

Fourteen years ago, on the street, next to where we stand – where you are all sitting right now – seven men were murdered.

The Banyan trees on Clifton road provided sniper cover for the Karachi police.

The street lights were shut.

The roads were cordoned off.

More than a hundred policemen stood waiting, waiting for my father Mir Murtaza Bhutto, their guns loaded and their orders undeniable.

Three men, Yar Mohammad Baloch, Sajjad Ghakro and Rahim Brohi were felled with single sniper shots as they ran to protect my father with their bodies.

A precisely aimed bullet struck Yar Mohammad in his forehead and he died instantly. His son Shahnawaz is here with us today.

Sajjad ran to replace Yar Mohammad, to shield Papa from the bullets, and was killed with a shot to his heart.

Rahim, the youngest of the men killed that September night, was shot in the head.

Two other men Sattar Rajpur and Wajahat Jokhio were injured by the hail of gunfire, they later died in police custody.

My father was shot several times. But he was killed with a point black execution shot to his jaw. They severed his tongue, hoping to silence a voice that would not fade in the face of tyranny. Ashiq Jatoi, his comrade and his friend, was killed with a bullet to the back of his neck, a neck that was bloodied but unbowed.

They were left to bleed on this road, they died outside the beautifully decorated Clifton Gardens.

Ashiq Jatoi's family is here tonight, Sabeen his brave daughter is acting as the masters of ceremony, introducing me and Songs of Blood and Sword.

We Karachiites know what happened here on the night of September 20th, 1996. You know also then, that the men who ordered and orchestrated the assassination of Murtaza Bhutto and six of his associates are also with us tonight. They are the President of the Republic, they are the policemen, promoted and celebrated, who are charged with the security of this, our beautiful dangerous city. They have won national medals, they serve as leaders in the highest posts in our lands. They travel to meet foreign dignitaries; they are the soldiers of this obscene war on terror.

Our newspapers erase the stain of blood from their hands.

Our people do not question how criminals can come to lead nations. Not too loudly anyway, they have to worry about electricity and water and the rising price of food.

But we know who they are and what they have done.

There are many who are frightened by this book, this we also know. There are those whose guilt is not seen as crimes for which they must atone, but as badges of power and authority. There are people, and let me say this clearly, there are people who will go to no end to make sure that the truth is not heard. But intimidation, money and violence is no match for the truth.

George Orwell, who would have had much to say of Pakistan today, once said ‘In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.’

So this pursuit of the truth then, is my revolutionary act. You cannot kill seven men and leave them to die on the open roads and then silence those who seek justice.

I wrote this book as a labour of love. I wrote it to honour the last promise I made Papa before he was so brutally killed on these roads. I promised him that I would tell his story. He could not write it himself, he joked, because what he knew was too dangerous. They’ll kill me if I write my life story he said, laughing quietly so that his smile spread across his face. You write for me, you can tell my story when I’m gone.

Fear and the threats which build as the book is readied to reach the world, could not stop Songs of Blood and Sword, they still can’t, because it is a book borne out of love.

And nothing and no one can defeat love.

I wrote Songs of Blood and Sword for my brother Zulfikar, whose kindness and strength remind me every day of our father. I wrote for my mother, Ghinwa, whose bravery is paralleled to none. She is my hero, a woman whose life has been marked by speaking truth to power. I wrote for the children of the shaheeds. For my grandfather whose name and history has been hijacked by murderers and thieves. For my Joonam, my grandmother, whose arms we have not been enveloped in for the last 14 years as she is kept securely away from us, her grandchildren. For the nameless and voiceless victims, for those who have spent their life struggling for a just and honourable Pakistan. For Mir Ali, who is the light of my life. For my Uncle Shahnawaz who died too young to see his daughter Sassi, also here with us tonight, turn into a young woman her father would have been proud of.

I wrote Songs of Blood and Sword as a love letter to my beloved, beloved father. I know he is here with us tonight too. There may not be justice in politics and justice may be muffled in the courts of Pakistan, but we seek it still. One day, it will be ours. That is my message to my father, to all our fathers. Don’t worry Papa, nothing happens to the brave. History is built on the strides and sacrifices of the brave.

I will end by reading you the poem from which the name of my book is taken. Poem of the unknown, and we have so many of our own unknowns here in Pakistan – we even have a name

for them in Urdu, la patta the unknown, the disappeared – was written by the Iranian Marxist and poet Khusro Golsorkhi. Golsorkhi was put to death by the Shah's regime for his criticisms of the states' corruption, feudalism, and violence. And he died bravely and with a spirit infinitely more dignified and peaceful than that his killers. This is his poem:

On your breast lay

The deep scar of your enemy

But you standing cypress did not fall

It is your way to die

In you nestles songs of blood and sword

In you the migrating birds

In you the anthem of victory

Your eyes have never been so bright.

Thank you for choosing to be with us tonight.