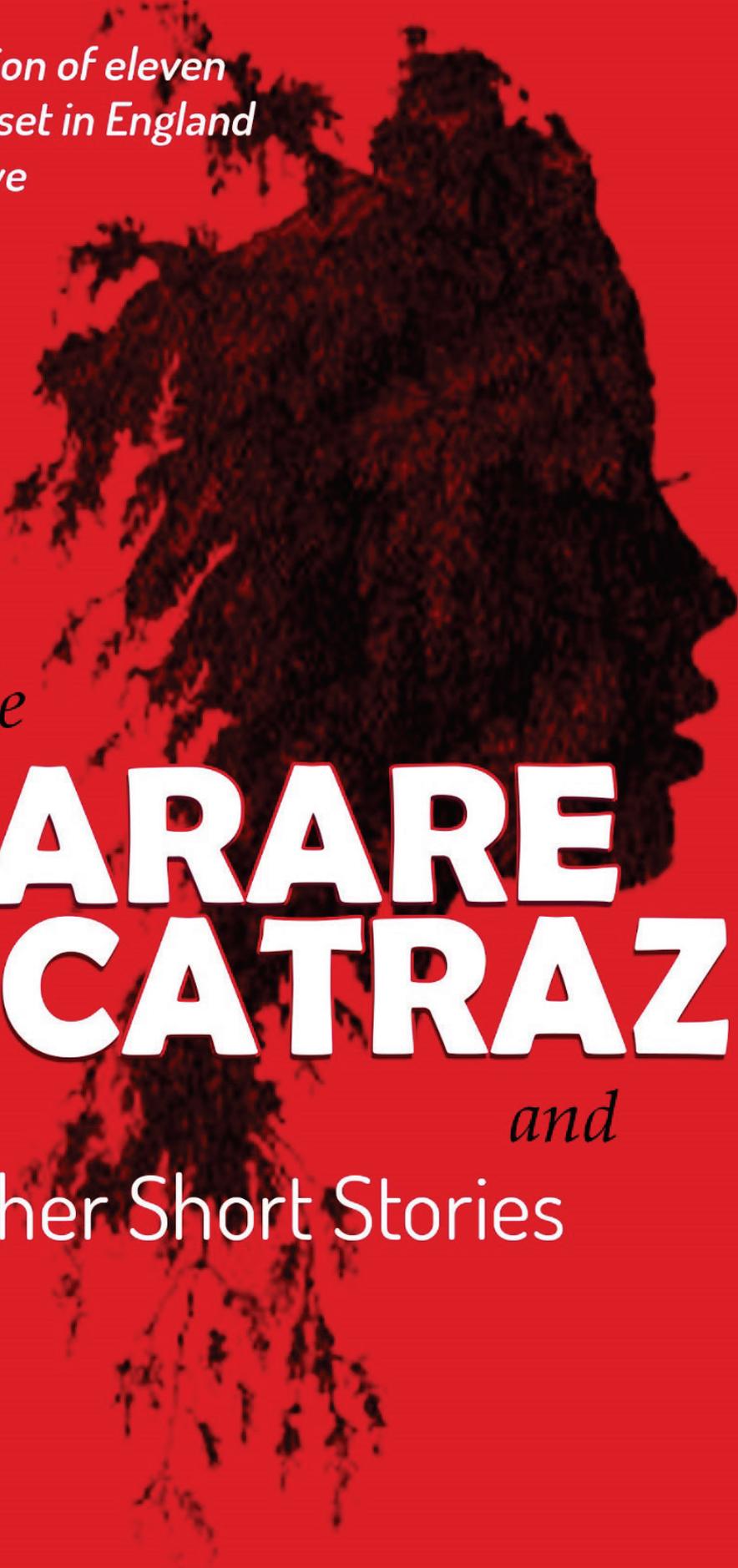


*Gritty collection of eleven
short stories set in England
and Zimbabwe*



Inside
**HARARE
ALCATRAZ**
and
Other Short Stories

ANDREW CHATORA

PRAISE and REVIEWS FOR

**INSIDE HARARE ALCATRAZ AND
OTHER SHORT STORIES**

Chatora writes exceptionally well on Black identity and Black experience and what it means to try and walk straight in a crooked white world.

—DAVID CHASUMBA

(2023) NAMA Prize winner and author of *The Mad Man of First Street and Other Short Stories*

Inside Harare Alcatraz collection of short stories offers a fine assembly of different tones, voices, and settings, giving a view of a Zimbabwe and her diaspora that is multifaceted.

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—**SARAH CALNAN**

Inside Harare Alcatraz and Other Short Stories affords Andrew Chatora a further opportunity to tell his story with more urgency than before. Chatora roars into center stage with this charmed confluence of the novella, the essay, the treatise, the short story, and the vignette. Here is a collection to startle you out of your complacency.

—**MEMORY CHIRERE, UNIVERSITY of ZIMBABWE**

Inside Harare Alcatraz and Other Short Stories



by

Andrew Chatora

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*To my brother Goodmore Chatora,
My biggest supporter,
My proudest fan,
This one is for you.*

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Inside Harare Alcatraz

I

Exploits of an Inside Man

I had multiple identities. I could be a plainclothes police officer, or a security officer providing personal protection to the supreme leader. I could be a pseudo suspect falsely thrown into prison as a decoy to eliminate many of the supreme leader's perceived and real political opponents.

In fact, a common strategy we employed with perfection at the bureau was that we were thrown into the prison cells as new suspects. I assumed this role on many occasions, having been schooled in the art of espionage in our friendly all-weather friend, China.

This time, my job was to follow up on the targeted individuals, Jacob and Hopewell, inmates of political interest.

Our strategies were countless. We could pose as fellow cadres or sympathizers seeking to develop a bond with political opponents, the whole idea being to lure them to lower their guard. We could then strike when they least expected. Often, I helped deal with unsuspecting targets who'd been thrown into Harare Alcatraz Maximum Security Prison on the flimsiest of charges.

Look, the techniques we used were wide and varied. We sought to quell political dissent in the dear leader's republic. We could employ water boarding methods of torture, coerce opponents to drink their own urine and sewage, refuse them water, force them to perform degrading sexual assaults on females, all in the name of the party and the dear leader.

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Our propaganda media wing, the daily *Pravda* newspaper and its sister sole television and radio broadcaster, CCTV, would then embellish our gruesome, inhumane acts with the usual spin: “It’s all a fabrication from the enemies of state. Ours is one of the most peace-loving republics in the world. Don’t listen to foreign-funded detractors for their puerile lies, as the so-called torture and abductions are in most cases self-inflicted, self-staged by them, and in some cases only exist as a figment of their very fertile imaginations.”

They say sometimes the truth is stranger than fiction. I dare say. Underpinning the propaganda strategy was a multi-pronged network of silhouettes, “lampposts” as we code-named them; these were phantoms, bots or ghost accounts sprawling online on vantage social media platforms with our trolls galore to buttress our dear leader’s party and government, and also to sow confusion and foment discord in the so-called opposition and democratic forces. Twitter™ was our godsend haven; we “owned it” given the prevalence of our multitude bots crawling on it, nicknamed *varakashi* (those who get angry on behalf of the state) by our usual detractors.

Induced deaths and planned accidents were among some of our *modi operandi*. In cases where we abducted political opponents, we usually injected them with noxious substances, some of which led to those souls contracting forms of cancer, particularly colon cancer. Our chemical boffins from the local university would also dabble into polonium poisoning. When we couldn’t achieve elimination of our perceived enemies, we could count on the compliant judiciary to concoct and rubber stamp frivolous charges which wouldn’t have stood in any other competent court of law anywhere else in the world.

But one must remember, the republic was the supreme leader’s haven, where anything goes and the party could pretty much criminalize anything, even thinking or breathing. If you were a marked person by the party, then any charge – however ludicrous it may appear to the outside world – would stick. Within the party, we had well-oiled brutal machinery which also periodically annihilated any perceived internal dissenters or potential future threats.

Hadn’t we perfected the art of persecuting political opponents, like we’d done with that garrulous Job Wiwa, an opposition politician whom we’d kept in Alcatraz for over a year and half, a *de facto* detention without trial? But who cares about due process or the rule of law anyway? As long as we showed Job

and other like-minded sods that we wouldn't brook political activism of any sort, and if you dare raise a finger, as he did, you will rot in Alcatraz malfeasance. I dare you. "You must strike fear in the heart of citizens, so they're cowed," was very much party ideology churned out non-stop at party political rallies across the length and breadth of the country.

In many instances in the republic, the law was manipulated and employed as a blunt instrument to exact excruciating pain and serve as a tool of oppression to perceived political opponents. This was achieved through numerous strategies, i.e., flagrantly denying the accused bail, even where it was clear they were facing trumped up charges. The legal system was especially complicit in the persecution of political prisoners like Jacob and Hopewell. We could always count on our compromised judges, magistrates, and prosecutors to play ball in undermining the rule of law. These public officials had no choice other than to dance to the whims and caprices of the party. In any case, the supreme leader had a damning dossier on each of them which he used to keep them in line, and it succeeded. Far from being an instrument of a fair and just society, the law was thus weaponized against critics, dissenters, and political opponents alike. Add the widespread nature of cartel-run corruption permeating the justice delivery system, and it was therefore an open secret the country's judicial service was at the behest of the highest bidder.

We even meddled within the so-called opposition, choosing an opposition leader of our liking for the republic, and planting an acquiescing, ineffectual puppet within opposition ranks. In actual fact he was an extension and proxy for the party doing the bidding of the dear leader. This was done for the sole purpose of hoodwinking the international community that the country had some semblance of democracy. Every now and then, say five years or so, the republic would have a tinge of a mostly disputed election, just to give off a façade of multi-party democracy politics to the outside world. High stakes deception was the name of the game. The more erudite would call it *realpolitik*.

In my many years in the service, I had witnessed bizarre and surreal occurrences at colorful grand state funerals, occurring because we would have killed the high-profile politician, but the supreme leader would brazenly deliver a glowing eulogy, waving an envelope with the supposed post-mortem results of the deceased as the poor widow and her hapless family looked on. And jarringly enough, sometimes the body lying in the coffin was that of an imposter or could be missing certain body parts, as the supreme leader and

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his very close inner circle were twisted oddballs who practiced organ harvesting from those whom they had killed. Legend has it, the dear leader would use these harvested human parts to fortify and consolidate his own position through the underworld dark forces of *juju* magic. Some said it was also done as a cynical intimidation ploy to build a hard persona façade of the supreme leader that he was some weird zany who couldn't be trifled with.

Food poisoning was another armory at our disposal, in connivance with the prison kitchen staff who were mostly compliant and overzealous in the execution of their duties. One common technique we employed at Harare Alcatraz was to feed political prisoners with dog biscuits laced with poisonous chemicals. We intercepted outside food from their relatives and outlawed outside food as a punishment to induce hunger, such that our targeted prisoners would hungrily accept the chemical laced biscuits and compromised water which would quicken their demise. We had pretty much adopted the political playbook of Russia, China, and North Korea – our role model friends – as it was not possible to criticize the party or the supreme leader and still manage to escape with your life and freedom. The system we served was not for the faint-hearted.

II

On this Friday morning, I arrived at Harare Alcatraz, kicking and screaming at the prison guards, shouting obscenities and expletives, protesting my innocence. I had been assigned on the greatest mission of my life, one which meant a lot to the supreme leader.

The previous evening, the supreme leader had phoned me to underscore the top-level importance and urgency of the operation. I had felt a thrill of excitement coursing through my body, hearing the supreme leader talk to me over the phone. “Don't you worry sir, it will be done to perfection,” I had said. “I will make it look like an accident, so it won't be traced to anyone else other than myself. I will be the fall guy as usual.” I spoke with pride and triumph.

“I knew I can count on you, Brezhnev,” said the supreme leader in his creepy voice. “I wish to thank you on my behalf, and behalf of the party for your

selfless service, Brezh.” Then the line went dead. No goodbye at all. I was a bit peeved off by the abrupt end of the call, but knowing I was doing it for the supreme leader and the party just about gave me fulfilment, as had all the murders, abductions and enforced disappearances under my bidding.

I love blood and serving the party unquestionably. Killing people gave me an orgasm of unimaginable proportions, thus I was the covert head of the party’s hit squad, the infamous Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), as we code named it in spooks’ parlance. There was talk in the corridors of power that after successful completion of this latest mission I may even be elevated to joining the presidium!

“The presidium, now that was big, boy!”

“The presidium, I’m all for it, bring on this new mission.”

Leonid, the overall party intelligence supremo had personally come to brief me on the finer details of this new operation, stressing very much that under no circumstances should it fail, as it meant a lot to the supreme leader that these two malcontents in custody were eliminated.

“I have to level with you, Brezh,” remarked Leonid, in his usual gruff voice. “The stakes here couldn’t be higher and riskier, so no slip up or else...”

“You know me, chief, there will be no slip ups,” I said.

The plan according to the chief was for me to enter Harare Alcatraz Prison and befriend the two political detainees, Jacob and Hopewell. “Go in there, and befriend them, pose as a friend to them, though in reality you are our agent provocateur, our eyes and ears. Now Brezhnev, you really have to listen to me. Comrade are you with me?” Leonid barked, a certain uneasy rasp in his voice. “These two men are dangerous because they are known to the British and Americans, so tread with caution, and wear kid gloves with them. First, get into their confidence, and tactfully elicit all the dirt on them: What do they know about the party? Who else are they working with? Do they know where the dead bodies are buried? Only after that can you set the next phase of the plan in motion.”

Leonid continued, “Once you’ve got what you want from them, they are disposable to us. They’re mincemeat. You will proceed to bait the targeted individuals into a fight, thereby creating a situation of chaos and violence in

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Alcatraz Prison. During this process, you and other moles inside Alcatraz will ensure the targeted individuals are violently attacked. The crack intelligence team will fit you with listening devices and all other relevant paraphernalia. Goodnight, Brezh.”

Leonid disappeared in the maze of darkness and the shadows, leaving me with the aroma of his expensive Cuban cigars filtering in my nostrils. That was always his modus operandi before an important mission; he would personally debrief you himself. You were not expected to ask any questions, or you would ignite his legendary, volatile wrath.

Legend had it, he had once poured a kettle of boiling water on an operative who dared ask him a question, and so we were all cowed never to ask him questions but to commit everything to memory, like I did on this occasion. We were expected to have photographic memories, for that was how we had been schooled at Mzee Propaganda School of Ideology.

Thus, on this Friday afternoon, I entered Harare Alcatraz Prison as a phantom prisoner, the same trick of planting spooks we’d also used at the supreme leader’s University of Life, where we had so many wraith students who helped further the cause in flushing out bad apples, dark forces, and terrorists who were bent on destabilizing the country. Who can forget one of our legendary phantom students, Warlord, who gained so much notoriety for his shenanigans at the University of Life, where, for all those many years he was a perpetual student, the omnipresent rabble rouser clandestinely serving the cause?

III

I approached my targets at their breakfast table the next morning in the prison canteen. “Hello, fellas,” I said, flashing my warmest smile at them. “I’m Chipendani. How do you do?” I sat down with a tray with porridge, two hard boiled eggs, and toasted bread.

“How do you do, Chipendani,” they both acknowledged me politely, as they offered their hands for vigorous handshakes. And that was it; we started

chatting, babbling away like we'd known each other for ages. Call it a magnetic aura of some sort. There was something about this duo which made me feel at ease and disarmed. If it was not Hopewell's guttural laughter, then it was Jacob's constantly cracking one joke after the other, a far cry from how one would expect prisoners to exhibit such gaiety and seeming merrymaking in a place of captivity such as the mighty Alcatraz fortress. I wish I had known how those three weeks of interacting with my targets – the very people whose lives were in my hands – would radically transform my own life.

The prison day was marked by well-defined routine, because "Routine offers structure and discipline to the inmates," as the sadistic, authoritarian pot-bellied prison warden, Zimbudzana, would repeatedly bellow this mantra at us. In the morning, we would go out to the courtyard for our daily exercises. I liked this bit because it helped me figure out my elimination plan of the duo and rehearse it in my mind as I interacted with them daily. Many times, I stared vacantly at Hopewell during courtyard exercises and mulled my next plan.

Mid-morning to lunch break, we would either do some prison housekeeping chores like cutting the long grass at the back of the courtyard or manning the daily laundry. Then in late afternoon, we were allowed to retire to the prison library, which is where I was pondering setting my plan in motion. Jacob and Hopewell were something of prison celebrities; you could count on the library to be a hustling bustling hive of activity, teeming with inmates crowding around the duo, backslapping them, some asking them their opinion on something or the other. Some inmates hero worshipped the duo, and many times I overheard the other inmates badgering them, "Please, mukoma, can you help me with my assignments? I came into Alcatraz with only a form 2 qualification, but now I am prepping for my GCSEs O-Levels, *ndibatsireiwo m'koma Hopewell, Maths dzinondihiringa.*"

"No worries, Munin'ina, let's get on with it. Remember, root out that negativity in your mind that mathematics as a subject is your nemesis. It all starts in the head, and you must extricate that defeatist attitude," quipped the erudite Hopewell, much to the adulation of his hangers-on disciples. I could see their admiration drooling from these youngsters as they clung to every word that Hopewell uttered. Can't deny it, I felt some pangs of jealous at this charismatic influence.

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Alternatively, it would be affable, big eared Jacob, wide-grinned as ever, constantly motivating and encouraging equally intellectually curious inmates like Zivanai, who was now preparing to take his A Level exam in Alcatraz, having come in for culpable homicide.

“You will get there, Zivanai, you’ve done very well to rehabilitate yourself, coming this far with only primary school education, and now you stand on the threshold of a new trajectory, taking A-Level exams. Bravo, my young brother,” gushed Jacob as he back slapped the overawed young prisoner Zivanai.

So, there was always that environment of camaraderie permeating the prison library. With everyone’s guard down, I reckoned, the library venue to me provided the perfect, opportune moment to strike.

IV

In the early hours of that biting cold July morning, I requested to speak with Prison Chaplain, Reverend Siyachitema, as a matter of urgency. The end was nigh, I knew it; I didn’t have much time remaining on my life, following my failure.

The system was vicious. Soon word would filter out that I had sold out by not accomplishing the task, so I wanted to make peace with my God before my last rites were read over me. It was only a question of hours before I was mincemeat. That much I knew from other fellow cadres we had ruthlessly dispensed with once they botched it like I had just done. I wasn’t going to be an exception; the system’s brutal juggernaut had a well-known penchant for devouring its own errant children like me. In no time, the chickens would soon come home to roost.

But I hadn’t botched an assignment; mine was a voluntary decision to turn a corner following the light I had got from the very two people I was meant to eliminate. As I increasingly got under their wing, I knew I couldn’t go through with the action anymore. My Damascene moment had inadvertently arrived, though in a very strange way, in close quarters, human interaction, and intimacy.

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“You see, Chipendani, we are prisoners of conscience here at Harare Alcatraz; our desire is not for us to benefit personally, but for posterity, our children, their children and future generations to come,” Jacob had remarked to me often.

“Far from the regime’s peddled propaganda, ours is a dream to live in a truly democratic space. The minority cannot and must not be allowed to hold democracy at ransom,” said Hopewell, whom I had really warmed up to because of his peculiar idiosyncrasies over the weeks. The chappie had a smashing sense of humor; now I understood why most of the prisoners followed him around like a poodle with everyone hanging on to his every word.

Truth be told, there was something immersive and magnetic about *m’koma* Hope.

What had happened to me inside my usual Alcatraz forte? See, I was now calling my perceived hit target, m’koma, a term of endearment.

My mind flickers to one of many heart-to-heart conversations I now periodically had with these amigos. “You got to understand, Chipendani,” Hopewell had remarked as our eyes locked, and he resumed his sermon, as I now playfully called them.

“Jacob and I have better lives out there, by the republic’s own austere standards; we get by well, the two of us and our immediate families.

“We could have chosen to be quiet, looked the other way, forgot about the systemic corruption, police and army brutality, joblessness and dismissed it as, not my business.

“But we chose not to do that. Instead, we dared to confront and fight the monster that the system is, and for that we are here, on indefinite detention placed in a subhuman maximum prison, Harare Alcatraz, for daring to stand up for the downtrodden, our fellow citizens.

“We are not bitter, Chipendani, I would rather we stand up than let our children urinate on our graves in future, cursing us, *“Why did you not do something? How come you let this wicked system thrive and proliferate?”*”

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“See where we’re coming from?” butted in Jacob as I nodded my head in acquiescence.

“I got to say, I see your rationale here,” I quipped, surprising myself in the process at how I had inadvertently crossed the Rubicon. They both exchanged weird knowing glances as Jacob cleared his throat and adjusted his huge glasses frame, his usual mannerism before he proceeded to speak.

“Thing is, you say you have three daughters, Chipendani, and a ten-year-old son, I am sure you also want the best for your kids? A vibrant Great Zimbabwe! That’s why we want you to join and spread the word. A new republic is possible in our lifetime, where everyone will be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of political affiliation, ethnic disposition, or sexual orientation.”

Hopewell concurred, “Our dream is to fix the country; we are not interested in vindictive politics, endowed in personal reprisals. That is not our goal.”

“If we all leave in droves, as is happening now that there is this ongoing massive nurse aide exodus of medical personnel fleeing to England for jobs and a better life, who will fix Zimbabwe’s woes and broken politics?” remarked a visibly dejected Jacob, the furrows in his brow etched with pain. I felt for him.

But he was not yet done sermonizing on the Zimbabwe downward spiral trajectory as he often characterised it. He resumed speaking, “There is no denying the regime is obscene and callous as they perennially rub it into our faces: *“Nyika inovakwa nekutongwa nevene vayo,”* the country is built and ruled by its own people.”

“Which people?”

“When they’re all fleeing the ruler’s ineptitude and political chicanery,” chipped in Hopewell as he carried on speaking – now fired up and the glaze in his piercing brown eyes all too intense.

“We are indeed in a pariah state. When the law is weaponized to punish voices of dissent, it becomes a travesty of justice. Criminalizing dissent is one conspicuous sign of a failed state.”

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In unison with Hopewell, Jacob retorted with the regime's apparatchiks' relentless scream on social media, "Where is the evidence for all this? You perennially badmouthing your country to the outside world?"

"Evidence! Don't get me started on this, will yah?" remarked an irate Hopewell as he suddenly went into full galore poetry mode:

We are the army.

We are the police.

We are the judiciary.

We are the elections.

We are the electoral commission.

We're everything in this country.

We're untouchables.

So, what are you going to do about it?

Saka uchaita sei?

What are you going to do about it?

The party's propaganda machinery deliberately mocks and taunts us on social media with their charlatan, fraudulent clergymen rubbing and flaunting their ill-gotten wealth right into our faces.

There is the evidence for you," remarked Hopewell after his lengthy melodramatic eloquent delivery."

"I hear you my brother," replied Jacob as he resumed speaking. "They arrest and detain journalists for exposing corruption. They arrest and detain political opponents for speaking against their rule. They close civic space. They ban political activities of their opponents.

"This, in short, is sufficient evidence that there's no rule of law in Zimbabwe.

"We are now an African North Korea, our living space is fast shrinking, Zimbabweans can't breathe. That is the sad state of affairs of our nation."

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Hopewell railed, “What do you do when leaders brazenly spout such hogwash? We are the majority, we are the people, we are the government, we are the army, we are the air force, we are the police, we are everything you can think of! No wonder the overzealous party faithful parrot their leaders’ mantra needlessly.

“The courts are weaponized against perceived opponents of the state.

We have all witnessed how our courts have become the party’s latest weapon, not only against opposition leaders and their supporters, but against anyone seen as a threat to its hegemony. Now they’ve legislated a draconian piece of law, *The Patriotic Bill*, out to muzzle citizens’ freedom of expression. What a palaver unfolding before us!

“Will the party ever stop attacking all those who have views divergent from its own? Zimbabwe needs to be free from this perverted justice system and those who are raping Lady Justice in broad daylight without shame.

“In fact, all dissenting voices in Zimbabwe – or any place or country – are not safe when Lady Justice has fallen. Wilful, callous rape of a nation and its resources at the hands of this kleptocracy. Who can forget the insidious stench of the Gold Mafia scandal? Cry the beloved nation,” Hopewell remarked in what appeared to be a close to their poignant speeches that day.

Even as I hobbled away, my limping leg dragging one after the other; my conviction was now stronger than before in aligning with these progressive voices as represented by Hopewell and Jacob. Interacting with them had brought out epiphanic realizations in me. It was like something had been awakened from the nether regions of my loins.

V

This red-letter poetry day experience came to typify my consciousness and experience with both Hopewell and Jacob. As I increasingly chatted with the duo, and our interactions in the prison compound escalated, the scales gradually fell from my eyes. I found myself more and more in unison with their viewpoint, concurring with them, their worldview about our country,

and the upward trajectory we should take as opposed to the self-destruct downward spiral which was currently obtaining. Somehow, I now found resonance with the narratives I had heard many times from my victims when at my mercy, that I had chosen to brush aside with contempt. In concurrence with Hopewell and Jacob, I sure wanted a better future for my progeny, Nyasha, Chido, Tapuwa, and Onai. As Jacob and Hopewell were wont to say, during most of our prison rounds as we cut the long grass in the prison courtyard, “We have had our lives, Chipendani. If the Good Man above was to take us today, we wouldn’t complain; we have done right by our country, done right by our children, and done right by our conscience by standing out against tyranny and all forms of dictatorship. That’s why it doesn’t bother us we are in prison, but the job is half done, my brother,” Hopewell said to me.

“In two months, you’ll be out and re-integrated back in society. Go and play your part Chipendani,” they had earnestly admonished.

“Play my part, but what can I do? I’m part of the system that brutalised you,” I blurted out to them unwittingly, much to my own surprise at this inadvertent slip.

“Oh, we knew, already,” Jacob remarked nonchalantly, as if I had just said good morning to him. He carried on speaking, “In every situation there are some good men and women, these can be prison warders, kitchen or laundry staff – good people make a difference to humanity, Chipendani. We were warned about you privately by these good citizens, but we threw caution to the wind because every sinner deserves a chance. And to vindicate us today, here we are; we’ve certainly come a long way, but it’s been worth the journey with you earning our camaraderie, mate.”

Jacob continued, “We are not downplaying the huge risk you have undertaken, coming out clean to us. You’ve said it yourself. It’s more like signing your death warrant, but you can hold your head high, Chipendani, as you join us and other progressive, forward-looking citizens in our country. I can assure you our children will extol us for this selfless bravery and not censure us for inaction.”

“Get busy living and not dying,” added Hopewell.

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“Why don’t you tell us what you got up to during your heydays, Chipendani, as you took orders from your superiors in your unfettered reign of terror on citizens?” inquired Jacob.

I had nothing to lose anyway; I knew I had crossed the line once I started having a soft spot for the two gentlemen I was supposed to eliminate but had increasingly started making up excuses for why I couldn’t do it anymore. The Rubicon moment had been the realization these were men prepared to die for what they selflessly believed in, their inner convictions for a better future. Somehow, their humanity, awakened something long dead in me. I don’t know what it was. Perhaps, it’s the repressed human compassion of all those years I had maimed, raped, eliminated with impunity, and yet I could go back home to Edna my wife and switch on a different persona just like that, like I was an automaton or a light switch which can be flicked on and off at the drop of a hat, just like that! I knew the die was cast when I switched off the listening bugs the IT chaps had put on my clothing, and it would merely be a question of time before the spooky moles picked up on my misdemeanor.

“I blame it on youth,” I remarked, clearing the troubling phlegm from my throat as I gazed into vacant space, my mind rewinding to those university days where it all kicked off. “I was young and foolish, in need of pocket money at the supreme leader’s University of Life. That’s when I was recruited into the revolutionary command council by the party youths at university. I started by spying on my friends and classmates and soon the money started coming in. Sometimes I could tell fibs about people I hated, or if I liked someone’s girlfriend, I could make up stuff about them, that they were denigrating the party and putting the dear leader’s name into disrepute. You know, all the silly stuff, he said/she said kind of thing. With the money to top up my student’s pay came the booze and then the women whom I could impress.”

I continued, the top now off my Pandora’s box, “The revolutionary command council promised us straight jobs in the bureau after university, as long as we proved our mettle and loyalty by doing extraordinary acts of loyalty. For instance, I shopped my uncle, Sekuru Muchineripi, my mother’s brother, as being an enemy of the supreme leader who was conspiring with foreign enemies, and for that I got a promotion in the bureau. So, by the time I finished university, I was already a high-ranking officer. Never underestimate the mirage of power; it corrupts a man’s moral compass, as

what happened to me. And you know why I shopped Sekuru Muchi? It's none other than my lustful, carnal desires for his young, hot wife Selina. I coveted Selina and desired to get into her knickers, and in my twisted little head, what better way to achieve this than to have Sekuru Muchi out of the way."

Jacob and Hopewell listened closely as I said, "I committed my first elimination at 21; it was an abduction during general elections time. We abducted the local party chairman on his way from work one evening, took him to some unknown location, blindfolded him, and to prove myself to the chief, I requested the pistol from him and blasted the man's brains out then and there. Just like that! Later, we disposed of his remains in a disused mine shaft."

I went on unflinchingly, looking both at Jacob and Hopewell who encouraged me to proceed with my narrative, looking unperturbed or disturbed with my bizarre tale all the way.

"The weeks following this act, I couldn't sleep as I kept hearing his screams and cries for clemency as he reiterated, *'Please spare my life, I only want a better future for our country I mean no one any harm, I have a young family to take care of...'* but I had been impervious to those cries and pleas for help. Unable to cope with my troubled conscience, it was then I started dabbling in drugs, and I can tell you this, fellas, that helped a lot in numbing my senses and emotions, not to mention my warped sense of right and wrong. I found out every time I was high my aphrodisiac was to volunteer for more eliminations, abductions, or brutalizing my fellow citizens. I became feared within the rank and file of the bureau, because I gained a notorious reputation for being a bloodthirsty war monger who walked with a chip on his shoulder and was out to look for trouble at any slightest provocation."

"Can I just interject," butted in Jacob, "as all this was taking place in your life, what was your home life like? I mean, were you able to have a normal home life with your wife and children amid all this chaos and darkness in your life?"

"Never underestimate the powers of a drug-fuelled mind and delusion," I replied. "I think my wife suspected whatever I did was jarring, because according to her I had trouble sleeping; I used to talk and scream a lot in my sleep. My cop out phrase to my wife has always been, *'Official secrets act, love, I*

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can't talk about my job, sorry.' But I think she knows; she is a very smart woman, Edna. There is no way she has lived with me all these years without suspecting anything is amiss, especially given my sleep-walking incidents the last couple of months."

"Sleep walking? Please enlighten us," Hopewell, who'd been exceedingly quiet all along, butted in animatedly. "We thought sleep walking was a white man's problem, Chipendani. What do you mean you've been sleep walking?"

"Often, Edna, my wife, has had to be extra cautious with me as I frequently wander from our bedroom upstairs in our three storey Mt. Pleasant Heights mansion. I wander from the third floor right to our living room or the main kitchen – all this and I will be totally oblivious. At first I couldn't believe it when she mentioned it to me one morning."

"Is everything all right with you, hubs?" she'd enquired over the breakfast table, as I dipped my spoon into my cornflakes cereal.

"What do you mean, everything all right?" I'd shot back at her, accusingly like she had stabbed me in the eye with a sharp object.

"I couldn't be better. What's this? You are fussing over me again?" I said dismissively to Edna's protestations. My no-nonsense voice spelled it clearly to her: "Leave me alone, wife, and stop poking your nose into this."

"She looked me in the eye and said, 'I wouldn't say anything, love, if I wasn't concerned, but twice in one week, you've walked in your sleep, and when I tried to engage you in a conversation, I had the shock of my life you were asleep even though you were walking.'"

"Now, that's very fanciful and well exaggerated sweetie," I said, as I hurriedly dismissed her and dashed out to my car for another eventful day's work. "Silly woman!" I angrily cursed under my breath. "Who does she think she is? She fancies herself Agatha Christie's Poirot of some sort, huh?" I sniggered contemptuously, as I inserted my car key in the ignition and started revving my range rover.

"It was only a week and half later that she sat me down again, her face white as a sheet, like she'd seen a ghost. She showed me a little video of me on her smart phone, and right there on her screen was myself in the nude having my

little wander around the house and, yes, by Jove, my eyes were glazed open like a zombie, but I was out of it, fast asleep.

“Well, I don’t know what to say of this Edna,” I said to her sheepishly. “I guess I owe you an apology for my brusqueness the other day and dismissing you.”

“She was okay with my apology, but on one condition: I see a shrink. I didn’t want to, but to keep her happy, I’ve been seeing a top Harare shrink.

“Perhaps, one other thing I need to say, as the last word... Something I can do to help the world out there know as a sign of my atonement, even as I know they will get me, anything to help further the democratic cause,” I said clearing my throat. “You may wonder why the system is invincible, and we always seem to be one step ahead of all you good, decent people.”

“Enlighten us please,” Hopewell entreated with a flourish of his hand.

“Well, you have to understand, the supreme leader is supreme in every sense of the phrase. We have our tentacles spread in almost every aspect of the nation. To echo your poetry speech the other day, Hopewell, yes, we have our magistrates, judges, prosecutors, as you well know, who are as equally sadistic sycophants as their political masters. We have our journalists who use the pen to douse our propaganda for us, for *the Pravda*, as you call it, Hopewell. Then you have the sole TV broadcaster, CCTV, which does the oppressor’s bidding. The system is mightier than any force, I can tell you this, fellas.”

I asked, “What’s the phrase again you call it, where organs of the state are in our pockets?”

“State capture, you mean,” chimed in Hopewell.

“Oh yes, that’s the term. Believe me when I say, our tentacles and fingers are almost into everything. Think of the party as an octopus; that’s what we are and why the supreme leader is a survivor all these years. You will certainly be surprised, especially yourself, Hopewell, even the so-called independent media is captured, as we have journalists from these stables doing our firefighting PR work, though by day, they demonize us, but it’s all part of the game. A well-orchestrated subterfuge. Tell me, what is the independent media when one is captured, when independent scribes are on our payroll?”

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He who pays the piper, calls the tune, so the saying goes. But gentlemen, I have one question to ask,” I entreated of Jacob and Hopewell.

“Go ahead,” they both replied in tandem.

“How is it, in spite of my gruesome history I’ve just told you, you don’t appear to judge me at all?” I asked, somewhat bewildered by their seemingly nonchalant reaction throughout my exposé.

“Well, we are not in the business of judging people, Chipendani. We believe in the cause of persuading people to see our vision of a better future for our country, and we are delighted, even at the cost of bitter reprisals from your employers, you have decided to join the cause and abandon that life of yesterday. That for us means a lot and our fellow citizenry who have borne the brunt of broken politics, vindictive, toxic politics over the years. We are glad we now share a similar vision of a better future. In that, to have you on our side, Chipendani, we believe we have done very well.”

And even as he was talking, I saw them out of the corner of my eye, coming for me, my former comrades, out to exact the same inhumane cruel treatment I had meted out to my fellow citizens for the three score years the supreme leader has been in charge. But I had made up my mind I was going to go out on a high, and waving my palm open I shouted defiantly, “Long live fellow patriots! Bravo Zimbabwe! Uhuru hwedu! Asante Sana!”

But I had one last sting up my sleeve. I wasn’t going to let them win and have the last laugh over me. The poison I had intended to use on both Hopewell and Jacob was safely snugged in the inner pocket of my trousers. “I just need to use the loo before you take me, fellas. You can’t deny a man the call of nature,” I deadpanned at my captors as they signalled, I could use the toilet for all I want. They had time on their hands.

Let them wait till infinity then, I remarked inwardly to myself as I headed to the nearest cubicle, the suppressed smirk on my face increasingly becoming visible...

Black Britain

“Another driving while black offense I'm sure...black people are allowed to own expensive things you know.” (Anonymous post on my feed)

I wasn't really conscious of my race until when I was 13. The police stopped Dad in Hackney, northeast London, for no offense other than driving an expensive vehicle. My consciousness as a global black citizen was born. Dad was all nice and polite to the two police officers, but Mum was having none of it, seething with anger, foaming and frothing; she couldn't repress lashing out virulently at the two officers. Her face was like an erupting volcano as she came out, guns blazing, spitting fire and brimstone at them.

“We all know it, you two know it, the only real reason you've stopped us is nothing other than the color of our skin, because we are migrants from Zimbabwe,” said Mum.

“Of course, not, ma'am,” the male police officer replied. “We're only doing our job. Allow us to do our job...”

“Doing your job my foot. Does that entail profiling one particular race? In this case, us the black community?” Mum glared at him with big, rolling eyes.

Meanwhile, I was recording the whole melee on my smart phone.

“Can you step outside, please?” Both officers meant business and scowled their faces.

“Why have you stopped us? What offense have we committed?” my dad barked.

“You were driving erratically, and we just need to check your legal paperwork,” the female police officer butted in.

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“What do you mean, ‘driving erratically’? Do you have video footage to evidence this?” countered Mum.

“Look, can we all be reasonable about this? We should be done in no time,” replied the other police officer.

“*Reasonable?* You dare talk about reasonableness? Since when has the crooked Met Police ever been, especially where women and ethnic minorities are concerned?” Mum hit back at both officers, looking at them askance. She was clearly worked up by the whole palaver as she fired off another salvo at both police officers. “Misogyny and wanton police brutality are pretty much the Met Police modus operandi, aren’t they?” Mum derisively sniggered at them.

The argument went on for a good half hour, until eventually we were allowed to proceed with our journey. Dad received a “friendly warning,” to ensure he drove with due care and diligence henceforth. “Ensure you’re not distracted when driving, sir,” remarked the male police officer as he attempted a friendlier tone, but by now both Mum and Dad had just about had it with these two and maintained their stony glares at them.

Later that evening, when I uploaded the video footage of this needless police heavy handedness on my feed, there was a huge social media storm and frenzy which catapulted me into an instant celebrity status; multitudes of people and trolls responded to my video with polarized views on the police actions. I didn’t realize I had torched a political storm, as there were some strong opinions expressed by both sides of the divide. Those who were pro police said they were not necessarily stopping black people, but they were doing their job; others maligned it as unnecessary profiling tinged with racism.

Unbeknown to me, thus began my political consciousness and civil rights advocacy – a year before my fourteenth birthday.

Race relations opinions are always sharply polarized in contemporary Britain and framed within binary opposites of “us versus them”, and “whites versus non-whites”. Thus, it was common to be targeted with a barrage of vitriolic and disparaging insults and posts for advocating for racial equality and a fair and just society. Usually in such uncouth exchanges, most of the unsavory right-wing groups in England, such as the English Defense League akin to

Nazism, and the Nigella Faragos of this world, underpinned by the corrosive right wing British media rag underlings like *The Daily Fail*, *The Expresso* and the vile *Scum* newspaper whose name I had deliberately corrupted by inverting and substituting its letters.

One such comment framing race relations and needless police harassment which typified many was: “And? If you drive a car and the police suspect or see wrongdoing, they will stop you. Nobody is above the law; even black people are subject to it. What is your actual point? Whining about being stopped? Are you that fragile?”

For most of us Londoners, it was a common secret that the Metropolitan London police were institutionally racist. Often, currently serving and retired officers have openly acknowledged this cancer at the core of the Met police. The public domain is littered with poignant, real-life stories where a travesty of justice occurred in cases involving black families, such as the tragic Damilola Taylor and Stephen Lawrence cases that were conspicuous. The latter was mishandled due to police corruption, cover-ups and racial bias, all of which undermined any legitimate investigation. Thus, justice wasn’t served.

As my anti-racism advocacy profile grew, I was fortunate enough to interview two former Met police officers with ethnic minority backgrounds. Both vindicated my long-held scepticism of institutionalized racism inherent in the Met police, as I had experienced at the tender age of 13 with my parents.

As I became of age, I had constant brushes of my own with the police. Twice I was stopped for spurious charges while driving. Once the police stopped me and said, “We’ve stopped you because your car is dirty. You need to give it a wash, mate.”

I was aghast, though I remained polite to the officers. “You stop me because my car is dirty. Really? I could understand if my registration plates were obscured by the so-called dirt, but clearly that’s not the case, officer,” I protested.

“Well, we’re only doing our job, sir,” butted in the other chappie.

I told myself, *yes, right, doing their job! Hadn’t that been the same excuse given to my parents a few years back, in Hackney? Gosh, these people appeared to read from a similar script, no matter where they stopped you in England.*

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It was either the, “We are doing our job” mantra, or, “Can I see your license, please?” or, “I need to check that your vehicle is properly insured with valid mot and road tax.” One had the feeling that freedom of movement was being curtailed in Britain, but only if you were black.

The police certainly had an infinite arsenal to draw from when targeting ethnic minorities like me. Dad used to shrug it off, saying, “You just have to get on with it, Anesu. That’s the way it is; these police officers are prejudiced against us, but what can you do at the end of the day? It’s their own country. They do as they please. Not only that, but they are protected by the misnamed police federation.

“Toe the line, son, and learn to manage them so you move on with your life. Much as it pains me to say this, I can’t bear you going to settle in Zimbabwe – your umbilical cord – because there’s no future there,” Dad admonished, his voice all too obviously that of a defeated man who’d had somehow accepted his untenable situation.

At times, he would ramble on, “Son, this is a futile exercise. You’re throwing stones at windows here. For what reason? The writing is clearly on the wall for all to see. We’ve lost this one. They’re in charge. Let them do as they please.”

Secretly, I felt for him; this whole race thing must have been a crushing experience for him, to have effectively flummoxed him into acquiescing submissiveness.

But I wasn’t going to let that kind of nihilism and defeatism define me; something I politely made known to Dad. “With all due respect, Dad, I politely disagree. Racism, police brutality, bigotry, sectarianism, among other ills, must be confronted head on. That will be me, my *modus operandi* moving forward. I’m sure you didn’t raise me to sit at the back of a bus, Pops. The indomitable Makombe chieftainship clan spirit you always used to inculcate in me is alive and kicking. Quite vibrant and I’m raring to go.”

Perhaps, Dad knew in his heart of hearts that I was a headstrong sod once I set my mind on something, so he let it rest and our conversation meandered elsewhere.

The second time the police stopped me was quite weird. I was coming from work and with me in the car was a white colleague, Chris, whom I had given

a lift. He lived nearby and I tended to give him a ride every now and then. Twice that day I remarked to him, “Chris, see that police car in the rearview mirror? It’s been following us for some time.”

“Are you sure, mate? Or it’s in your head again,” chuckled Chris.

“Nope, let’s see where we get with this.” I decided to take back roads and so did the police car behind me.

Even Chris was now on board. “Looks like you were on point, mate,” he said.

“Look, Chris, I’m not going to stop unless instructed to do so. I have not broken any laws, unless I’m being followed for having a white passenger in the car,” I replied.

“Now you’re being silly, Anesu. You stop it,” Chris countered. As I pulled into my driveway, the police officer parked his car behind me as both Chris and I got out of the car to confront our nemesis.

“Afternoon, officer. Can we help you? Is there a problem? I notice you’ve been tailing me for quite a while,” I said.

“I need to check your road tax sticker to see if it’s valid,” he said as he advanced toward my windshield and peered at the road tax decal.

It was at that point that I ripped into him, “You see, officer, where I take exception with you is that actually my tax disc is valid. Well, I am thoroughly disappointed, officer. All you do is pigeonhole certain people as lawbreakers like you just did with me. What do you say, now you’ve seen my road tax is valid?”

“I thought your tax was out of date, as its color looked different from other tax discs I’ve seen,” the officer mumbled sheepishly.

“And so, you just assumed, as it’s the black face, he must be guilty,” I gave it to him sarcastically. I was bristling with anger, hissing like a snake. “Why don’t you devote your time to hunting down real criminals out there, rather than the phantom ones in your head?” I said curtly to him. He could see I was visibly annoyed and mumbled something inaudible, an apology of sorts, then scurried away with his tail between his legs like a dog.

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“You shouldn’t have been born black. That was your first mistake. The police already knew who you were from checking your license plate, so I wonder what excuse they had stopping you this time,” remarked Valerie, a mixed-race English lassie, a longstanding friend and fellow participant at our perennial Black Lives Matter rallies in London’s Parliament Square, after hearing my woes. Valerie tended to be my sounding board on matters of race, identity, and the black experience whenever I needed a rant and some cheering up at the same time.

I realized, from chatting with Valerie and other black colleagues, that this wanton discriminatory targeting of black motorists had pretty much been the order of the day in England from time immemorial. I called it “the black man’s experience.” Once the political establishment introduced stop and search powers, it turned out that such powers were tinged with deeply ingrained racism as they tended to target young black males disproportionately over other ethnicities. The statistics validated my assertions if anyone cared to check them out, lest I be targeted for stirring up things. There was even some empirical research which validated this brazen racist profiling of one race over others.

Increasingly, I noticed through shared experiences with other black brothers that each time the police stopped black motorists and were called out for this wanton racial profiling, they would invariably read from the same playbook with their pathetic justifications such as: “We are sorry, it was a mistake with our ANPR computer system and rest assured it’s not a racially motivated traffic stop.”

As if we were idiots to fall for that tried and tested line. Though a youngster, I quickly cottoned on to the vagaries of racism in England and how it was entrenched in different spheres of the society. Turned out, it was always the same scripted answer from the police. No wonder one of my brethren in the cause used to remark, “All of this. Imagine if our police had guns. And it is always, ‘Oh, the system ran the wrong number.’ Like hell it did.”

I, like my fellow woke black brethren, realized quick enough that racism ran deep in myriad British institutions, including the idea that we should probably be grateful being “let off” and “not make a fuss”, each time we were stopped by the police for no reason other than harassment for our skin color. Half the time, those who accused us of gaslighting racism did not fully understand

our narrative, nor for how long we'd been on the receiving end of racism as a community, and about time we speak out. I spoke for many here, and far from the disparaging epithets thrown at us, this was not race baiting at all.

It was frustrating day-in-and-day-out, getting snide remarks from ill-informed people who are not from the black community about knowing how it felt to be stopped so many times between us and them. Nonetheless, it was their rabid ignorance and parochialism which spurred us on in the civil rights movement of our times.

The black experience has been harsh and austere for me and my fellow black brethren in England. Unlike my parents, who seem to have taken the racism within their stride, quietly coming to terms with it, rationalizing it, making up justificatory excuses for it, I have refused to roll over and sanitize this cancer. Take the Windrush scandal, for example, in which the Tory government in 2017 unleashed their hostile environment policy, which systematically encouraged hostile policing among immigrants from the Caribbean who had been living here since the end of the Second World War. They were being deprived of their legal, medical and human rights forcibly detained, and some illegally deported. Something snapped in my head. For me, that was the signal to up the ante, so I found myself lending my legal skills to these targeted minorities, doing pro bono representations.

Fighting the System

The barrage of insults I have received in championing race relations has been far and wide, with some accusing me of being obsessed with race and fomenting the race card, but of course nothing could be farther from the truth. Once, after a protracted trial defending Windrush generation litigants, I found two cards, one beneath the other, shoved under my windshield wipers.

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On the second card emblazoned with big bold red **Race Card** was the following: “Of course, being a person of color, the police aren’t allowed to stop you are they?”

At the bottom right hand of this mocking card was, scribbled, “Race Card. Don’t leave home without it.”

At times, I would have these disparaging words perennially thrown at me: “Guaranteed, you lot have got pocketsful of victim cards you’ll start tossing out whenever it suits. Victim cards! Now, there’s a thing for you folks!”

This white fragility phenomenon wasn’t new to me. It was the same old narrative peddled from the other side ratcheting up their vitriol against me. For as long as I have been in the trenches, I have been accused by critics and those from the other side of race baiting and gaslighting racism issues, among other charges.. Some were happy to reiterate their mantra to me, “The police can stop any vehicle on a road. They do not need a reason to do so, therefore, your ‘It’s ‘cause I’m black!’ makes no difference! Shut it and grow up!”

In any struggle there are sell outs, what some call counterrevolutionaries; our fight against racism with like-minded brethren hasn’t been an exception. I found out each time we had high profile anti-racism cases at the fore, or executed largely successful Black Lives Matter demonstrations, the system would unleash its state apparatus on us to undermine and discredit the cause. One day it could be the servile, slavish right-wing media misrepresenting the

demonstrations as having been “*violent and characterised by an orgy of violence, and therefore let the police be allowed to do their legitimate work of policing and maintaining law and order.*”

Such deliberate misrepresentations had largely become the norm and we confronted them head on, as one of the facets of this racism cancer we were fighting. Valerie, myself and our lot rationalized that it was bound to happen, especially as we were fighting a deeply ingrained and entrenched system backed by the establishment. For some it was a way of life to normalize and whitewash racism, without so much as batting an eye. Now that we were fighting it at a global scale, they didn’t like it. So, they preferred to shoot the messenger, as the tired cliché put it.

If it wasn’t the supine media bashing us, then another trick up their sleeve would be to wheel out other compromised black brethren who were currying for favor, political capital, or vying for public office in some of the right-wing political parties. These brethren would come out, guns blazing, on myriad television channels and newspaper columns, denying the existence of racism in England. Who can forget the infamous Priti “Awful” Patella and her disgusting gaslighting of racism in England, the very evils our detractors try to throw back at us? As if having Priti Awful Patella wasn’t bad enough for us, her successor, odious Cruella Hatemonger must have been plucked from the depths of horrid hell, another ethnic minority racial gatekeeping enabler, who thrived on promoting hate speech against minorities like herself, and needless race rabble-rousing.

We called them out for what it was: racial gatekeeping, not difference of opinion as they couched it. We often countered, “If anything, you are enabling systemic racism with police brutality rife, needless stop and search abuse experiences of black people and you dare come up with this mendacious drivel?” I had seen lots of my fellow black brethren prostituting their integrity, denying the existence of racism in Britain, even in well-documented cases where the Metropolitan police had been called out for institutionalised racism in official reports out there in the public domain, but such apologists would still bury their head in the sand. Yet the very people – when it suited them or their narrow self-interests such as ambition to public office – would conveniently be black, shouting from rooftops for all and sundry to hear them. They could only be black when it furthered their career, and nothing else.

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On looking back on the anti-racism crusades, none fills me with greater pride than the Bristol march of 2020, where I was part of history in the making amid the group that toppled the statue of Edward Colston, former slave trader, and chucked it into Bristol Harbor. This was big and a watershed, defining moment, and I gave a rousing speech from my megaphone as I stood on the vacant spot which earlier held Colston's statue, "Friends and colleagues, I venerate you all for being part of this Black Lives Matter movement, as we seek to right the wrongs of yesteryear by ensuring we all live together harmoniously, celebrating our differences as one people, one world, one race, the human race..." I paused amid the rapturous wild whistles, applause, and adulation from fellow protestors. I spotted affable Valerie among the crowd as I felt energized and resumed my diatribe, "There is something obviously very wrong here in 21st Century Britain having statues of former slave owners and traders in our streets. What are we doing, eulogizing the very people who enabled and profited from human trafficking?"

"Shame on you, Shame on you," the crowd repeatedly chanted in an eclectic, wild frenzy of excitement against the establishment.

"These statues belong somewhere else, deep down in the bowels of the earth, to the very bottom of the sea, where Colston's victims, our forefathers, brethren and sisters, often suffered cruel, horrible deaths at the hands of these monsters. And while we are still at it, why are the atrocities committed by these men not taught in the British curricula? Is it any wonder, their non-exclusion is an attempt to whitewash the curricula and justify the colonial empire legacy?"

What a day it was for us, as the crowd went wild, erupting into a heightened frenzy of applause and whistles to my electric speech! I felt it. I was onto something big at Bristol that day. Call me big headed, but there was something in the air that afternoon, something akin to our very own Martin Luther King, Jr./ John Lewis/ Ruth Bader Ginsburg moment, other yesteryear key luminaries in the civil rights movement history. Perhaps, it was so much the symbolism of our actions, toppling a former slave trader statue, and jettisoning it into Bristol Harbor. Our Colston moment was to reverberate in other parts of the country and beyond the borders as a global conversation started on the place and scope of well-known racist slave masters, colonial figures, and white supremacists whose statues continued to

grace public buildings. Should they not be tucked away, behind closed doors, perhaps in museums? And why not reform the British curricula so the less attractive aspects of the “mighty empire,” were taught in the classrooms and became recurrent discourses floating around the Habermasian public sphere and blogosphere? I was chuffed. Our anti-racism campaigns, get your knee off our neck campaigns, ignited these discourses.

Following my address at the toppling of Edward Colston’s statue in Bristol Harbor, I received a barrage of vile abuse online, mostly from the usual suspects, the right-wing trolls on my feed. Among some of the insults, I was accused of race baiting, a pathetic race grifter pushing a self-serving agenda for race bullshit, deliberately fomenting and stoking racial disharmony.

“If you hate this white country which is 85% white, why are you here? Maybe find somewhere where you are happier, with your Black Lives Matter movement and anti-white agenda,” screamed one post.

As polarizing as this debate was, counter arguments ran thus: “Aw dear...so you hate black people, you ignorant little man! Get comfortable; we are here to stay! And we are not our ancestors, so we don’t take shit either! Equality doesn’t mean anti-white, by the way.”

These two binary posts pretty much summed up the vitriol and diatribe which have and continue to characterize race relations in Britain today. The “us versus them” dichotomy.

White Fragility

The immigration system against immigrants like my parents (in itself microcosmic of other fellow non-white and non-Britons) was nigh harsh and racist to the core. Pops has told me they had to go through a financially extortionate visa regime from work permit holders when they arrived in this country in early 2000. From there, and at a prohibitive fee, they had to renew their work permit each time it ran out, then apply for permanent residency status, itself another golden goose for the UK government through the financially insatiable Home Office. And the final journey of naturalization to become fully fledged British was itself riddled with further punitive financial obligations to be honored, not to mention the raft of citizenship English tests

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one had to sit for before they could be deemed a British citizen. So, the visa immigration system had become a cash cow for the government to extort more money from law abiding citizens and taxpayers, the very immigrants who bore the brunt of racist insults from the far right in this country.

I found it a painful irony that one of the most hardliner ministers in charge of the Home Office and immigrants, a certain Patella, was herself a first-generation immigrant like me, yet there was no ounce of decency and empathy in how she treated migrants and other foreigners within the UK. God forbid the sort of racist vitriol which came out of her mouth in framing migrants and those unfortunate enough to lose their lives trying to cross the English Channel. I always wondered why she wasn't struck by the irony of her own background in failing to empathize in a humane manner with immigrants. And I poignantly realized, this "crabs in a barrel" mindset replicated itself through the other non-white politicians in the racist Tory party, like Cruella Hatemonger, supine Sunak, and clueless Badenochapples, who unashamedly sought to outdo themselves in demonizing and vilifying immigrants and asylum seekers, criminalizing the latter all in a bid to be accepted by the other side. It's the perfect "pull up the drawbridge" scenario exhibited by these poster boys and poster girls of racism which thoroughly disgusted me. And the recurrent irony exhibited by these clowns' lived experiences lives on unabated! Perhaps, irony isn't what it was before.

This rough terrain, among others, for me a first-generation Briton, a Zimbabwean by descent - has been the British experience. Never mind the "we are one" rhetoric they sprinkle out in the media once in a while, the so-called race commissions with a race tsar instituted by politicians, especially the rabid right wingers themselves. It's all a cleverly choreographed facade meant to hoodwink people that we are an integrated society, and we are doing something about the racial inequality and tension within our society. One just needs to critically take stock of the underlying real reasons behind the whole Brexit fiasco in order to fully understand the racism which sits at the very core of England's psyche, as some politicians and citizenry still harbor colonial delusions of grandeur of the colonial empire.

And then I got thoroughly sick about the whole Meghan Markle-Prince Harry bashing at the hands of the unrepentant right-wing British media. What truly laid at the heart of this unashamed media bias was wanton racism again and biased media coverage and relentless bullying of Meghan by the British press,

which subsequently drove the young couple abroad. Some trolls have surely outdone themselves with their appalling racist conduct in relation to Meghan, and sadly even in relation to her minor children, and we were saying it was this kind of vile, depraved behavior we strove to fight, day in and day out. Valerie, my comrade in arms, equally dismissed the unrelenting bashing by the press of Prince Harry-Meghan Markle as media racism. “This is media racism, Anesu, there is no other way to frame it,” she often remarked to me, visibly outraged. I have to say, their perennial harassment made me concur with Valerie.

“I have to agree with you, Valerie, there is something more insidious, deep and dark in the way journalists and the news media have relentlessly pursued these two and even their children, who should be shielded and protected from all this,” I told her, my disgust clearly palpable.

We are not asking for special treatment as black people. Things should be dealt with in an equitable manner, not tinged with racism and racially profiling black people. Ours is a new generation. Kudos to our parents who are immigrants from different parts of the world; we will do them proud by speaking out, filming, posting, demonstrating, confronting any racial profiling, police brutality and unwarranted bias against our communities. This whole racial profiling of people is tiring, exhausting, and mentally draining. Our immigrant parents experienced it, we continue to experience it, but we will not shut up or put up with it either. It is cancerous and needs to be taken out, not only from the police force, but also cut out of British society altogether.

We see questioning and debating every proposition as a basis for affirming dignity and self-respect, and you can't shame us otherwise, for demanding such. The white fragility defense mechanism of bashing and demonizing counter narratives has to stop.

To those naysayers who are constantly banging it in our faces, “The UK is not racist,” calling us pejorative names, maligning us as “professional” race grifters, rude and needless attention seekers; nothing could be farther from the truth. No number of self-serving denials, crude rhetoric, or mere white washing captured race commissions will change our lived culture as the black community. This has been the reality of our lived experience as black people. The surveillance culture, the systemic racism, must stop!