

Van Zyl Slabbert in

In the Heart of the Whore

The story of apartheid's death squads

Jacques Pauw

July 1987, Dakar, Senegal: A group of about 60 predominantly Afrikaner South Africans sit around a table with ANC executive members. Mac Maharaj talks about the ANC's armed struggle. He says: "Before I went to Robben

Island I could kill in anger; when I left it, I could kill in cold blood." A chill went through the gathering and then passionate debate exploded which dominated the whole period of our interaction over the next ten days: When, if ever, is violence as a political instrument justified? What about innocent lives? When has one explored every possible non-violent source? The meeting ended without resolution except to agree to differ. The day before my return to South Africa from the Dakar meeting a bomb went off outside the Witwatersrand High Command, injuring scores of innocent civilians. The ANC

accepted responsibility.

Much later, perhaps two years afterwards, in Lusaka, ANC President Oliver Tambo drew me aside and apologised for any embarrassment the bombing may have caused me, assuring me that it was not calculated to coincide with my return. The Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, later blamed a young Afrikaner from an impeccable establishment family, Hein Grosskopf, for leading the bombing mission on behalf of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). This led to an outcry because Hein Grosskopf had neither been arrested nor formally charged.

I joined in the outpouring of indignation and wrote a letter of sympathy to his parents, who are well known to me. After the Tambo meeting, another Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (Idasa) conference between members of MK and those involved with the South African Defence Force took place in Lusaka. At this meeting Hein Grosskopf acknowledged that he was a member of MK and, without accepting responsibility for the High Command bombing, said he was quite willing and able to lead such a mission, even if innocent bystanders got killed.

I am not a pacifist - I can well imagine when, out of anger, fear or in a warlike situation, I might kill. But then, and now, I cannot justify cold-blooded, premeditated murder for political purposes. I lack the ideological dogma

tism and moral certitudes to make this likely, and in fact, have no desire to be cursed with either. But if I cannot justify, I have come to understand how it is possible. This book deepens such understanding.

It explores how successive governments used the State apparatus to change the victims of its policies into enemies and to fashion any conceivable instrument to eliminate them. It records how some of the agents of State security can "kill in cold blood" without regard for "innocent bystanders".

South Africa is not unique in this respect. Many authoritarian regimes have been exposed in their use of death squads, political assassinations and destabilisation. Almost without exception they adopted omniscient ideological delusions of grandeur of "our own total strategy" versus "total onslaught" variety. When this happens, legal accountability becomes capricious; civil

liberties are crushed; society polarises; and brutality and barbarism replace the rule of law. This is true for Chile, Colombia, Romania, Uganda and South Africa.