

CHAPTER ONE

THE STORY

1990. The setting of this story sees it open in the Mamelodi SOS Village at a meeting of resident students of the community centre, from the local university, and visiting students from a not too distant Afrikaans, white university: all training psychotherapists. Supervisors were present. It was a hot, airless Pretoria day. The still bright light of the relentless sun bounced off the concrete outside the room the group sat in. The resident students explained patiently to the visiting students what it was they did in Mamelodi with the local “semi-literate, vernacular” people, many of whom had never heard of the concept psychology. In that context consulting a medical doctor could sometimes be perceived as radically western when the sangoma best knows the ways of the local people, living and dead.

In the midst of the meeting, a telephone call arrived via a messenger. One of the resident students was asked to please attend to it. A nearby doctor wanted a psychologist to go to his rooms immediately. The doctor, Dr O, practised in Tsamaya Road, close by. The chosen student excused herself and entered the white heat of the late morning.

A Journal: The Story of Lešaka

From this point the story of Lesaka takes the form of a chronicle of events. In order to emphasise the journalistic nature of the narrative that follows, it will be presented at times in the present tense and throughout in the first person.

Day one

Dr O is waiting for me and I am ushered into his neat consulting room. He quickly explains the situation to me while the patient waits in the next room. A

woman has brought in her neighbour's two-year-old son this morning. The child has been severely beaten, sjambokked, and is in shock. He is dehydrating and must be admitted to hospital. I am asked to look into the matter, as it seems to be a family affair. I am taken to the woman and the child in the next room. The child is silent and still. I am told that the shock makes him unresponsive. His little shirt is lifted for me to view the damage: long raised stripes cross his torso on either side of his body. I am struck by how apathetic the child is.

The woman neighbour explains that the child's older brother called her this morning to take the child from him. He has since disappeared but a charge of assault against him has been laid at the police station. The children's mother is in hospital and the father is away. I agree to visit the home.

Day two

The next day I visit the child in the hospital. He is lying in a cot in a small ward with several other babies. The nursing sister tells me that he is much better but still very quiet. He has a drip attached to his arm. His mother has been to see him as she is in the same hospital - Mamelodi Day Hospital, a facility for short stays and routine medical procedures. An attached out-patient clinic serves the community. Paramedical departments include occupational therapy, physiotherapy, ophthalmic services, psychiatric services, social work services. No psychological services are provided.

About day six

A few days later I visit the child's home in Mamelodi Gardens - a middle class, new suburb. The houses are neat but close together. Each garden is walled off from the street and its neighbours. To find the house is not easy as this is a town where the streets have no names. The names were removed to foil the soldiers and the police during the years of political struggle in the country. Houses are identified by large hand painted numbers on the doors. The numbers run into the tens and hundreds of thousands. A typical address would

be, 105334 Mamelodi East. I find a spot with numbers approaching the one I am looking for, I follow the numbers until they run out, then the sequence starts again somewhere else. Eventually I find it.

The child's mother is home. The child is home. They both look weak. The child is called Neo and his mother, Patricia, is Mrs Morare. Neo is more cheerful than when I had last seen him. He is a plump, healthy looking child with a winning smile. Patricia and I talk about what happened. She tells me that there is a boy, Lesaka, seventeen years old, who was living with them. She had to go to hospital suddenly and Lesaka beat the child Neo while she was away. Mrs Morare is a large woman who speaks passionately. She is very angry and wants to see justice. She does not want Lesaka living with them in the house any longer. He still sleeps at the house but she seldom sees him. There is going to be a court case. Her husband is in Cape Town but should be returning in six weeks time to Pretoria. He works for the American Embassy and must travel every six months between Pretoria and Cape Town, the country's two capitals. For diplomats and higher government officials, summer is spent in Cape Town in the south and the winter is seen out in the warmer and drier Pretoria in the north. The winter season in Pretoria will start in six weeks time. Mr Morare is a driver for the embassy official, Mr Dougall. Mrs Morare does not work.

Mrs Morare had developed a kidney infection and was admitted to hospital for an emergency procedure. It was then that she left Lesaka to care for the child Neo but he ended up beating the child.

I negotiated to see Lesaka. I arranged to return when he would be present.

Day eight

When I met Lesaka I found a small, slightly built youth of seventeen years, shabbily dressed with a diffident manner. His eyes remained lowered while we

spoke, or tried to speak with the help of an interpreter, the house helper. Occasionally he stole a glance upwards at me and his mouth twitched at the one side as he struggled for the odd word in English that was the extent of his vocabulary in my language. My knowledge of his language was nil. He said that on the morning of the beating incident the child would not stop crying. He had had to cook, wash and get the child to school but the child would not stop crying. Lesaka did not know anyone in Mamelodi except his father who was presently in Cape Town. He did not get on with Patricia at all and complained that she often locked him out and refused to recognise him as a member of the household. It was at this point that I understood what the family connection was between Lesaka and Neo: they had the same father but different mothers. Lesaka said that Patricia had been nice to him while his father was home but that she had changed towards him as soon as he left for Cape Town. Lesaka had lived all his life with his mother in the Ciskei until she had died recently. Lesaka had come to Pretoria a few months earlier, after the death of his mother. This was the first time he had left his home in the Ciskei, a large rural area plagued with poverty and much violent political unrest. He had come to look for his father. Lesaka was frightened and asked if I could help him in the court case that he knew he would have to face. I agreed to see what I could do but said that I wanted to speak to his father first.

The next few weeks

I wrote to the American embassy in Cape Town, asking for Mr Morare. I managed to contact him and informed him of the problem. He showed my letter to his employer, Mr Dougall, who allowed him to return to Pretoria early to sort out the problem. We met one late afternoon at his house. I remember him arriving in a car and us shaking hands in the street. I had arrived a few minutes before him and waited in my car outside his house. I remember feeling a bit anxious in case he was aggressive or expressed great anger at what his elder son had done. My stereotyping of black men at that time, in that context, led me to expect an aggressive, violent father to a violent son.

I was confounded in my expectations. Mr Morare was not big. He spoke softly and reverently. He shook his head when he described the routine fighting in his house. His wife did not want Lesaka in the house. Lesaka was the son of his first wife from his home in the Ciskei. They had been married in a traditional ceremony, not a civil one. Many years ago he had left this first family in the Ciskei and had never returned. He had left the poverty of the Ciskei to seek employment in the more prosperous north of the country. He had found a new life with a new wife, one to whom he was joined legally. He still recognised Lesaka as his son, but what was he to do with him? Lesaka did not speak any language except Xhosa and few people in the north speak this language. Lesaka was not educated, he could not even read or write. Now he had arrived at his father's doorstep and wanted money and a place to live. Mrs Morare was not happy at all with the situation. She felt that Lesaka demanded too much money and did not work enough around the house. If Mr Morare gave Lesaka money or bought him clothes then Mrs Morare became very angry, shouting and complaining. They fought constantly. He asked if I would help with the court case against Lesaka. I agreed to do so. I suggested that we must work together to sort out the family problems. He agreed.

The next few months: Interpreters

I began to see Lesaka at the community counselling clinic almost weekly. He would arrive smiling shyly and sort of bouncing rhythmically as he walked, cap in hand, repeatedly pulling it through the one hand with the other. We always had to scramble to find an interpreter before we could settle down to talk. We eventually established a habit of using one of two interpreters who were mostly available. Not many people spoke Lesaka's language fluently. I briefed the interpreters as to how I wanted them to work with Lesaka and myself. This began as a very formal arrangement of precise translations but soon the interpreters formed their own relationships with Lesaka through myself, as much as I formed a relationship with Lesaka through them. The interpreters and I always discussed our sessions with Lesaka after he had left. As such we formed a small therapeutic team in which I led the formal

dialogues.

There was Catherine, the motherly mental health worker. Catherine grew very fond of Lesaka. She would tell me in detail about any chance meetings she may have had with him in between sessions. She also used to remind me of his visits before he arrived. She often asked after him when he was not there. Catherine would nod approvingly at some of my questions to him or smile indulgently at his answers. My relationship with Catherine changed, too. We became mothers in alliance although at times I felt as if I were an apprentice mother to her expertise. She sometimes had to patiently explain cultural issues to me. Lesaka became a shy boy in the presence of Catherine. His sentences were short and he spoke of his personal life, his fears and his concerns.

Marley, or Rasta Marley, as he was known, was the other interpreter. Marley was long and thin. His gentle, almost oriental face, also long with high cheekbones, was scarred deeply on the one cheek with two long gashes. His dreadlocks were always in various stages of progress. They never quite made it to a respectable Rastafarian length. This was typical of all of Marley's life. He never quite made it to leaving home, or earning a living through his art, or making it with a girlfriend, or even being a "real" man in some opinions as he was slightly effeminate in his mannerisms. Marley brought out a different aspect of Lesaka from the one Catherine elicited. When Marley was with us, Lesaka became more masculine, more assertive. Lesaka smiled less and his answers were more focussed, less emotional. He spoke of work, the law and his father. Marley, too, was different with me during the period we worked together with Lesaka, different from how he was with me when he and I were alone. There was a kind of competitiveness between Marley and Lesaka that I sensed.

About this time I was introduced to Jane, a woman of the community. Jane was an elderly woman but strong. She always wore a maroon beret and a kind of dark green cross-over pinafore dress. Jane spoke beautiful English and so

we could communicate well. I was introduced to Jane because the question of possible alternative accommodation for Lesaka had arisen in conversation with my interpreters. Jane was known to take people into her home. She worked with young children as a day-care mother but also gave care to other people in other ways. She gave me directions to her home and I made my way there one day.

Jane's house was not far from the community centre in an old property. The yard behind the modest standard four-roomed house held a maze of zozo huts standing on raised dried mud platforms. Property owners in the townships often erect temporary (zozo) huts in their yards to rent out for extra income. The aisles between these huts were narrow and most of the doors were open. A few semi-naked babies sat or tottered at doorways. Most of them had thin strings of beads around an ankle while some had a similar string around their plump bellies. One or two had a strip of hairy animal skin around a wrist. Adult women, probably mothers of the babies, were seated in the aisles, some of them washing clothes in galvanised basins. None of them could speak much English but attempted to communicate with me anyway. I crouched down to play briefly with one of the babies and its mother touched the bangles on my own wrist. I wore two twisted copper wire bangles and a solid brass bangle with engravings on. I had been given each of them by different people and kept them on my wrist as nostalgic reminders of the givers. The woman showed me her own arm that was adorned with bangles, then she pointed to the bangled wrists of the other women. They all laughed and one of them said "sangoma!" She then pulled on the beads around her neck and repeated "sangoma!" I laughed, too, but shook my head, "no, I'm not a sangoma".

Jane was not there that day but I learned later that she accommodated sangomas in training.

That day as I drove away from Jane's house I found myself face to face with the entrance to the Day Hospital not 50 meters from Jane's yard. I suddenly

remembered the visit to Neo. He was a toddler not unlike the ones I had just left behind me, but the day I had visited him he had been hooked up to a drip and held in a barred iron cot. I was struck by the contrast and wondered at the juxtaposition of the two images in my mind. Perhaps strangely, they did not seem incongruent in that moment.

In the Same months: The Court Case

I took Lesaka to consult a lawyer at a Legal Aid Clinic at an office in the centre of Pretoria. The elderly white lawyer we spoke to was understanding and patient. He suggested that the case would not be treated as a very serious one; he knew the magistrate concerned and was confident that Lesaka would get off with a warning especially as a psychologist was involved.

The Mamelodi court was crowded to over-capacity on the day of the hearing. We waited our turn as case after case was heard. People continuously entered and left the court room that had something of the flavour of a market place: bustling people, children crying, parcels and bundles crowding the aisles. I had arranged to be present as an expert witness although no written report was asked for. I also needed to testify that Lesaka would continue to see me in therapy. The hearing was remarkably quick, with the case being heard in a matter of about half an hour in total when it was eventually presented. I was questioned briefly from my seat and it was all over, with a warning. The lawyer had been present from early on as he had several cases to defend that day.

Setting therapeutic goals

Like a therapist well trained in conventional methods, I started to set goals for our sessions together. Lesaka and I discussed the way forward, Mr Morare and I discussed the way forward and Mrs Morare and I discussed the way forward. Among all these discussions, it emerged that Patricia (Mrs Morare) believed

her husband to drink too much alcohol. She said he became drunk and then they would fight. She accused him of being “harsh” with her. She complained of how tired she became looking after the small child, Neo, and with her sewing activities. Patricia belonged to a women’s group who met regularly to sew for a small profit and learn further sewing skills. This served also as a community group who engaged in politico-social awareness activities with members of foreign embassies. Patricia told me that she had known of Joseph’s (Mr Morare) first wife but had not known of a child. She had been shocked to have Lesaka turn up on her doorstep. However, right now her main concern was to sort out the quarrels between herself and her husband. She also found Lesaka “cheeky” to her: he did not respect her as the woman of the house. He seemed to want all of his father’s attention.

Joseph was less giving in his communication with me. He admitted to the quarrels between himself and his wife. He was hesitant to speak of his first wife or his previous life in the Ciskei. That life seemed very far from the life he had established in the respectable middle-class suburb of Mamelodi Gardens. The Ciskei is one of the poorest areas of rural South Africa. He had left in desperation to find work in the more prosperous north (under desperate circumstances) but in so doing had never returned to those perpetual desperate needs of his first family. Lesaka had been a baby but Mr Morare had never sent any money home for his care. He had heard that his first wife had died recently. He acknowledged Lesaka as his son and wanted to help him but did not know where or how to begin. In our conversations we looked at the possibility of sending Lesaka to night school to learn to read and write. Lesaka was approached with the idea and was very enthusiastic about the prospect. All was organised and soon Lesaka was travelling to lessons four times a week.

Mrs Dougall, the American official’s wife, wrote to me to thank me for assisting the family. They said that they would encourage Joseph to maintain his commitments from their side. I tried not to see this as patronising but as a genuine concern for a soft-spoken loyal man.

In our sessions, Joseph was not keen to address any marital issues he may have been having with his wife. Thus, I referred his wife to another counsellor for marital therapy and indicated that I would work only with Lesaka or with them as it related to Lesaka.

The community centre

Lesaka and I continued to see each other at the local community clinic. The clinic itself was situated under a large blue gum tree - a circle of chairs in the shade. The clinic had had a history of attempts to establish itself in Mamelodi. It had started out in one of the back houses in the SOS Children's Village. From there it had been moved to a section of a front house of the same complex, closer to the street. Lastly, it had been moved to the grounds of the YMCA adjacent to the SOS Village. At first the grounds had had three prefabricated huts that the clinic was allowed to use although they came to be used mainly for storage, the huts themselves being unpleasant 'hotboxes' in the summer sun. The use of the huts proved short-lived: I clearly remember arriving one morning to find the largest of the huts being dragged away on the back of a large truck. The two smaller huts followed soon after. At the stage of the clinic history when Lesaka came for counselling the only remaining shelter was the large tree.

The members of the clinic often speculated on the metaphorical meaning behind the out casting of the clinic from official community structures in the township. We saw it as a reflection of the struggle for psychology to fit with local traditional healing. Nevertheless, the services of the clinic were used by some and possibly the visibility of the tree setting was more acceptable to local people. Issues of confidentiality were not the same in this township community as they were in the urban, more western community of Pretoria. When I met with Lesaka others would eavesdrop or even at times join in. Lesaka never brought a friend to our sessions, possibly because he had no real

friends at that time, but sometimes other clients did bring friends or family members to sessions. This was community counselling in a different sense. It was not so much that 'community' defined a specific type of counselling activity, as that it indicated that counselling was largely performed in small communities, not one-on-one.

Lesaka continued at night school, took up boxing at the YMCA hall and met some friends. Lesaka wanted to get himself an identity document as a matter of urgency. He had no birth certificate either. Without any official documents he could not get work. This started a long process that was to last over a year and never reach conclusion. I discuss it in more detail later in this chronicle.

The Street Committee

The time came again for Joseph Morare to return to Cape Town with his employer. Lesaka was left at home once more with Patricia Morare and Neo. It was only a week or two after Joseph had left that problems began again. Things did not go well between Patricia and Lesaka and one day Lesaka ran away from home. Mrs Morare told me that he had disappeared when I asked after him after he had missed an appointment. Mrs Morare's neighbour was the chairperson of the street committee. He came over to join in our conversation. Mrs Morare seemed concerned that Lesaka had disappeared - she said that she did not want Joseph to find out that his son had gone. The chairperson of the street committee said that he would put the word out to other street committees to look out for Lesaka.

This was my introduction to the street committees. Each and every street had a committee whose business it was to represent and protect the members of their street. I was given several examples of how these committees worked.

A woman had run into financial difficulty with her payments on some furniture. When the furniture company had arrived to remove the items from

her house in lieu of payment, the members of the street committee had refused to allow the furniture company's personnel to take the furniture. They stood in the street blockading the path to the woman's house. At other times people were hidden from perceived aggressors, money was collected for needy street members, protection was given. When municipal services were discontinued due to debt, the street committee arranged for re-connection using people who knew how to connect the electricity wires from the poles in the streets.

Less than a week passed from the time of our conversation when I received a telephone call from Mrs Morare - they had found Lesaka. The street committees had located him in a street close to the YMCA. He had gone to live with a man by the name of Benjamin- someone he had met through a friend he had made at boxing.

The time with Benjamin

Shortly after Lesaka had been located at Benjamin's house, I paid them a visit. The house was in the old part of Mamelodi, just off the corner of a dirt road not far from the main tarred road that ran from one end of the township to the other, along the east-west axis. The old houses were all built according to a similar design; several rooms symmetrically arranged within a rectangular shaped building. The windows of these houses were set in small, iron framed openings; the houses had a back door and a front door; a tin roof and small yards. Benjamin's house had a well developed hedge partitioning the front yard from the road. The most remarkable feature of this house was, however, the maximum utility of available space. It was obvious that some kind of home industry was run from the premises as concrete objects such as grave stones, wash basins, birdbaths, fencing, and paving stones were stacked on the pavement, inside the driveway and hung from wires over the driveway. Also, various metal and wire objects were arranged in some kind of high-rise storage system in the yard. As I moved up the driveway along the side of the house to

the back, I realised just how remarkably extensive the utilisation of space in this property was. The entire yard at the back of the house had a second storey constructed above it. The ground storey was used for living, with several small outbuildings accommodating persons, a fenced-off section held some sheep in captivity, chickens ran around underfoot, then a staircase led one to an upper level of the yard which I could just make out as having a small hut on it. Later, when I had become more acquainted with Benjamin, I asked permission to look at the top. There I found a container vegetable garden, the small hut and some wash lines. I guessed that the plants and washing were put at the top as they needed the sunlight that was not able to reach the lower storey very well.

On that particular morning as I entered the yard for the first time, I found a gathering of people in the courtyard at the back, between the house back door and the out rooms and the sheep enclosure. The gathered group were sitting on boxes and chairs. I introduced myself and explained my presence. One lady, Rebecca, was able to speak good English. She was also talkative and friendly. She and I eventually established a good rapport. She understood my interest in Lesaka and the purpose of my visit and was able to convey this to the other members of the commune. She in turn explained to me how the set-up at Benjamin's house worked. Benjamin was a strong community figure who took stray people into his home. In return he expected them to work for him or pay rent. Benjamin was presently training Lesaka in his concrete manufacturing and welding industry.

I did not meet Benjamin immediately but had to arrange an appointment when I could return to find him. He was an elderly, frail looking man with a sense of inner strength about him. Rebecca was present to interpret as Benjamin's English was not good and my Sotho was non-existent. We spent some time discussing Lesaka and his problems, how he was getting into smoking dagga, was hurt by his family situation, how his prospects for a productive future were not good. Benjamin, nevertheless, seemed to have considered the matter carefully and decided that he could give Lesaka a chance to train at a craft and

provide him with a secure home at the same time. Benjamin agreed to encourage Lesaka to communicate with his father.

I met Lesaka at the house one morning, by arrangement. He walked up the driveway, cap in hand, smiling diffidently in his usual manner. Again, Rebecca was present to interpret for us. A new set of consultations now began at Benjamin's house and at the community centre when Lesaka could visit me there. We did not meet often now but our focus of conversations changed from personal crisis to practical matters. It was during this time that Lesaka vigorously renewed his efforts to obtain his identity document and applied himself seriously to his literacy classes.

The identity document

In South Africa it was, and at the time of writing still is, almost impossible to accomplish anything without an identity document. Without this Lesaka would never be able to obtain employment, vote, open an account, or drive a car legally among many things. Lesaka set himself a mission to obtain an identity document that became an absorbing, encompassing activity in itself. I came to think of it as a quest that in some ways symbolically depicted Lesaka's attempt to re-position himself in society generally. Even a third world country fighting major national problems such as HIV/AIDS, widespread adult illiteracy, extraordinarily high violent crime statistics and radical socio-political dissatisfaction, had little tolerance for an unskilled, homeless, illegitimate and "unofficial" youth.

I took Lesaka several times to the Home Office in the city centre to make enquiries. We wrote letters to his home village, to the school principal of his village who we discovered was also deceased. No one could vouch for Lesaka's identity. I forget why his father could not do this, perhaps it required two people, or perhaps because Lesaka's father had never married his mother in a legal ceremony, nor witnessed his growing up, he was not recognised as

being capable of a formal identification of Lesaka. I made many lengthy telephone calls to many officials to try to obtain some help. Nothing ever came of this. Lesaka remained without identity. This was something that he felt keenly with frustration and regret. As I have already said above, I believe that it had at least as much to do with his need for legitimacy as it did with the possibility of a job.

Lesaka found himself trapped in an imperious looped system of social regulations and demands. He had no way of obtaining an identity document as he could not prove his existence through any of the regulated means. Without an identity document Lesaka had no social rights, except the right to be punished should he break the law, which he was already doing by not holding an identity document. He and I took more than one trip into the city to search for a way through to legitimacy. After many months of trying, giving up, and trying again, we not so much admitted defeat, as finally let it all go.

Night school

Here I briefly discuss the matter of Lesaka's education. It was his idea to become properly literate and learn English as even his own vernacular tongue did not get him very far in the northern provinces where we often scrambled for interpreters. Although he had attended school intermittently in his village, the state of the schools in troubled rural areas did not allow for much of an education. We enrolled Lesaka at an adult literacy night school at which I had contacts, having taught there for some years previously. A regular lift to the school was arranged and we arranged with Lesaka's father to pay the fees and buy the books. Some of this negotiation was done through Mrs Dougall, Lesaka's father's (Joseph's) employer. Mrs Dougall expressed enthusiasm that she could be party to acts of charity for the disadvantaged in the host country. She took it upon herself to "speak to Joseph" about supporting his son. While I

have no doubt that she approached her involvement with all of the best intentions, the “Joseph” she spoke of seemed other than the Mr Morare I encountered both through his family’s stories and in the flesh.

Lesaka attended school for some months but left when he discovered that his father had stopped paying the fees.

Interval

After Lesaka moved in with Benjamin I stopped seeing him as regularly as before. He was working and attending school, initially at least. He had a “family” of sorts and continued staying with Benjamin even after his father returned from Cape Town. He and his father saw each other in a more formal arrangement outside the home of Patricia, mostly. This way they avoided the conflict with Patricia and Mr Morare was able to give Lesaka gifts occasionally, such as clothes, shoes or limited amounts of money. Lesaka appreciated these although he never really got over the sorrow of not being able to live with his father and always held resentment towards Patricia for this.

Eventually I stopped seeing Lesaka altogether and had no news of him for about a year until the next crisis was brought to me.

Another death in the family

I had already completed my two year period of training at the community centre in Mamelodi and was working at a local black matric and teachers’ training college, running life-skills programmes, peer counselling training and counselling students, when news came to me that Lesaka was wanting to meet with me urgently. An appointment was set up.

The Lesaka I met at that appointment was self-confident, his English had

improved tremendously, more so than my Xhosa which remained non-existent, but he was very angry. The week previously, Patricia had stabbed his father to death in the kitchen of their home. Besides the fact that Patricia had now, according to Lesaka, succeeded in forever preventing Lesaka from seeing his father, he was angry that she was not in police custody. Lesaka was concerned that Patricia would not be charged for the murder of his father and would also prevent Lesaka from any inheritance which he might be entitled to. Lesaka wanted recognition as eldest son and the first born of the first wife, and his customary rights protected. He said that Patricia would leave him destitute. Once again I was being asked to become involved in the life of this young man.

I began by visiting Patricia at her home. I found the house filled with several women family members of Patricia's. A large area of the carpet in the living area was stained with blood. I was led to Patricia who was in the bedroom at the back of the house. She lay on a large double bed and seemed in a state of shock although she was able and willing to talk about what had happened. The other women left us alone for a while to talk. She and Joseph had argued, she said that he had been drinking and became aggressive towards her. She drew a knife from the kitchen drawer and stabbed Joseph repeatedly. He died on the spot. It was not difficult to imagine how she succeeded in doing this as she was quite a bit bigger than her husband had been.

Patricia had been arrested and charged but her sewing group leader, also a foreign community worker, was supporting her to try and get the charges dropped. She told me the name of the police officer who was handling the case. It was he who had allowed Patricia out of custody. He was a friend of hers.

I next visited the police station down the road from where Patricia lived. I located the police officer handling the case. The rooms of the station were arranged around an inner courtyard. The investigating officer's office was

small and dark and filled with simple furniture. There were files stacked on a small wooden table. He offered me a chair opposite him at the desk. I told him who I was and why I was involved and asked him if he knew that Joseph had had an older son. He told me that he had not known of Lesaka at first but that Lesaka had come around to the police station asking questions. He was reluctant to discuss details of the investigation with me, understandably. He could not yet give me a date of hearing or trial.

On following up when I tried to ascertain a court date, I was told that the file had been lost and that it was unlikely that the case would come to trial. Lesaka expressed his fury when he heard the news. He accused the police officer of conducting some sort of relationship with Patricia. He held his index and middle fingers up together, entwined. He disappeared after that and never contacted me again.

Reflection

I believe that Lesaka gave up on a system that showed no sympathy for one who had no “official” rights in the eyes of our formal social system. I found this ironic in that South Africa was reaching its peak in its engagement in a long struggle to free its people from bureaucratic and unsympathetic laws which marginalised the poor majority who did not fit into the western system. I often wonder about Lesaka and ponder whether he turned to hi-jacking cars or robbery. At other times I believe that I do him a great disservice in even entertaining such an idea. Then sometimes I manage to take a step back and realise that I have yet again been thinking about Lesaka’s story from my conditioned western regulated perspective, placing judgements on the events so that they fit into the “malevolent” category simply because they do not fit into my western social expectations.

I, however, remain grateful to Lesaka who introduced me to a completely different life which is being led by millions of persons in our country in a twilight stratum of our society. If I had not met Lesaka and taken the road with him for a while, I may have remained constantly under my impression that all societies follow similar patterns, although the contents may differ. And if the pattern did digress from the one with which I am familiar, the western one, then I may have been always tempted to judge the digressing one as inferior or malevolent in some way. These events had led me on a journey of critical reflection of what I do as a psychologist in the different contexts in which I work.