

After Heritage Day in Simonstown, 24 Sept 2018.

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Fifty years ago the apartheid government decreed that Simonstown becomes a whites-only town. In 1968 Africans had already been forcibly removed to Gugulethu. Now it was the turn of those apartheid classified 'Coloured'. Six-hundred-and eighty families were uprooted. Memories of uniformed policemen, batons, being herded on to open trucks, bulldozers pushing over the walls of what was once home and the fear of being dumped in an unknown place abound. A seventy-four-year-old man recalls: I went to the Catholic School here in Simonstown. Nobody warned us. When we came home from school my mother sat on the pavement with a few of our belongings. Our house was gone. Bulldozers were pushing down the last walls of houses. I always wanted to tell how it felt seeing my mother weeping there on the pavement. The hurt does not go away. Violent evictions based on skin colour were going on all over South Africa.

Every year the number of those who gather in Simonstown to remember their expulsions gets smaller. They come from Ocean View and Gugulethu and the other places. At St. Francis Anglican Church someone reads out the names of those who passed away since last they met. Rev Peter Storey and a handful of whites who opposed the evictions join to again express their outrage and show solidarity. But the vast majority of whites now living in Simonstown do not, it seems, want to be reminded that they might live on land or in a home from which people were once forcibly removed. As we gathered to lay wreaths at Jubilee Square at the ever so modest and diminutive monument, white motorists passing, hooted because of the inconvenience caused by the crowd listening to an Imam and a Reverend.

Those evicted five decades ago meet under the banner of the Phoenix Committee. It is they who have kept the memories against us forgetting. Now it is time for white folk to reciprocate, acknowledge and place meaning behind our heritage of pain, prejudice and dispossession. It would be an act of potential bridge-building and healing if white folk were to join the discussion about an idea that speaks to the memory of these evictions. I imagine Simonstown residents placing a plaque or other agreed signage on their gates or front doors that says: *Wag 'n bietjie* (wait a moment), remember those who once lived here and who were forcibly removed under the Group Areas Act of 1968. Maybe a small number of present-day residents can provide the impulse. Maybe one day there will be six-hundred and eighty small memorials against forgetting on the porches throughout Simonstown. This would be a small act of considerable meaning by which white folk take some personal responsibility for a past from which we benefitted materially and enjoyed huge privilege – always at the expense of the 'other'. My hope may not find great resonance yet but I believe that the time will come. Such act of acknowledgement should then be replicated and 'catch on' elsewhere in South Africa.

A variety of South African shrubs and trees are called *wag 'n bietjie*, literally translated as, hang on a minute. The shrub and its tree relation, are also known as the buffalo thorn (*ziziphus maronata*). Its curved thorn makes you reverse before you are free of its hook. In isiXhosa and isiZulu it is known as *umphafa*.

The inspiration stems from the Germany example of *Stolpersteine* – stumbling stones on the pavements outside homes or shops with inscriptions that remind those who pass that here once lived a Jewish family or an opponent of the Hitler regime who was taken from this place to be murdered in a concentration camp. To stumble over the stone intends to remind everyone, every time they pass, that people were once murdered here in my name. A year ago there were 69,000 stumbling stones in Germany and throughout Europe where Nazi atrocities took place. The real power of this is that ordinary citizens, however belated, make a personal statement in public in which they acknowledge some responsibility, however minor, for the atrocities committed. Such personal accountability and acknowledgement are also the guarantor.