



## Odyssey to Freedom

*George Bizos*

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"In October 1941 a young boy and his father disembarked at Durban harbour from a large liner commissioned into emergency service by the Allies. They were Greek refugees from their German-occupied motherland. They spoke no English. They had little money and no prospects. They were heroes, but no one knew that.

Some months earlier, father and son, together with two other Greek men and seven New Zealand soldiers, had set off in an open boat in an attempt to escape the German invaders. For two days and nights, sailing by instinct and the stars, battered by fierce winds, their food stocks running low, their water bottles almost empty, they ploughed across the Mediterranean towards Crete, little knowing that the island was soon to capitulate to the Germans.

Fortunately the escapees sailed into an Allied fleet while it was still light and were rescued. Had they encountered the fleet in darkness their fate might have been dire, as, sometimes, in the horrors of war no prisoners were taken – a reality the young boy discovered not many nights later.

The boy who stood on the Durban docks, appalled at the sight of Zulu men doing the work of animals by pulling rickshaws, would become one of the leading human-rights lawyers in the country that his father had chosen because the pavements were allegedly paved with gold. The boy was George Bizos.

Today George Bizos is a legendary name, renowned throughout the legal profession and beyond. More than that, he is a figure recognised in townships across South Africa. For as an advocate, Bizos is associated with the Treason Trial of the late 1950s; the subsequent Rivonia Trial where his colleague, client and friend Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment; the trial of Bram Fischer; that of the Namibian Toivo ja Toivo; a host of major human-rights trials through the 1970s and 1980s right up to the amnesty hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; and, in 2004, with the treason trial of the Zimbabwean opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, in that country. A consummate lawyer, a self-styled street fighter with a quiet tone of voice and a beguiling smile who, in cross examination, would slice through the evidence of security police and apartheid apologists alike, Bizos haunted the courtrooms of the apartheid regime. For four decades he exposed State lies and hypocrisy, State brutality and murder. In response the State badgered and threatened him, bugged his phone, obstructed his hearings. But the advocate was not to be intimidated.

In this compelling and long-awaited autobiography, George Bizos reveals the drama, the heartache and the moments of triumph, the fears and the frustrations of his long career as an advocate. He writes,

moreover, about himself and his family, and the domestic moments that made bearable the brutal years. He revels in his return to his beloved Greece, his joy at the Athens Olympic Games and his love of modern Greek poetry.

Above all, his is a warm and compassionate account, related by a raconteur of note. It is history told from the inside."

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