

Name: Dr. Jonathan Gluckman

Born: 18 December 1914

Died: 25 May 1993

In Summary: Dr. Gluckman's medical background and knowledge gave him an advantage when performing autopsies and identifying flawed medical reports, which helped uncover the truth behind many deaths in detention centers and prisons across South Africa. Despite enduring risks to his professional life, Dr. Gluckman adhered to high ethical standards. It was because of his courage, as well as the resourcefulness of other such non-traditional activists, that the downfall of apartheid became a reality. Even though Dr. Gluckman did not actively participate in protests or strikes, like anti-apartheid activists, his work gave the anti-apartheid movement ammunition. His work helped prove the violence of the state at a critical moment in South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy.

During the apartheid era, there were many protests against apartheid policies. Protesters were jailed, sometimes without trial, for their efforts to change governmental policies. Nearly a hundred detainees and prisoners died under suspicious conditions that human rights and anti-apartheid activists attributed to police brutality and a lack of accountability in the jails. The police offered two main explanations for these suspicious deaths: suicide and natural causes. However, Dr. Jonathan Gluckman, a forensic pathologist, revealed through detailed autopsies that these explanations did not add up. He believed that these explanations were hiding the truth behind the deaths in detentions and prisons. Dr. Gluckman risked everything to shed light on state violence in the jails across South Africa.

Dr. Gluckman helped uncover the truth behind many deaths in detention centers and prisons across South Africa. Although he was not a political activist, he was a man of principle who opposed police violence and brutality. His revelations brought South Africa's brutal system of detention and imprisonment to the world's attention, which resulted in justice for several victims of police violence. Despite enduring risks to his professional life, Dr. Gluckman

adhered to high ethical standards. It was because of his courage, as well as the resourcefulness of other such non-traditional activists, that the downfall of apartheid became a reality.

Dr. Gluckman's medical background and knowledge enabled him to perform autopsies and identify flawed medical reports. Some doctors and pathologists working for the apartheid regime performed autopsies of those who died in detention. They found distinct injuries that classified the detainees and prisoners as victims, but would not act upon this information in fear of spoiling their reputations, losing their medical licenses, or even incriminating themselves. Unlike these doctors and pathologists, Dr. Gluckman reported his findings and scheduled inquests to shine light on the violence of the state at a critical moment in South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy.

Jonathan Gluckman was born in Johannesburg on 18 December 1914.¹ He completed his studies in the U.S. In 1945, during World War II, Dr. Gluckman underwent training to become a pathologist in the army. Following the war, in 1947, he moved back to South Africa to open his own private practice in Johannesburg. Dr. Gluckman became a medical practitioner and a specialist pathologist with the South African Medical and Dental Council. He held a Diploma of Clinical Pathology from the University of London and was a fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists. Dr. Gluckman would lecture as a post-graduate at the University of Witwatersrand and for the college of Medicine of South Africa. His work focused on 'the examination and diagnosis inter alia of disorders and disease in skin.'² Dr. Gluckman became most well-known for his work on South African detainees and prisoners.

¹ John Bridcut, 'Obituary: Dr. Jonathan Gluckman,' *The Independent*, May 28, 1993.

² Historical Papers Research Archive, 'Ahmed Timol Inquest Records.'

Dr. Gluckman's expertise in forensic pathology grew as a number of clients requested his expertise on the death of prisoners in South African jails. However, the more cases he took on, the more his work became tied with the government, because the prisoners he examined were mistreated by police officials. As he continued to examine prisoners' and detainees' bodies, he began to realize the extent of corruption amongst police officials. This is when he found the need to bring this ongoing police brutality to not only the courts, but also to the public's attention.

While many doctors and pathologists examined the bodies of prisoners and detainees in apartheid prisons, including, Dr. N. J. Scheepers, Dr. Ivor Lang, and [Dr. Benjamin Tucker](#), Dr. Gluckman was one of the few forensic pathologists who actually reported the crimes of brutality in the jails, instead of concealing the evidence. Through his work, 'Gluckman showed that state forensic pathologists falsified state post-mortem reports to protect security forces.'³ There were times when Dr. Gluckman requested for old cases to be reopened because of the inconsistencies in autopsy findings, which included failure to 'mention bullet wounds, neglect and clear indications of trauma resulting from torture and prolonged abuse.'⁴ Some of these reopened cases included those of Armstrong Yisake, Zaphianiah Sibanyoni, and [Phillip Siphon Mutsi](#).

One of the most notable demonstrations of Dr. Gluckman's adherence to high ethical standards is when he represented Ahmed Timol's family in the High Court of South Africa in

³ Laurel Baldwin-Ragaven, Jeanelle de Grunchy, and Leslie London, *An Ambulance of the Wrong Colour: Health Professional, Human Rights, and Ethics in South Africa* (University of Cape Town Press, 1999), 107.

⁴ International Dual Loyalty Working Group, 'Dual Loyalty & Human Rights in Health Professional Practice: Proposed Guidelines & Institutional Mechanisms,' *Physicians for Human Rights*, (March 2003): 133.

1971. Prior to the hearing, Dr. Gluckman had observed the autopsy of Timol along with medical examiner, Dr. Scheepers. While in court, Dr. Gluckman made changes to his original statements regarding the death of Timol. These changes were based on Dr. Gluckman's own observations made during the autopsy. During his oral testimony Dr. Gluckman was asked if he believed Dr. Scheepers conducted a thorough investigation of Timol's body. Dr. Gluckman said that '*there were things that should have been done that were not done.*'⁵ Dr. Gluckman's honest testimony demonstrated his integrity as a pathologist, and further displayed his general commitment to do what was morally right.

Similarly, Dr. Gluckman was outraged during the inquest of Steve Biko when he found out that Dr. Lang and Dr. Tucker tried '*to hide the fact that Biko had been injured, by submitting the sample from a lumbar puncture under a false name.*'⁶ In 1985, Dr. Lang and Dr. Tucker's actions were found to be disgraceful by the South African Medical Council on the basis of providing Biko with inadequate medical care and for falsifying his medical records.⁷ During this time, Dr. Gluckman maintained his ethical standards and believed that '*you don't work for or against the police; you work for society...you only give factual findings with no bending and no twisting...it's your own integrity that counts the most.*'⁸ It was Dr. Gluckman's ethical standards that drove him to uncover countless other cases like Biko's and Timol's, in which he found evidence that contradicted the findings from autopsies.

⁵ High Court of South Africa, 'Reopened Inquest of Ahmed Timol,' 152.

⁶ George Bizos, *No One to Blame?: In Pursuit of Justice in South Africa* (New Africa Books, 1998), 151.

⁷ United Press International, 'The South African Medical Council Today Found Two Doctors...' *United Press International*, July 5, 1985.

⁸ Laurel Baldwin-Ragaven, Jeanelle de Grunchy, and Leslie London, *An Ambulance of the Wrong Colour: Health Professional, Human Rights, and Ethics in South Africa* (University of Cape Town Press, 1999), 106.

It is believed that Dr. Gluckman's discoveries, which often contradicted findings of other doctors, may have threatened his professional life. The most notable incidence of this threat was a campaign launched in 1992 to discredit Dr. Gluckman. The same year, Dr. Gluckman *'was subjected to death threats and his office was placed under surveillance...'*⁹ This event had a profound impact on Dr. Gluckman. Although he wanted to bring truth to the forefront, he did not want to risk losing his job. As [George Bizos](#) recalls, Dr. Gluckman *'was a man of integrity who cared much for his profession's reputation but was falsely accused of lying, of being driven by false motives.'*¹⁰ It was after the incident in the Biko case that Dr. Gluckman became more careful in his revelations. Allister Sparks, a friend of Dr. Gluckman, recalled a situation where Dr. Gluckman gave Sparks a copy of the post-mortem report signed by Dr. Gluckman and the state pathologist. Mr. Sparks said, *'he made me promise not to disclose...that he had revealed the findings to me... [because it] could lead to his exclusion from the inquest hearing, but he was so outraged by the Minister's untruthful statement that he felt ethically bound to expose the lie.'*¹¹ Dr. Gluckman was aware that [Minister Kruger](#) had lied about the cause of Biko's death. While he wanted to share his findings, he knew he could not be the one to do it because of the risks of governmental backlash and losing his professional reputation. Despite the threats he faced, Dr. Gluckman adhered to high ethical standards and did what was right, even if it meant doing it anonymously.

To be an anti-apartheid activist in South Africa often meant protesting against the government. However, not all anti-apartheid activists intervened in politics. Dr. Gluckman

⁹ Amnesty International, 'Crime Without Punishment,' August 1993, 4.

¹⁰ George Bizos, *No One to Blame?: In Pursuit of Justice in South Africa* (New Africa Books, 1998), 154.

¹¹ Alister Sparks, *Beyond the Miracle: Inside the New South Africa* (The University of Chicago Press, October 15, 2003), 149.

avoided politics while still striving to achieve justice for the prisoners and detainees who lost their lives at the hands of the police. Although he tried to achieve justice for each of the prisoners he examined, Dr. Gluckman could not have proven the police's guilt without support from the courts. He did not always receive the support he wanted from the government because the government's police officials were the reason for so many deaths in detentions and prisons. While Dr. Gluckman attempted to talk to government officials about the issue, he did so respectfully. In November 1991, Dr. Gluckman wrote a letter to the state president [F.W. de Klerk](#) requesting to meet because he believed the harsh treatment of detainees and prisoners was a matter 'of utmost gravity which, if they became public, would do the country incalculable harm.'¹² This letter was ineffective, causing Dr. Gluckman to follow up after the discoveries he encountered in autopsies performed on people under police custody. As Bizos explained, he was built up with 'frustration and a growing sense of horror by what [was] being committed by the lower echelons of the Police.'¹³ Dr. Gluckman's letters indicate that there was a problem with the police; however, he never pointed fingers at the government. Eventually, Dr. Gluckman became more direct in his letters to the state president. 'It is in a mood of utter despair that I address you concerning the treatment of suspects-not even prisoners-by the SA police.'¹⁴ Dr. Gluckman went on to state that detainees, prisoners, and other South Africans 'are entitled to look to the state for protection against barbarism, particularly at the hands of its servants employed to uphold the law and the sanctity of the individual.' Dr. Gluckman

¹² George Bizos, *No One to Blame?: In Pursuit of Justice in South Africa* (New Africa Books, 1998), 151.

¹³ George Bizos, *No One to Blame?: In Pursuit of Justice in South Africa* (New Africa Books, 1998), 152.

¹⁴ George Bizos, *No One to Blame?: In Pursuit of Justice in South Africa* (New Africa Books, 1998), 152.

reached a point where he needed the government's attention, which he earned by bringing his findings to the press.

Dr. Gluckman not only brought the truth of these cases to the public, but also to the government's attention. In December 1992 Dr. Gluckman brought the results of 118 cases to the Minister of Law and Order, Hennis Kriel. Kriel made these results available to the public, but claimed '*that only thirty-four of those listed by Dr. Gluckman had in fact died in police custody.*'¹⁵ Dr. Gluckman demonstrated his courage in this situation as he rejected Kriel's report as unsatisfactory. The [African National Congress \(ANC\)](#) came out to show their support for Dr. Gluckman's allegations by making a statement the following month on January 15, 1992. The ANC stated that '*Minister Kriel's pathetic and bizarre response to the disclosures about continued deaths in police custody by world-renowned pathologist Dr. Jonathan Gluckman reflect a determination to cover up police malpractice at any cost.*'¹⁶ Dr. Gluckman was respected by entities like the ANC, and he was not alone in his beliefs or efforts to bring out the truth. Although Dr. Gluckman faced opposition from government officials and apartheid supporters, he continued his efforts to end police brutality in prisons and detentions with the courage and general commitment to do what was morally right.

Dr. Gluckman's courage and commitment gave him the ability to reveal South Africa's brutal system of detention not only to the government and the public, but also to the world. South Africa was on the world's radar during the apartheid era. Many countries did not support this system of government because of the harsh treatment many South Africans endured. Within South Africa, activists like Ahmed Timol fought against apartheid and helped reach

¹⁵ Bronwen Manby and Joanna Weschler, *Prison Conditions in South Africa* (Human Rights Watch, February 1994), 54

¹⁶ ANC, 'Minister Kriel's Inadequate Response to the Gluckman Allegations,' 1992.

international audiences. [Ahmed Timol](#) is one of South Africa's most well-known anti-apartheid activists who died while in police custody on October 27, 1971. His death was declared a suicide by authorities. Like many other families of people who died in detention, Timol's family asked Dr. Gluckman to be their private pathologist during the original inquest of Timol's death. In a court hearing on Timol's death, Dr. Gluckman stated that Timol's injuries were caused by blunt force, but implied these injuries could have been caused by just bumping into something. The recent reopening of Timol's inquest on 25 July 2017 evidenced that Timol died of brain damage due to brutal torture by the security police. The world closely followed the reopening of the inquest as many countries believed Timol's death was a result of police negligence. It can be said that Dr. Gluckman's work in Timol's case led him to become a more well-known pathologist in South Africa. Dr. Gluckman's role in Timol's case might have also been the reason he was chosen to play a role in another well-known anti-apartheid activist's case.

Six years after Timol's case, Dr. Gluckman played a role in Steve Biko's death inquest. [Steve Biko](#) was a world-renowned apartheid activist, whose death in detention on 12 September 1977 '*caught the attention of the international community, increasing the pressure on the South African government to abolish its detention policies and calling for an international probe on the cause of his death.*'¹⁷ Biko's case was a milestone for South African families who lost loved ones due to harsh treatment in detentions and prisons. Biko's story demonstrated the government's actions to conceal the truth. Unlike his other cases in the past, Dr. Gluckman was able to shed light on the truth of Steve Biko's death. '*Dr. Gluckman first won an international reputation for his evidence in the 1977 inquest into the death in police custody of the black*

¹⁷ South Africa History Online, 'Stephen Bantu Biko,' 2011.

*activist Steve Biko.*¹⁸ Dr. Gluckman's observations revealed that Biko suffered from a brain hemorrhage, but this injury only played a small role in Biko's death. Following Dr. Gluckman's testimony investigators found that Biko did not receive adequate medical attention after his injury, and was inhumanely treated during his last days. These findings concluded the case of Steve Biko and the evidence of police brutality was displayed for the world to see. The conclusion of Biko's case brought justice for him and his family, but Dr. Gluckman's revelations also helped bring South Africa's brutal system of detention to the world's attention, which resulted in justice for several victims of police violence. His continuous search for the truth gave the families of the victims hope and closure. He had a general commitment to uphold ethical standards and continue doing what was morally right. Other non-traditional activists carried this commitment with them when fighting for justice in South Africa. It was their courage and collective efforts to do what was morally correct that gaining freedom in South Africa became a reality.

Activism has generally been associated with the uprising and mobilizing of political or social movements to bring change. In South Africa, activism did not only involve protests and marches, but also unseen actions to bring about change. The fight for freedom in South Africa was a joint effort; people from all walks of life came forward to provide their expertise. From an external perspective, activists were often seen as people who participated in strikes or politics; however, there were others who used their talents and profession to move the anti-apartheid movement forward. For example, some non-traditional activists used their platforms to highlight key aspects of apartheid, like the harsh cruelty detainees and prisoners faced at the hands of apartheid police. Musicians, like [Miriam Makeba](#), protested this aspect of apartheid

¹⁸ Hilda Bernstein, *No. 46-Steve Biko* (International Defence and Aid Fund for South Africa, 1978), 73.

through her lyrics that satirized ‘*the strick police and their methods of frisking.*’¹⁹ There were also medical workers, like Dr. Gluckman, who performed autopsies on those who were killed in apartheid detentions and prisons to shed light on the true causes of their deaths. It was because of Dr. Gluckman’s courage, as well as the resourcefulness of other such non-traditional activists, that gaining justice and freedom in South Africa became a reality.

It is because of Dr. Gluckman’s courage and moral integrity for freedom in South Africa that he can be considered a significant anti-apartheid activist. To be a medical examiner during the apartheid era required courage because bringing the truth to light could cause backlash from the government and apartheid supporters. Despite this, Dr. Gluckman did what he believed was morally right. In a letter written in January 1992 Dr. Gluckman stated, ‘*Almost all my colleagues in this branch of the profession have adopted the view that they would prefer not to do any kind of work, which might land them in a witness box. This is contrary to my way of thinking and to my general commitment as a doctor and a pathologist.*’²⁰ Dr. Gluckman’s commitment is evidenced by his investigation of approximately 200 deaths in his career. Furthermore, he found a pattern in his autopsies, which explained the causes of deaths for many detainees and prisoners. Dr. Gluckman concluded that about 90 percent of the 200 deaths he investigated were a result of police brutality and violence in South African jails. As he discovered these findings, he took action. Sue Armstrong wrote in her book, ‘*Jonathan*

¹⁹ Charles Realubit, ‘Miriam Makeba,’ *South African Music as Influenced by Apartheid*.

²⁰ George Bizos, *No One to Blame?: In Pursuit of Justice in South Africa* (New Africa Books, 1998), 151.

*Gluckman spoke up against the police when we had hangings in the cells...*²¹ He was not afraid to take a stand against the police and educate the public about the truth.

During apartheid, many South Africans from all walks of life came forward to play pivotal roles in the fight for freedom. From lawyers, to news reporters, to doctors, each of these individuals came forward to fight for justice and help gain back the civil rights of South Africans. Dr. Jonathan Gluckman is a great example of this. He used his expertise as a forensic pathologist to write up post-mortem reports that contained powerful evidence of cruelty inflicted upon prisoners and detainees by police security during apartheid. Even during trying times, often risking his own professional life, Dr. Gluckman upheld his moral values. His actions make him an unsung hero of the anti-apartheid movement.

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²¹ Sue Armstrong, *A Matter of Life and Death: Inside the Hidden World of the Pathologist* (Canongate Books, 2010), 325.

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