



Liliesleaf

A PLACE *of* LIBERATION

Grade 12

Coming to Terms with the Past

A Unique Meeting at Liliesleaf

ENGAGE

DISCOVER

S.A. ONTTREK INLIGTING

Persverklaring van dr. Verwoerd

Die buitegeboue van mnr. Dr. Goldreich se huis in Tonia waar Walter Sisulu toormalige sekretaris-generaal van die verbode Nasionale Kongres, hom aangehoor het nadat hy verdagtig was en terwyl hy in huis was geplaas was. Die eerste buitegeboue was die arrestasie het 1 dagoggend in die laat uitg...

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REFLECT

When the ANC came to power in 1994, it heralded a new era of democracy for South Africa. President Nelson Mandela and his new government were well aware, however, that moving on from our history would not be easy. For millions of people, the injustices and pain inflicted by apartheid did not simply stop on the 27th of April 1994. It became clear that, in order to consolidate and entrench our young democracy, it would be necessary to deal with our troubled past in a sensitive and meaningful way.

In July 1995 South Africa's new parliament passed a law authorising the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The central purpose of the Commission was to promote reconciliation and forgiveness among perpetrators and victims of apartheid by the full disclosure of truth. The Commission had three main tasks: to uncover human rights violations perpetrated in South Africa between 1960 and 1994; to identify victims, hear their stories and make reparations; and to give amnesty to those perpetrators who came clean about their involvement in politically motivated human rights violations. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was appointed as chairperson of the Commission, or TRC, as it became known.

“[A] commission is a necessary exercise to enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation.”

Dullah Omar, former Minister of Justice

The TRC dealt with hundreds of stories of victims, as well as applications for amnesty from many members of the apartheid security forces. But reconciliation is not a once-off event. It is a complicated process, and needs time. Many efforts at forgiveness, reconciliation and closure happened – and are still happening today – outside the official TRC channels.

One remarkable story of reconciliation took place at Liliesleaf. Some 48 years after the raid on Liliesleaf, two men who were both there on that fateful day had the chance to meet again: Ahmed Kathrada and Hennie Pitout.

Detective Constable Hennie Cornelis Pitout

Born in the Eastern Cape, Hennie Pitout was a young constable when he participated in the raid on Liliesleaf on 11 July 1963.

After the raid Pitout was moved to the Republikeinse Intelligensiediens (RID), which was one of the predecessors of National Intelligence (the government intelligence service). He later returned to the Security Branch. At the time of his retirement Pitout was the longest serving security policeman in South Africa. Pitout passed away in August 2013.

Ahmed ‘Kathy’ Kathrada

Ahmed Kathrada first got involved in resistance politics at the age of 17 when he participated in the Passive Resistance Campaign of the South African Indian Congress. A veteran of the South African liberation struggle and Rivonia Trialist, Kathrada was one of the men arrested at Liliesleaf on 11 July 1963. He was imprisoned on Robben Island and in Pollsmoor Maximum Prison for 26 years and three months. Walter Sisulu wrote of him: “Kathy was a tower of strength and a source of inspiration to many prisoners, both young and old.”

Upon his release in 1989 he was elected on to the ANC National Executive Committee and became an ANC Member of Parliament. Today he heads up the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, which, among other objectives, identifies and supports projects and programmes that will deepen non-racialism and create an equitable society.

Colonel Hennie Pitout's recollections of the Liliesleaf raid

We (those who went on the raid) all worked on one floor. We knew one another well. Lieutenant Willem van Wyk [who led the raid] handpicked us and we were chosen for our experience and knowledge in different aspects of intelligence and security. None of us knew of Operation Mayibuye at that stage. I was chosen, I think, because I had good experience of people working underground and their way of operating. I was also very good at judo and that always helped when arresting people. Van Wyk came in the late morning, about 11 am and said: "We're going to find Sisulu and the radio."

We met outside the police station and there we were held up because we had to get the paperwork done correctly. You know, the warrant and so on. We could not afford to make mistakes now. We decided to hang a piece of cloth between the driver and the guys in the back so that we would be hidden. Then we left. We were very squashed there in the back and we had the dog! I was in the back of the van when we drove into Liliesleaf.

We drove in through the gates and there was a man walking towards the exit. We stopped and this man said there's nobody at the house. Van den Berg started reversing. Kleingeld said, "What do we do now?" Van Wyk stopped and said: "Kom ons slaan toe." We drove forward and stopped. We jumped out. I remember seeing people jumping out of the windows. We chased them and rounded them up. We arrested the farmworkers. Kathrada was in disguise, but he couldn't disguise his voice. When he opened his mouth and spoke, we immediately knew it was him. The others were very nervous, but not Kathrada.

When we raided the thatched cottage we were surprised at what we found. We did not expect to find those blueprints! We realised we were on to the MK-plans. Govan Mbeki, Kathrada, Rusty Bernstein and Mhlaba were in the cottage.

Then we found the antenna and realised that we had found Radio Freedom. We knew this was something big. This was it! We've got them!

While we were busy going through all the documents and handwritten letters and plans, Arthur Goldreich arrived in a green Citroen. He wanted to turn around but we stopped him. One of the officers pulled his gun on him. In the lounge we made a list of everything we found and all the people present and then took them to Johannesburg.

We definitely felt a sense of success after the raid. The success became more and more apparent as we found more and more documents and letters. I never thought the Rivonia trialists would get the death penalty. I think that would have been wrong because although they planned to overthrow the state, they were arrested before they could put their plans into action.

Interviewed by journalist Pearlie Joubert

Ahmed Kathrada's recollections of the Liliesleaf raid

Although we notice a closed deliver vehicle bearing the name of a dry-cleaning firm drive up to the main house, we ignore it. ... Suddenly the rear doors of the vehicle open, disgorging armed security police and trained attack dogs. We are electrified with shock. Our group of intruders race towards the main house, while another heads for the outbuildings, where we are meeting. Govan quickly stuffs the Operation Mayibuye documents into the unlit stove, hoping they will not be found. Walter and I jump through a window at the back of the room, facing the road, but are stopped in our tracks by police with dogs and guns.

They don't recognise me at first, and it's only when I speak that they realise who I am. Among our captors are Warrant Officer Dirker and Lieutenant van Wyk of the Special Branch, both of whom know me well.

After removing the mass of incriminating articles they find, the police detain everyone on the farm, including labourers, who are wholly ignorant of the clandestine role the property has played. We are taken to the Johannesburg prison, the notorious Old Fort, where we are locked individually in the single cells reserved for prisoners who have been sentenced to death and are awaiting transfer to Pretoria, and the gallows.

Ahmed Kathrada, *Memoirs*, Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004

They meet again, 2011

On 23 April 2011 a remarkable meeting took place at Liliesleaf. Forty-eight years after the raid on Liliesleaf, Colonel Hennie Pitout and Ahmed Kathrada met for the first time since that fateful day. On both sides there was instant recognition, as if the years had just fallen away. They walked towards one another, and Kathrada held out his arms. They embraced. As they exchanged thoughts and memories they could now look one another in the eye, as equals, as free citizens of a democratic South Africa.

Pitout remembered how, as a young white policeman in apartheid South Africa, his first loyalty was to his chosen career in the South African Police. From Kathrada's side there was no bitterness, no recrimination, accusation or resentment for the role Pitout had played in his arrest and subsequent imprisonment – only genuine interest in meeting the man behind the police uniform.

It was a day of shared memories, exchanging views, comparing perceptions – and making peace.

Activity

Write a two to three page dialogue of the conversation that takes place between Ahmed Kathrada and Hennie Pitout when they meet again after 48 years. You can be imaginative, but stick to the historical facts. You can also write what they are thinking (and not saying).

Use the following ideas to guide you:

- What is needed for one human being to forgive another
- How perceptions shift over time
- How power relations shift over time
- What reconciliation means and why it is fundamental to our South African democracy