

My earliest memory of witnessing an injustice comes from a time when I was no more than 9 years old. My family was living at a massive flat complex called Eastview Gardens which had at least 700 flats divided into 7 courts, each named after Zimbabwean rivers. My family lived at the biggest court, Odzi, and as such my friend group, comprising of Jacob, Tadiwa, Paida (Tadiwa's little brother), and myself, was exclusive to Odzi.

Our friend group, though tiny, had a clear hierarchy. Jacob was our leader partially because he was the fastest among us (and speed was a massive status symbol at this age), but mostly because his family was well off enough to afford a DSTV (cable) subscription and we needed to keep him happy if we were going to get invited to watch cartoons and anime at his house. Jacob was more than aware of this and would often punish us for disobeying or defying him by refusing us access to precious entertainment.

I was the second in command because I had an old Phillips game station that I had inherited from my older brother and used as leverage to stay in good books with Jacob. Tadiwa and Paida's parents on the other hand had invested heavily into toys for their kids and toys, though common, were still a valuable resource. We knew that just including Tadiwa, our age mate, would be enough to secure the toys, but Paida was like a little brother to us and I held a soft spot in my heart for the kid so he was always invited to hang out.

One fine day, my pals and I were seated in a small circle discussing the last episode of Dragon Ball Z and we were paying keen attention to our leader, Jacob, as he described what he believed would most likely happen in the next episode. You couldn't interrupt Jacob when he was mid-speech, or you would risk missing episodes of the exclusive shows. This was a well-established, though silently enforced, rule so you can imagine our surprise when little Paida suddenly piped up with an opinion of his own.

“Nah, you’re wrong.”

None of us had actually been listening to Jacob, but this sudden incursion into his awful monologue cut through our boredom like a scalpel. What was Paida thinking? He might never get to find out what happens in the episode. Granted the boy was only 6, but he knew better. As I was processing this novel event, Jacob stood up quietly and, with no hesitation whatsoever, kicked Paida in the belly so hard, he slid backwards a little.

What happened next was one of the most shameful memories I have to this day. Tadiwa, Paida’s brother, and I froze. We looked at Paida, writhing on the ground and struggling to breathe, then at Jacob, standing over him with an evil smile on his face and finally at each other. At this moment we quietly weighed our options. Jacob wasn’t a large boy and with our forces combined, we could definitely take him. This path would doubtless lead to us being cut off from DSTV and all the wonderful shows on it and possibly destroy our friend group forever. On the other hand, we could do nothing, sit back, let Paida recover and laugh about it some other day between marathon episodes of Dragon Ball Z.

We chose the latter.

I stood up and started trying to convince Jacob to let it go while Tadiwa managed to get Paida to his feet and lead him home. What we didn’t know in that moment was that Jacob had done some serious damage and little Paida would need surgery to repair some internal injuries. It would be months before the kid was the same physically, but mentally he was changed for ever. I wish I had stood up for my little buddy. It wouldn’t have spared him the surgeries, but at the very least, he would have known he has someone looking out for him. Instead, I chose personal benefit over my friend and I will never forgive myself for that.

The Price of Silence

The world, like our childhood playground in Odzi Court, is filled with power imbalances. There are vast and mighty empires that, like Jacob, command resources and wield influence with an iron fist. Then there are nations, smaller and often poorer, navigating the intricacies of this power play like we tiptoed around Jacob's fragile ego. And the question that forever echoes, the shadow always lurking - are we complicit in the injustices we witness, the Paidas left battered and broken, because of the crumbs of comfort tossed from the imperial table?

History whispers this tale in countless tones. Rome, the colossus that cast its long shadow across the ancient world, demanded fealty from smaller kingdoms. Trade agreements, yes, but often laced with the bitter aftertaste of tribute and of subservience. Kingdoms like Numidia, once fiercely independent, found themselves caught in the dance of diplomacy and desperation, a waltz between economic dependence and the threat of military might. Did those kingdoms truly hold autonomy, or did they, like us frozen in Odzi Court, become silent bystanders to atrocities committed against their neighbours, all for the sake of maintaining ties with the empire?

The modern stage reflects a similar drama, though played out in boardrooms and diplomatic cables instead. The United States, the undisputed superpower of our time, casts a long shadow across the globe, its influence stretching from trade deals to military interventions. And just as smaller nations sought Rome's favour, many today wrestle with the ethical tightrope of engaging with the Eagle. Economic opportunities dangle like Jacob's tantalizing DSTV subscription, promising development and prosperity. But the price, sometimes, is silence in the face of the powerful nation's transgressions.

Take the case of Angola, a nation rich in oil and strategic advantage. In the 1980s, amidst a brutal civil war, the US, seeking to counter Soviet influence, forged close ties with Angola's UNITA rebel group, led by Jonas Savimbi. The US provided military and financial aid, turning a blind eye to Savimbi's human rights abuses, including the use of child soldiers and the displacement of millions. While the US's support ultimately helped end the war, it came at a

heavy cost – an estimated 500,000 lives lost and a legacy of instability that continues to plague Angola today.

The Angolan story is not an isolated one. Nations rich in oil and strategic advantage find themselves entangled in a complex web of alliances with the US, their economies buoyed by military contracts and trade partnerships. Yet, when human rights violations occur under those alliances when drone strikes cast their deadly shadows, does the silence of allies and benefactors not become complicity? Do we, like Tadiwa and I, turn our backs on the Paidas of those distant lands, sacrificing their cries for justice for the sake of our own economic well-being and safety? This silence is not without its consequences. It emboldens the powerful, fuels injustice, and ultimately undermines the very values of freedom and democracy that these nations claim to uphold.

But just as there are those who remain silent, there are also whispers of courage, echoes of defiance that refuse to be drowned out by the excuse of economic pragmatism. These whispers come from individuals and groups who dare to speak truth to power, who stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Paidas of the world, demanding justice and accountability.

One such voice is Angolan journalist Rafael Marques, who for years has risked his life to expose the human rights abuses committed by both the Angolan government and its allies. Marques's investigations have led to international condemnation, sanctions, and even the arrest of high-ranking officials. He is a testament to the power of a single voice, a reminder that even in the face of overwhelming odds, courage and conviction can make a difference.

This is not to paint with the simplistic brush of good versus evil. The world is rarely so binary. Engagement with powerful nations can indeed bring development, foster peace, and offer a path to progress. But that engagement must be tempered with a clear moral compass, a refusal to compromise core values for temporary gain. Just as we, in our moment of cowardice, should have confronted Jacob's cruelty, nations must not shy away from speaking truth to power.

Condemning human rights abuses, pushing for accountability, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the Paidas of the world - these are not acts of hostility, but of moral clarity. They are the echoes of defiance that refuse to be drowned out by the siren song of economic benefit. They are the whispers of courage that remind us that true sovereignty lies not in silent servitude, but in the unwavering pursuit of justice for all.

The choice, like that faced in Odzi Court, is never easy. The risks are real, the potential consequences dire. But as we navigate the intricate politics of this global playground, let us remember: the silence of bystanders, the turning away from injustice, ultimately becomes a chorus of condoning. To truly stand tall, to be a person worthy of respect, you must not only demand justice for yourself, but for the Paidas of the world, even when their pain echoes from lands far beyond the shadow of our own court.

Becoming King Except Chapter 1, REBELLING AGAINST INJUSTICE.