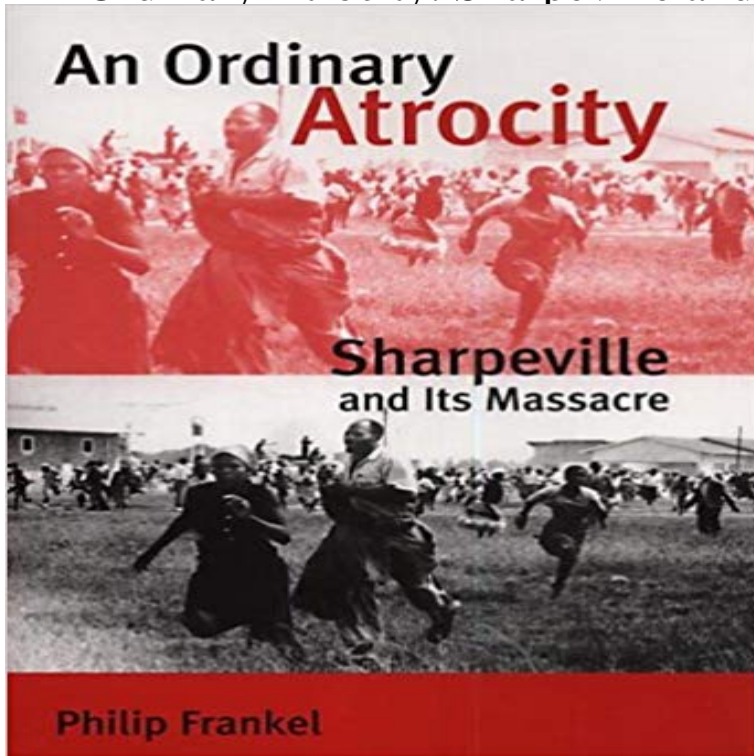


An Ordinary Atrocity: Sharpeville and Its Massacre



On March 21st, 1960, police opened fire on members of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) protesting peacefully in the Vaal Triangle township of Sharpeville against apartheid's iniquitous pass laws. Sixty-nine people died. The shots fired that day in an obscure corner of South Africa reverberated around the world, and Sharpeville became the symbol of the evil of the apartheid system. For a variety of reasons this seminal event has never been systematically documented. The Wessels Commission of Inquiry established to investigate the matter never published a formal and final report that was satisfactory to all the parties, and in the four decades since the shooting, the massacre has been so mythologised and contorted to serve various political interests, that it precluded a thorough investigation. Philip Frankel's book goes a long way toward correcting that deficiency. Drawing on a wide range of sources, from policemen to survivors and families of victims, he tells the exciting and hitherto invisible story of this watershed moment in South Africa's experience. In doing so he reveals the dubious behaviour of the South African police, new findings on the role of the PAC, the extent and nature of casualties, and the parts played by a number of individuals whose behaviour in the vortex was critical to its tragic outcome. The book ends, fittingly, with the signing by the then-President Mandela, of South Africa's first democratic constitution at the site of the massacre.

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