



The Strange Alchemy of Life and Law

Albie Sachs

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From a young age Albie Sachs played a prominent part in the struggle for justice in South Africa. As a result he was detained in solitary confinement, tortured by sleep deprivation and eventually blown up by a car bomb which cost him his right arm and the sight of an eye. His experiences provoked an outpouring of creative thought on the role of law as a protector of human dignity in the modern world, and a lifelong commitment to seeing a new era of justice established in South Africa.

After playing an important role in drafting South Africa's post-apartheid Constitution, he was appointed by Nelson Mandela to be a member of the country's first Constitutional Court. Over the course of his fifteen year term on the Court he has grappled with the major issues confronting modern South Africa, and the challenges posed to the fledgling democracy as it sought to overcome the injustices of the apartheid regime.

As his term on the Court approaches its end, Sachs here conveys in intimate fashion what it has been like to be a judge in these unique circumstances, how his extraordinary life has influenced his approach to the cases before him, and his views on the nature of justice and its achievement through law.

The book provides unique access to an insider's perspective on modern South Africa, and a rare glimpse into the working of a judicial mind. By juxtaposing life experiences and extracts from judgments, Sachs enables the reader to see the complex and surprising ways in which legal culture transforms subjective experience into objectively reasoned decisions. With rare candour he tells of the difficulties he has when preparing a judgment, of how every judgment is a lie. Rejecting purely formal notions of the judicial role he shows how both reason and passion (concern for protecting human dignity) are required for law to work in the service of justice.

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