, it couldn't make it - today, tomorrow. It was winter blue if you had a secure house in the northern suburbs away from that wretched gray. In fact, gray was seldom seen there; the awarded privilege when the sun decided to show face or slowly slip down in a multicolored dusk. Even the sun had been told to stay away from the confines of the location, never to please, make the grass grow, or allow the flowers to blossom. A visit to the land of emptiness.

The location's coldness wrapped you in, in a strangling vice-tight hold, but at the same time, tried to squeeze you out, not wanting you, warning you to move on. I hated the streets but I had to be there, to report on a nation's uprising.

The streets are cruel here, just muddy foot-thick strips of slush in the rainy season and suffocating dust in the dry.

The pavements of cracking bricks, formed a wall continuing forever. They separate rows of prison-style houses that kept the residents of the location. There was no time here - I learned - unless someone died, when that house became different, an appealing gesture of difference, with the other houses of the accordion-shape formation squashing from both sides, inwards, towards the house that claimed death. It became a show of concern, to break the monotony.

Only then did time perhaps move on, in slow mourning, until death had become a forgotten drama, the accordion of houses slowly taking their previous pattern. Mass produced houses designed in minutes, thousands of on both sides of the strip, separated by another strip and another and another. In each hundreds of thousands of Blacks coming and going, entering and disappearing, in and out of stark white-washed houses of deceptive purity.

A young woman sits knitting. At her feet are bundles of wool, bright red with strands of blue. Her eyes gaze downwards to the silvery knitting needles speeding away unwavering in deep concentration. No one can disturb her hour. Her mind lost in fantasy perhaps, forgetting all, oblivious to the harsh surroundings in which she is confined.

On the same street a baby cries out, stops in a while as her mother leans forward, thrusting her nipple into his mouth. She smiles and begins a lullaby, beautiful but eerie, as though not fit for this place. A precious moment, a face of pride directed to her suckling baby, only. She has for this instant forgotten the future. It doesn't exist, the hateful past, but only the the wonderful seconds of present time, time that is only temporary. The baby falls asleep, satisfied, the lullaby lingers on for a few minutes more, and then silence.

She too fades into a sleep.

Further down another strip, I spot four men huddled together, trying hard to keep the cold air out, their mouths allowing for drifts of cold steam to wander while staring at the cards in their chapped shaky hands. As each speaks, a puff of cold misty hue clouds the air, as a steam locomotive would spit out in gaining power to produce movement. They, too are deeply

engrossed in what they are doing. There is a quick chuckle from the winner, a choir of despondent cries of disbelief from the losers. The next hand is dealt quickly, taken with a swig of the bottle and the lighting of homemade cigarettes. Then all is quiet in deep concentration until the next victory. The stillness, this quietness seems so false, so reassuring that everything here is fine.

I keep moving.

At the junction of the strips, stand two youths, one dressed in jeans, faded and ripped, his T-shirt bearing the initials UDF; the other in garage light brown overalls. Each stands like a newly-elected politician after a successful election campaign. But these teenagers are far from the avenues of a regular job, let alone important decision-making. Their existence in a racially classed country has reduced them to attacking the equally destitute who may have money in their purses at the end of the month. Someone who is too old to fight back, who will give in easily without defense. Blood will be drawn today, each day, the faces of those countless young, disappearing into rows of block houses, grinning with location achievement. They look at me with hateful eyes as I pass guardedly, knowing the passions of their minds.

I turn quickly into a new street. One with the attributes of a political catastrophe in the making, by a government ruthlessly bent on suppressing the black masses, shaping them according to its will.

Soul-impassioned rhythmic beats of township jazz/gospel usually loud, blaring from decaying radios wrecked of age, has changed channel to sounds of trepidation. The number one song has been scored by many an oppressive government; deadly bullets slamming into human flesh with a thud of an old bass drum while others off their marks, zip into walls sculpturing violence. The added notes - cries of agony as whips come down, lifting sprays of blood into the air. The song is played over and over until its melody is memorized and sang out in nightmares.

The calmness on the other side of the strip seemed like an illusion, a front to turn back visitors seeking answers to questions. The vans spill out uniformed men in blue and brown, charging with ferocity, unleashing powerful terror on children, men and women who fight back the pain with cries of pain. They run with outstanding courage.

Others stand firm with dignity.

Many fall.

Houses are entered and the struggling dragged out, rammed forcefully into waiting vans - struggling men, women and children, the strong, the blind and the crippled dragged from their homes...struggling.

I am witnessing it, my eyes trapdoor shut, now only allowing for the sounds of repression to enter my mind. It is a reminder that I'm not supposed to see it; off limits to Whites. The truth is jailing me. I must hide.

The cops are closing in fast and when they see me, for seeing them, the knife will come down hard - slashing.

“Can you hide me?”

“Sorry, there’s no room, you see its a tiny place I have here.”

“But they will be here soon!”

“I know, they always come eventually.”

“What can I do?”

“There is nothing to do but wait.”

“Where can I hide this?”

“You see the room is empty.”

The room is foreboding, empty of happiness. Only a few wobbly stools, a table and in a corner, an ancient oven. A bright clean cross hangs on a wall. The oven. I can put my camera bag there.

“Where are they now Mrs. Batshala?”

“Soon they will be here. They are in my neighbor’s house.”

The wait was short-lived. Four blues crashed inside. Catching sight of me brings them to a sudden halt.

“What are you doing here?”

“Where’s your permit allowing you to be in a Black area?” Asked the other cop aggressively, leaving me no time to answer the first question.

“We want an answer now!”

“Please let me explain. My reason for being here is that I came to tell Mrs. Batshala here that her mother died of illness last night and that she must arrange the funeral. That is why I’m here.”

“Ja, nee man, that’s okay. We thought you were one of those journalists who writes lies about our country.”

“Me? Oh no Sir, I don’t even have a pen.”

The cops laugh and warn me to leave immediately. The calm resumes.

Nervously I turn to Mrs. Batshala. “That was close.”

“Yes it was.” Nods Mrs. Batshala.

“Mrs. Batshala, don’t worry, I’ll get the photos of the police murdering your daughter to the newspaper. Tomorrow the world will know.”

Outside life is slowly returning to normal as I make my way through the street. An old man with an evenly cut beard, a gnarled stick in one hand, his legs struggling forward, turns to stare at me. Children in a resumed game laugh loudly in pure delight. They stop, look at me and continue their laughter.

Nothing can stop them.

End
