

# THE THEATRE OF VIOLENCE

NARRATIVES OF PROTAGONISTS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONFLICT

DON FOSTER • PAUL HAUPT • MARÉSA DE BEER



Funded by the Finish Embassy



*James Currey*

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# CONTENTS

|                                                                                                  |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Foreword                                                                                         | v          |
| Preface                                                                                          | ix         |
| <b>1 After the Truth and Reconciliation Commission</b>                                           | <b>1</b>   |
| <b>2 Popular representations of perpetrators</b>                                                 | <b>27</b>  |
| <b>3 Wider academic understandings</b>                                                           | <b>55</b>  |
| <b>4 Morals and methods</b>                                                                      | <b>89</b>  |
| <b>5 Police narratives</b>                                                                       | <b>105</b> |
| Law and order: The story of a former Commissioner of Police                                      | 105        |
| Living with death: The story of a former Koevoet operative                                       | 126        |
| <b>6 Intelligence narratives</b>                                                                 | <b>151</b> |
| ‘Things weren’t as simple’: The story of a former general in<br>Military Intelligence            | 151        |
| ‘I never fitted’: The story of a National Intelligence Services agent                            | 176        |
| <b>7 Liberation movement narratives</b>                                                          | <b>206</b> |
| ‘A very lonely road’: The story of a former MK Commander                                         | 206        |
| ‘A hungry man is an angry man’: The story of a former APLA<br>Head of Operations                 | 226        |
| ‘I was never wrong’: The story of a former APLA Commander                                        | 242        |
| <b>8 Narratives of township conflicts</b>                                                        | <b>253</b> |
| ‘What was the gain of killing people?’ The story of a former<br>member of a Self-Protection Unit | 253        |
| ‘No rewards’: The story of a former member of a Self-Defence Unit                                | 261        |
| Former enemies forging peace                                                                     | 271        |
| <b>9 Analysis and reflection</b>                                                                 | <b>274</b> |
| <b>10 Conclusion</b>                                                                             | <b>316</b> |
| Acronyms and abbreviations                                                                       | 341        |
| References                                                                                       | 345        |
| Index                                                                                            | 357        |

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## FOREWORD

To understand all is to forgive all.

*Mme de Stael*

While intriguing, the sentiment is not adequate. To understand is not to forgive. A complex, contested and always unfinished process, understanding is a struggle. Appearing 10 years after the advent of democracy, *The Theatre of Violence* demonstrates clearly that the promise of understanding also demands time. Drawing from the work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the writings of others who have endeavoured to explain the political conflict in South Africa, this book poses vital questions. As it details and scrutinises testimony from some of those who engaged in violence during the apartheid era, it refuses trite answers. In this way, the volume serves to enhance our understanding of the causes and complexity of political violence. Most certainly, it opens space in which to continue and deepen an important debate.

In 1995, the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No. 34, charged the TRC to help South Africa come to terms with the truth of its past. More precisely, a key part of the Commission's mandate was to investigate apartheid era gross violations of human rights, to help the nation understand the 'antecedents, circumstances, context, motives and perspectives which led to violations; [identifying] all persons, authorities, institutions and organisations involved in such violations.' It was a tall order. In a short amount of time and amidst high expectations, the Commission needed to both reveal and understand patterns of violence that defied singular explanation. Still, significant progress was made. Of the many findings presented in the 1998 *TRC Report*, the Commission's chapter (Volume 5) on the causes, motives and perspectives of perpetrators was described by several commentators as perhaps the most important chapter in the *TRC Report*. It suggested that, unless the underlying factors that contribute to a milieu within which perpetrators emerge, are nourished and prosper, are addressed, the chances are that these kinds of violations will happen again in one form or another.

The purpose of *The Theatre of Violence* is to reach into the complexities of political violence and further our understanding about the dynamics of political violence, patterns of conflict that drew South Africans into a vortex that risked outright disintegration. Its focus is on the accounts, often contradictory and confusing, of those who acknowledge having committed some dreadful deeds. It seeks not to attribute blame, nor does it call for prosecution of those who, from the perspective of retributive justice, deserve condemnation. It further recognises that

guilt rests not only with those who pull the trigger, but also with those who winked when the shots were fired. The bright lines are blurry. Are those who gave the orders to kill more or less guilty than those who pulled the trigger? What about those who were indifferent or scared to restrain the killers? *The Theatre of Violence* wrestles with just these sorts of questions. Without directly addressing questions of culpability, this is what makes the study suggestive and intriguing. In many ways it is an optimistic study, holding out the possibility of a society that can understand and take steps to minimise the perpetration of gross violations of human rights. It considers the possibility of partial social redemption, allowing for what, in the final chapter, are referred to as *partly healed people*, being able to find a measure of self-understanding and peace in the wake of the deeds for which they are responsible. The final words of this book, drawing on Sophocles' *Oedipus the Tyrant*, belong to the people of Thebes:

Then learn that mortal man must always look to his ending  
As none can be called happy until that day when he carries  
His happiness down to the grave in peace.

*The Theatre of Violence* attempts to grasp the bigger more complex truth about political violence, addressing a range of questions that are often not considered, perhaps cannot be considered, in a dispassionate manner. Preoccupied with the important need to identify *who did what to whom*, we often fail to realise how few political perpetrators and protagonists were either psychopaths or predisposed in some obvious way to violence. In many instances they are normal, socially balanced people who are also responsible for violent deeds. They were exposed to a range of experiences and conditions that opened for them the possibility of deviant violent behaviour. Perhaps then the potential for perpetration is more widespread than we would like to believe. The intention and capacity of the perpetrator to do harm is often a case of the circumstances in which a person finds him or herself. This underscores why understanding is not forgiveness. It also means that to explain is not to condone. We are required to take responsibility for our own actions. There are people, raised in similar circumstances, faced with the same choices and given identical opportunities as those who undertook violence, who resisted the allure of force. Some took it on themselves to oppose the violence, often at significant cost to their own well-being and that of their families and closest associates. The reasonable personal or social responsibility that enables, at the very least, a minimal civic decency to shape the ethos of a nation is, however, often more difficult to engender than hoped.

The idea of trying to understand what makes people commit dreadful deeds was born in conversations between Don Foster and myself in the wake of the publication of the 1998 *TRC Report*. Don wrote the TRC chapter on the causes, motives and perspectives of perpetrators. I was responsible for weaving it into the matrix of the bigger five-volume report. We shared many insights, ideas, anecdotes and harrowing stories. We visited and interviewed a number of 'common criminals' in

Pollsmoor Prison, pondering what makes an apolitical perpetrator different. Within this context we drafted a proposal to enable us to interview political prisoners. I met with Paul Haupt, who also worked in the TRC, a short while later. He agreed to join the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation as one of its first employees to undertake the interviews and head the programme. The outcome, four years later, is the pages that follow.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements are necessarily many: Don Foster's oversight and availability for consultation have been invaluable. His wisdom and skills in finalising of the manuscript are much appreciated. Paul Haupt's 'people skills' in meeting with a range of protagonists on all sides of the political divide, his capacity to win the confidence of interviewees, to gain the co-operation of their lawyers and to bring the study to completion deserves acknowledgement. He has travelled widely, conducting over 300 hours of interviews in 32 recorded interviews. In some instances, he provided a level of counselling and support for those interviewed that took him beyond the call of duty. Marésa de Beer, who shared extensively in the writing process, brought a level of research, drafting and editing to the manuscript that is impressive. Her perseverance and dedication are hugely appreciated. Sue de Villiers, another person involved in the TRC report-writing process, did the final edit. We are grateful to her. Others have contributed in their own way to the project, including Nazeema Ahmed, S'fiso Ngesi and other colleagues in the Institute. Carol Esau and Debbie Gordon provided logistical and administrative support throughout the project. Jeremy Sarkin was engaged in the project, in different ways, from its inception, providing insight, comment and legal counsel. Appreciation also goes to Fiona Ross who provided extensive commentary on the manuscript.

There could not have been a study without the participation of those interviewed. Some refused to be 'on record'. Others read the transcripts and/or chapters featuring their interviews and gave of their time generously. These insights inform more than the pages of this book. The complexity of the roles the interviewees played in the apartheid years, fighting for and against the state, has not escaped any of us. Many paid a price for revisiting their involvement in a process that others have chosen to ignore. To grapple with the past is never easy. It is a difficult encounter in a struggle between memory and forgetting. Some choose to forget, others struggle to forget. Those interviewed suggest there is much that cannot be forgotten, certainly not by the victims of violence – but also not by those responsible for the violence.

Audrey Chapman, Programme Director of the Science and Human Rights division of the American Academy for the Advancement of Science, understood the importance of the project in providing initial funding. We are grateful to her and the Academy. The support of the Finnish Embassy for the project has been extensive.

Ville Luukkanen, programme co-ordinator in the Embassy and his successor, Jesse Maait Laitinen, have promoted the study and Finnish Ambassador Kirsti Lintonen has shown personal and supportive interest in the work. Without their support the pages that follow would not have seen the light of day.

The quest for the healing of a nation is a long and meandering one. There are no simple routes or quick solutions. It is hoped that this book, in association with many others on the topic, will contribute to the process. The Institute of Justice and Reconciliation acknowledges all who have made the project possible. I am personally grateful to Don Foster, Paul Haupt and Marésa de Beer. Considerable appreciation is also due to the HSRC Press: thank you to John Daniel, Garry Rosenberg and Mary Ralphs for their commitment to the work, dedicated effort and technical skills.

Dr Charles Villa-Vicencio  
Executive Director  
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## PREFACE

Any study which undertakes the daunting task of understanding and unravelling the workings of political violence inevitably faces a set of problems. Whose side of the fence? Can one be impartial? What kind of approach? What kind of theoretical lens? Who can we believe? Some regard an attempt to understand violence, particularly from the perspective of 'those responsible' for the grim deeds, as an obscenity (see discussion of this issue in Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003). Others hold that an understanding of the wellsprings of political violence is of vital importance; not least, they argue, to prevent any future occurrence. We take this second road; we seek an understanding of political conflict with a focus on 'those responsible' for violence. Previous studies have focused on the victims of state repression (Foster, Davis & Sandler, 1987).

What kind of truth? Truth, these days, is a highly contested topic. It is not just lying inertly out there waiting for us to trip over. If anything, recent contestations over truth claims have suggested that truth is always likely to be perspectival, seen from particular spatial and moral positions. What men regard as truth is not necessarily what women regard as truth. Black and white evaluate truth claims from different perspectives. Constructionists hold that the 'truth' is shaped by particular theoretical approaches, by variable methodological lenses. We therefore need a framework; we need to say where we are coming from. But what kind of framework? In their recent study of state violence in Brazil, Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros & Zimbardo (2002; also Huggins & Haritos-Fatouros, 1998) usefully discuss two contrasting approaches, which they label as 'stockpiling' and 'storytelling'. The stockpiling approach is that often taken by human rights organisations in keeping records of violations. It is mainly statistically driven. It records numbers and types of violations, records when and where, but has far less to say about the why. It has its values; it is useful in establishing patterns. But human faces and emotional experiences disappear into the statistical array. It is concerned with the factual rather than with human sentiments and motives, which fade away into the dispassionate public record. We certainly require the public record, but we also need to hear human voices telling of their own experiences.

Storytelling or narrative approaches allow us to engage more personally with the experiences of both victims and those responsible for violations. As we shall see later, the versions of victims and perpetrators differ in palpable ways. That in itself is quite informative. But there have been very few studies using the narrative approach with those responsible for violence. As Huggins et al. (2002, p.22) put it, there is, in general, 'a great reluctance among human rights scholars to conduct

story-telling research on the perpetrators of atrocities.' While narrative approaches work through language, and we have no fail-safe methods to evaluate their truthfulness, there is nevertheless much that can be gleaned from stories, not least to hear the storytellers' own perspectives and to understand, if they are prepared to tell us, their motivations.

In the research that follows, particularly in Chapters 4 to 9 of this volume, we place considerable emphasis upon just such a narrative approach. It is an approach involving negotiation. We ask if they are prepared to tell their stories; they may agree or refuse. Indeed, as we report in Chapter 4, a number did refuse or withdraw after initially agreeing to participate. These stories are presented in the form that people wished to present them. They are not bound by constraints, for example as called upon by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC) amnesty procedures (Chapter 1). These, then, are perpetrators' own stories. We do not insist on admission of particular events of violent deeds, nor probe them for apologies. We do not insist on their naming victims, whether or not they are able to do so. The stories are framed in their own terms. That may not be to the satisfaction of all people. That is the approach adopted here.

These are not the only approaches. There are also judicial courts of law and, in recent times, a number of truth commissions that have adopted a variety of different approaches (Boraine, Levy & Scheffer, 1994; Hayner, 2001). Indeed, one of our lenses focuses carefully on the TRC, which in our view, particularly regarding its approach to perpetrators, constitutes a mixture of the factual and forensic stances, more similar to the framework of stockpiling than storytelling. There are yet other approaches. Scholars of all sorts have produced a sizeable literature on the topic. The popular media speculate, report and describe (or fail to do so); they provide another perspective.

With full awareness that they present different perspectives and different insights, our framework offers four sets of lenses:

- A factual or forensic lens through the eyes of the TRC, which could also be described as a stockpiling approach (see Chapter 1).
- A public discourse approach that examines the images and representations presented through the media, particularly the press. It also examines the public portrayal (or lack of it) of 'those responsible' over the historical timeline of unfolding events (see Chapter 2).
- A theoretical or scholarly lens that reviews and debates the pictures drawn by a wide range of academic writings. Given the problem of competing academic perspectives, our approach works towards a new theoretical synthesis (see Chapter 3), which is framed as a 'relational' perspective (see also Bozzoli, 2004; Tilly, 2003).
- A narrative approach that presents the stories of protagonists from different sides of the conflict in South Africa: state security agents, liberation

movement cadres and those embroiled in urban township clashes (see Chapters 5 to 8).

Chapter 4 tells the methodological tale of this narrative research. It raises some moral and ethical dilemmas pertinent to the subject matter (the study of political violence) and the method. We note that all participants have given consent for their stories to be used for research and, where pseudonyms are not used, for their names to be disclosed. Interpretation and analysis of participants' stories appear in Chapter 9.

Two other issues characterise our framework. First, we raise a series of problems with the standard term used to describe those responsible for violence: a 'perpetrator'. We attempt to disrupt and dislodge the very label and category, arguing that it places the onus too heavily on, and psychologically inside, those who commit violent deeds. Political violence, we argue, is a *relational* phenomenon. We need to cast our eyes more widely afield. To signify this disruption of the taken-for-granted, we shift to the more ambiguous concept of 'protagonist'. Second, to capture the multi-sided nature of political violence we employ a dramaturgical framework (Goffman, 1959, 1974), viewing protagonists as actors in a 'theatre' or 'arena' of conflict, a wider field in which political relations shape both enabling and constraining circumstances. This metaphor, we trust, will underline our overarching framework, which treats political violence in relational terms.



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# 1 AFTER THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

I felt nothing...because we had been harassed and we had suffered a lot, so that we no longer had mercy, we no longer cared, we no longer cared about everything...I did not have a heart.

...the violence affected everybody, young and old...when it crawls into a group of people it just destroys everybody.

(A member of a Katlehong Self-Defence Unit, *Truth and Reconciliation Report of South Africa*, vol. 6, pp.316–317)

## WHAT IS OUR CONCERN?

This book is – and is not – about perpetrators, particularly perpetrators or would-be perpetrators involved in the intense conflict and struggle in South Africa in the period 1960 to 1994. It poses questions about perpetrators of gross violations of human rights or, in more ordinary language, perpetrators of ‘horrible’, ‘evil’ or ‘wicked’ deeds (Midgley, 1984, p.7). Who are the perpetrators? What are their motives? Why do they act in ways that many people find incomprehensible? Can we understand them or their deeds? Can we explain their conduct? Can they admit remorse and ask for forgiveness? Could we possibly forgive them? Are we able to prevent the occurrence of future atrocities?

Part of the task of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was to account for the ‘causes’ of violations as well as the ‘motives and perspectives of persons responsible’ (Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No. 34 of 1995; hereafter the Act). The earlier five-volume *TRC Report*, finalised in 1998, presented preliminary accounts on persons responsible, but the Amnesty Committee (AC) of the TRC – the primary vehicle for dealing with perpetrators – had not yet nearly completed its task. This amnesty work was extended and wrapped up only by 31 May 2001 when the AC was dissolved in terms of Proclamation R31 of 23 May 2001. The crucial sixth volume of the TRC that covered the amnesty process and findings was presented, along with Volume 7 (a list of all victims), to President Mbeki in March 2003.

The onerous, challenging and difficult work of the TRC was over. We are in a post-TRC period; a reflective time. We can pose questions, we can argue, we can debate the merits of the TRC process and procedures, and the ‘truth’ findings of the TRC reports, seven weighty, intimidating volumes in all. What have we gleaned from the

TRC? Did the TRC uncover the truth (assuming that there is a single, uncontested truth to be found) as its mandate hoped for or promised? More pertinently for this volume, did the TRC reveal a better understanding of perpetrators, their motives, reasons and deeds?

What do we know after the TRC? Our task here is not to review or evaluate the TRC as a whole. Much has already been written on the TRC in general (Bell & Ntsebeza, 2001; Boraine, 2000; Chubb & Van Dijk, 2001; Cochrane, De Gruchy & Martin, 1999; Doxtader & Villa-Vicencio, 2004; Gibson, 2004; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003; James & Van de Vijver, 2001; Jeffery, 1999; Krog, 1998; Meiring, 1999; Meredith, 1999; Orr, 2000; Posel & Simpson, 2002; Ross, 2003; Tutu, 1999; Villa-Vicencio, 2000; Villa-Vicencio & Doxtader, 2003; Villa-Vicencio & Verwoerd, 2000; Wilson, 2001). Recently Savage, Schmid and Vermeulen (2001) produced a select bibliography of writings on the transition and the TRC that ran into 113 pages. No doubt mountains more will be produced. Opinions and evaluations are complex and vary considerably. From far afield, many have lauded the victim-centredness and the emphasis on reconciliation, and celebrated the delicate balancing act of amnesty procedures, which steered between the extremes of formal legal justice and blanket amnesty and social amnesia. Locally the TRC was lambasted and legally challenged by almost all political parties across the spectrum at various stages; no bad thing necessarily. On the negative side, some starkly claimed that the TRC simply got it wrong (Jeffery, 1999) or that the TRC could 'only render up a range of fractured, incomplete and selective "truths"' (Posel & Simpson, 2002, p.11).

Our intended range here is more limited than the general TRC process or the narrower brief on the merits of the amnesty procedure (Villa-Vicencio & Doxtader, 2003). While both issues may have background relevance, our primary focus is on perpetrators, with a predominant tilt toward the 'why' questions; a psychologically flavoured frame if you like. In this chapter, we summarise the *TRC Report*, particularly volume six, to see what the official version tells us about those responsible for violations. Questions are posed about lacunae and silences in the official version. But before we turn to the TRC it might be useful to ask what is meant by the term 'perpetrator'.

## WHAT IS A 'PERPETRATOR'?

At first blush the notion is straightforward: a person who commits an act that is held to be beyond some legal or moral principle and who can be judged as guilty of that offence or crime. In the binary constructions that tend to shape meanings, 'perpetrator' is contrasted with 'victim' (sometimes also referred to as 'survivor'); one in the pair is the doer, the other is done to – a construction of active/passive or of subject/object.

In terms of the relatively narrow brief of the TRC amnesty provisions, a perpetrator was an individual (applications could only be received on an individual, not a

collective, basis) who committed an 'act, omission or offence' which amounted to a gross violation of human rights, in turn defined in the Act as killing, abduction, torture or severe ill-treatment. It is no surprise to read that the TRC spent considerable time on attempting to define these terms. 'Did a slap in custody constitute torture? What was ill-treatment?' (Cherry, Daniel & Fullard, 2002, p.21). However, the Act also had a slightly wider definition of responsibility, including those who gave orders or commands, those who created a climate to incite acts and those who failed to prevent acts that constitute gross violations of human rights. This throws up the possibility of considering command and leadership structures as perpetrators and poses questions about the location of primary responsibility – among foot soldiers who commit the deeds or among leadership who authorise both policies and an overall climate for violence. Regrettably, despite the wider definition, the TRC did not sufficiently nail accountability to the upper echelons, not least due to procedural requirements of individual applications for amnesty. If an individual did not admit liability for a particular act of violation, the amnesty application was rejected. According to Martin Coetzee (2003, p.193), former executive secretary of the AC, there were some 398 of these kinds of applications denying guilt.

In many ways the TRC was heavily shaped in terms of 'simple moral binaries of "victim" and "perpetrator", associated with unambiguous judgements of right and wrong' (Posel & Simpson, 2002, p.10). This permits only a restricted view of those responsible. It sails around the complexities and ambiguities, rich in the lived experience under apartheid, of collaboration and complicity with apartheid, of the murky terrain of spies, crossovers and informers, or of the role of bureaucratic functionaries in a long chain of authority. It passes over questions about the producers of doctrines, ideas, plans and policies – not least the policy of apartheid itself – that lead to conflict and violence. It skirts around issues of social structures and processes, including poverty, oppression and domination, which produce actions only dimly intelligible to the people involved (Bonner & Nieftagodien, 2002).

In this book, we attempt to go beyond the TRC in presenting narratives from 'perpetrators' (more on this issue later) from different sides of the struggle, as told from their own perspectives. This approach goes wider than the TRC, which perforce attended to the quasi-judicial process of amnesty decisions. Running the considerable risk of appearing to exonerate their deeds or even showing empathy towards perpetrators, we try to offer a 'human' face in listening to self-presentations from their own points of view. This does not preclude us from trying to understand, or from 'reading' and 'interpreting' such perspectives, or indeed from recoiling from and condemning actions such as, for instance, the killing of Steve Biko<sup>1</sup> or of Amy Biehl, the brutal slaying of babies or the burning of bodies of erstwhile foes. While the biography of multiply-convicted Eugene de Kock teems with sickening, repetitive, staccato-like descriptions of violent murders conducted in the name of the apartheid regime (De Kock, 1998), the sensitive tracings of

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) have found delicate understandings and humanness in the man dubbed 'Prime Evil'. There is a range of perspectives, which may open a more complex and nuanced account of perpetrators of dreadful deeds.

### SOME GREY AREAS

In considering the matter of perpetrators, there are indeed many grey areas. The first pertains to the question of whether victims may also be perpetrators. Certainly, yes. Alex Boraine (2000, p.254) directly grants this: 'In the final analysis Winnie Madikizela-Mandela was both victim and perpetrator.' A further clear example is that of *askaris*<sup>2</sup> such as Joe Mamasela. These were liberation movement guerrillas who were caught, frequently tortured, turned and who subsequently committed violations against their own former comrades. Mamasela testified to more than 30 such deaths. At the wider reaches of the debate, 'victims' argue that even if committing violations, by definition they cannot be regarded as perpetrators, since their acts were only committed in self-defence. In the narratives later in this book, members of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and the African National Congress (ANC) express variations of this argument. Similarly, victims of racism frequently argue that they cannot be racists, since they are not part of the structural arrangements that by definition constitute racism.

A second grey area pertains to those cogs in the wider machine who may not have committed atrocities, but nevertheless supplied information or greased the administrative wheels which permitted violence. Examples in this book are members of the National Intelligence Services (NIS) who would vehemently deny the label 'perpetrator'. They committed no direct acts of violation, but nevertheless provided information that led to arrests, detention and torture. Closely related, but on the opposite side of the political fence, is the shadowy case of spies, informers and 'sell-outs' – providers of information to the security forces that eventuated in deaths. In Jann Turner's (2002) novelistic depiction, such a spy turned out, in the tale, to have been a direct perpetrator. This area was little explored by the TRC process and remains still largely shrouded in silence. Few informers have been exposed. It was only recently, in late 2003, that some public attention was given to the matter of former 'apartheid spies'.

A third grey area refers to the matter of 'horizontal' or 'lateral' violence, long recognised as part of the patterning of oppression itself (Fanon, 1952/1967; Moane, 1999; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), in which violence occurs within the confines of oppressed people. 'Necklace' murders,<sup>3</sup> taxi violence and the bitter conflicts between hostel dwellers and informal settlements in black townships are all examples of this. Here, too, perpetrators are simultaneously victims. Later in this volume, the narratives of Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) Self-Protection Unit (SPU)<sup>4</sup> and ANC Self-Defence Unit (SDU)<sup>5</sup> members are illustrative of this. In such instances, protagonists may only be dimly aware of multiple 'social causes' that

engulf them in patterns of violence. For example, in the East Rand townships, a complex mix of taxi-route conflicts, enmity over scarce economic resources, migrant labour laws and local power battles intertwined into overlapping and differing group conflicts with diverse forms of violence (Bonner & Nieftagodien, 2002). The TRC did not get a good handle on the motives or causes of this aspect of violence; cases of 'necklace' murders, crowd and collective violence are largely absent from the *TRC Report*.

A fourth grey area, closely related to the preceding issues and an endemic problem for the social sciences in general, is the vexed question of collective or individual accountability and explanation. The TRC held a complex position on this matter. On the one hand, it only recognised perpetrator applicants if there was a declared political motive. A total of 3 559 amnesty applications were refused on the grounds of 'no political objective' (Coetzee, 2003). In other words, there was a vested interest for perpetrators to declare affiliation to, or belief in, a collective, a political organisation. Clive Derby-Lewis and Janusz Walus, the already-convicted killers of ANC stalwart Chris Hani, were refused amnesty on the grounds that they were not acting within the authority of the Conservative Party (CP). Furthermore, political motive was interpreted quite narrowly to refer to major political parties so that other forms of collective violations, such as crowd murders or murder due to witchcraft beliefs (see *TRC Report*, vol. 6, pp.332–337), remained strictly outside of the TRC mandate, unless shown to be intertwined with actions in the name of a political party. On the other hand, collective amnesty applications, such as that submitted by senior leadership of the ANC, were not permissible. Only individual applications were considered. Only individuals – albeit acting in the 'execution of an order of, or on behalf of, or with the approval of' (Boraine, 2000, p.276) a political organisation as a 'member, agent or supporter' (p.277) – could be found to be perpetrators, be named as perpetrators and be granted amnesty. The problem of individual or collective accountability raises knots that are difficult to untangle cleanly, for the TRC, for jurisprudence and for the social sciences more generally. The TRC specifically excluded as a criterion for evaluating perpetrators, acts for personal gain or actions out of malice, ill will or spite directed against victims. On the surface that seems a clear enough distinction, but who is to say quite so clearly how acting out of ill will can be disentangled tidily from a fierce struggle against hated and feared enemies.

A fifth grey area refers to the nomenclature and labelling of a perpetrator. Few participants in this very volume would happily regard themselves as perpetrators; many would vehemently reject the ascription. Who would readily own the description of 'perpetrator'? It is easier for outsiders, observers, analysts and reporters (including the present writers) to wield the term, than for actors and agents of the deeds, whether individuals or collectives, themselves to own the label. Indeed, most of the major political actors – including Buthelezi and the IFP, De Klerk and the National Party (NP), the PAC (see Letlapa Mphahlele, this volume) and Mbeki and

the ANC – mounted considerable challenges against the TRC, through legal and other resistance, refusing the category, the findings and the label of perpetrator. This is not altogether surprising. The label is pejorative; it carries strong and negative connotations, and a standard (if wearisome) reaction to such attributions is one of denial, deflection or divergence (Cohen, 2001). In such quandaries, it would help to specify clear and unambiguous definitions of and criteria for evaluations of the ‘sins’. To their credit the TRC did attempt precisely that, restricting the ‘evils’ to killings, abductions, torture and severe ill-treatment. But this raises more grey areas. What precisely is severe ill-treatment? Is psychological torture equivalent to physical torture? The problem of the ‘truth’ in the labelling of a ‘perpetrator’ remains just that: a problem.

A sixth grey area refers to a mixture of issues: intent, accidents, misinterpretations and omissions (no outcome). Did they intend that particular harm? Could they see the consequences of a series of actions? The TRC heard chunks of testimony about accidents, bombs going off at the wrong time, the wrong place, the wrong targets, the wrong information about targets, misinterpretations of meaning down a chain of command, and the like. If you intended to plant a bomb and indeed did so with the aim of maiming military personnel, but it failed to detonate, what is your status? Can one be a perpetrator by accident? The intent was to damage installations, not to take life, but the device went off early and people were killed. Some of these problems may be directed by legal devices and rules, but the potentially contested nature of these issues – allowing excuses, evasions and circumventions – does not entirely erase the problem area.

A seventh grey area revolves around distinctions between political and criminal actions. The TRC received a limited mandate, fashioned through the unique circumstances of the negotiated political settlement and fixed in the 1993 interim Constitution. Amnesty was a late-in-the-day compromise, tacked onto the end of the binding interim Constitution, stating that amnesty would be granted in respects of ‘acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives’ (Section 251, Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act no. 200 of 1993). A considerable pile of applications was received from sentenced prisoners. They were rejected if no political motive could be identified. While there may have been good grounds for so privileging political motives, the consequence was to restrict the TRC’s investigations into intersections with criminal and local community patterns of violence. We know that Vlakplaas operatives crossed this divide, as too did Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA) fighters and SDU/SPU members. Crowd murders and witchcraft-related killings involved mixtures of local power battles, petty jealousies, gender issues, gangsterism and generational struggles jostling between apparently pure political motives. The privileging of a purely political motive for violence, as Simpson (2002, p.221) puts it, ‘may do more to mystify than to explain continuity and change in the patterns of violence and violation which continue to pervade this society after apartheid’.

Little purpose is served here in trying to resolve these issues. Rather, we wish to highlight that the very category and label of ‘perpetrator’ is more complex and contested than commonly recognised. Most of the people we interview in this volume would challenge and reject the term as applicable to either themselves or their actions. Our aim here is to take a broad view, readily accepting the ambiguities and complexities. Perhaps that opens some ‘third spaces’ or some ‘third ways of knowing’ (Shotter, 1993) in contemplating this contentious terrain.

## A QUESTION OF BALANCE

In the case of a palpably unequal struggle, how should one consider the matter of perpetrators? Are the actions of the liberation movements equivalent to the actions of the apartheid state security forces? Are people from all sides of power divides to be regarded equally as perpetrators of gross violations of human rights? That, in effect, was the outcome of the TRC amnesty process, even if the TRC simultaneously and repeatedly claimed that it was not an equal struggle. The TRC faced sharp animosity along with legal challenges from a variety of sides in its unenviable task to straddle this question of balance. Its task was well nigh impossible from the outset, given that it carried the mandate of the prior and binding negotiated settlement; the balancing act that made the South African ‘miracle’ possible in the first place.

Our position is quite clear. It was not and never could be considered an equal struggle – morally, politically or in terms of military force. The roots lie in colonial military conquest, in land invasion, displacement and seizures. In more modern parlance, Du Toit (1990) has criticised theoretical biases that have under-represented the role of the South African state in contributing to mass violence. From the 1950s, the apartheid regime had the full powers of state apparatus, tax payers’ money, national defence and police forces and military conscripts, legislation (including the banning of all political opposition, powers to detain political foes without trial, media censorship and propaganda, removal and displacement of people, restrictions on gatherings and movement, and laws governing economic activities), along with the open or tacit support of most western nations – despite apartheid having been declared a ‘crime against humanity’ by the United Nations General Assembly in 1973 (Asmal, Asmal & Roberts, 1996). By the mid-1980s, the apartheid state had a real defence budget close to R15-billion or almost a third of the total national Budget and could deploy nearly half a million defence personnel (Cock & Nathan, 1989, p.5).

On the other side, the ANC, the PAC, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and later the black consciousness movement were banned and held to be unlawful organisations, and tens of thousands of local activists were detained, tortured or severely ill-treated. By the mid-1980s the ANC had roughly 8 000 personnel under arms, and a ‘defence’ budget of roughly US\$50 000 (Davis, 1987, p.72). It operated

from camps in neighbouring states, often under pressure from host governments. The vast majority of indigenous people, supporters of the illegal liberation movements, were disenfranchised, poor, uneducated, subject to considerable restrictions in terms of movement (the dreaded pass laws) and with few prospects of betterment. Economic resources, ownership and controls were almost exclusively in the hands of the erstwhile colonial 'settlers'. By no stretch of even fevered imaginations could this have been regarded as an equal struggle.

Nevertheless, in this volume we examine the question of 'perpetrators' from various sides of the struggle, since the multi-sidedness was a differentiating, if not entirely unique, characteristic of the long battle for political emancipation. In doing so, we constantly need to reiterate the inequalities, the disparities of power, resources and life possibilities. One dominant feature of these sorts of grossly unequal struggles is that the oppressed people suffer the most, both in terms of general conditions of living (structural violence) and in terms of direct physical violence, from both the state (death squads, torture, imprisonment, disappearances, police brutality) and the horizontal or lateral forms of violence among the oppressed. All of these were fully operative in the South African case. Gross inequalities produce particular shapes of violence and also produce differing forms of violence on the various sides. Attempting to find an appropriate balance or even-handedness in circumstances of such glaring inequalities is like searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack, as the TRC discovered to its cost and chagrin. Perhaps there is no true balancing act, no fully adequate outcome in the wake of human rights violations. With some cautionary and preliminary considerations in mind, we can turn to the work of the TRC regarding perpetrators.

## THE TRC AMNESTY PROCESS

Emerging from the negotiated political settlement and the last-minute compromises regarding amnesty tacked onto the 1993 interim Constitution, the 1995 enabling Act set the frames and terms for the TRC. Under conditions of huge logistical and administrative challenges, work got under way in early 1996. The first public victims' hearings were on 16 April 1996. The AC, at first with only five members – judges Hassan Mall, Andrew Wilson, Bernard Ngoepe and two commissioners, Sisi Khampepe and Chris de Jager – met initially in February 1996, with the first amnesty hearing on 20 May 1996. By 30 September 1997, over 7 000 amnesty applications (relating to more than 14 000 incidents) had been received. The AC, consisting of personnel with legal qualifications, was subsequently increased to 11 members (June 1997) and 19 by December 1997, supported at its peak by some 95 staff members and 32 investigators.

The five-volume interim *TRC Report*, faced with last minute legal challenges and with certain pages blocked out in consequence, was handed to President Mandela

on 29 October 1998. The amnesty process was not nearly done and was eventually extended to 31 May 2001. The final two TRC volumes (including Volume Six as the report of the AC) were handed to President Mbeki on 21 March 2003, currently celebrated as Human Rights Day, but which also commemorates the anniversary of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre in which 69 people were killed and 178 wounded by police action. For some this might have been an appropriate day for finalising the TRC work – the celebration of a new-found culture of human rights. For others it was a day of bitter irony since perpetrators had been granted amnesty in the intervening period, and were free from both criminal and civil liabilities. The seven-year labour of the TRC was over. The final report was in the public domain.

In terms of the enabling 1995 Act, the requirements for amnesty were primarily twofold, with a further subsidiary consideration. Amnesty would be granted for incidents in the period 1 March 1960 to 10 May 1994, within or outside South Africa, if applicants were held to be *politically motivated*, as discussed earlier, and if they provided *full disclosure*. In terms of the latter, applicants needed to give a full and truthful account of the incident, relating only to the facts relevant to that incident, to their own role and that of any other persons in the planning and execution of the actions in question, as well as subsequent steps such as concealing or destroying evidence of the offence. The issue of full disclosure became a matter of heated debate in amnesty hearings, with lawyers for victims' families frequently contesting the truth claims. The third principle, listed under the political motive requirement, was the issue of *proportionality*. Only if acts were proportional to stated political objectives was amnesty granted. These rules, which channelled the TRC decision-making process, were drawn from the Norgaard Principles,<sup>6</sup> which were first used in 1989 to guide the release of prisoners on the eve of the United Nations' supervised elections in Namibia.

#### A CASE EXAMPLE

An example of a TRC amnesty hearing, and of the proportionality criterion, is given in the case of the killing of George Mkomane in Belfast, in the then Eastern Transvaal, on 13 February 1991 (*TRC Report*, vol. 6, pp.485–489). A member of the right-wing *Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging* (AWB), Hendrik Johannes Slippers, applied for amnesty for the abduction and killing of Mkomane. He had already been sentenced to a prison term for the murder. Slippers testified that the AWB had instructed members to insist on a policy of 'white-by-night', a return to the curfew laws of the apartheid era, which prohibited black persons being present in white areas after 9pm without a permit. Force should be used if required. He believed that 'these actions would put a stop to the political changes in the country' (p.485). On the night of 13 February, Slippers and four other AWB members grabbed the deceased, loaded him onto a *bakkie* (a small truck) with the intention of removing him from the 'white' area. Mr Mkomane protested, saying he wanted to return to

the 'white' area. They assaulted him; he began running away back towards the 'white' area; they pursued, caught and beat him severely. Slippers claimed there was no intention to kill him, but 'things went wrong' (p.486). He expressed remorse for the 'senselessness of my action' (p.487). Amnesty was granted for the abduction, but refused for the death of Mkomane, which constituted 'an act grossly out of proportion with the stated objective of the AWB which was to keep blacks out of the town after 21h00' (p.487). 'Their conduct was out of proportion to the objective sought' (p.487). The act was not seen as one with a political objective.

This case illustrates the principle of proportionality, but also says a number of things besides, particularly about the process and procedures of the AC. First, it illustrates the formal and quasi-judicial flavour of the amnesty process, not surprising since it was headed by judges and involved only legally trained people. This has its merits, but it heavily shaped the process of truth-finding. It also has its critics. Krog (2003, p.118) argues that 'the amnesty hearings turned into quasi-trials and juridic procedures, with all the expense and delay that these entail. Judicialising the procedures inevitably judicialised the substance'. Second, it illustrates the direct and potent racism that abounded at the time, a time when political negotiations were seriously under way. Third, it illustrates the constraints under which the AC operated. In this case the AC condoned the extreme racist policy objectives of the AWB; the focus was to test whether the actions were proportional to the policies, aims and instructions of the political organisations, not to query the racist objectives of the AWB. This of course upset and angered many observers, not least black South Africans. It appeared that the Amnesty Committee was bending over backwards in favour of racist perpetrators.

Fourth, it illustrates the tensions and contestations among members of the AC itself. In this case, a dissenting decision was recorded by Chris de Jager (a former member of Parliament for the right-wing Conservative Party) – who argued that the 'two offences were interrelated and cannot be totally separated from each other' (*TRC Report*, vol. 6, p.488). This raises questions about the consistency of AC reasoning and decision-making, which as an administrative tribunal did not have the advantage of a system of precedent cases. Particularly regarding the criterion of full disclosure, Simpson has argued that '...from one amnesty decision to another, there was such pervasive inconsistency in the interpretation...as to suggest that the requirement [for full disclosure] was never consistently satisfied' (2002, p.236).

Given that the rationale at the heart of the amnesty process involved a trade-off between criminal justice (including potential for punishment) and the 'truth', in the form of full disclosure, this allegation of inconsistency seriously undermines the TRC's claim to truth-finding.

Fifth, the quasi-judicial procedures of the AC, with a focus on the 'facts' of the incident, precluded a deeper probing into psychological attitudes, perceptions, motives or sociological conditions and causes, organisational dynamics (e.g. the

structural arrangements and *modus operandi* – the chain of command of the AWB, in this instance) or indeed of the political history in that local area. This focus on forensic or factual truth meant that the amnesty process minimised the potential contributions to one of the main objectives of the TRC as laid down in the 1995 founding Act; that is, to explain and account for the motives and perspectives of the persons responsible. See Posel (2002) for critical commentary in this regard. During the AC hearings we did hear the voices of perpetrators, but the procedures largely impaired the possibility for them to tell the story fully on their own terms. Therefore we did not hear much in the amnesty hearings about motives, feelings or human passions, or about social motivations such as local intergroup rivalries, poverty, organisational dynamics or socio-economic factors. Indeed, elaboration on such matters could have bedevilled the amnesty application. South Africa missed an opportunity to unearth the causes, motives and perspectives of perpetrators. That is, in part, the grounds for the present volume.

Sixth, the case study illustrates the relatively sanitised, neutral or even distancing language employed in the *TRC Report*. The matter of appropriate expression, language and terminology was hotly contested in all aspects of the TRC work. ‘Eventually a fairly subdued and “cold” language predominated...the term “operative” came to triumph over “freedom fighter”, “terrorist” or “guerrilla”. The Commission spoke of “killings” rather than “murders”’ (Cherry, Daniel & Fullard, 2002, p.22). The forensic tone of the AC would have compounded this trend, as did the thorny question of translation/interpretation from one language to another. In the present case, we are spared the details of how the ghastly deed was done; it is reported only as ‘assaulted him severely’ (TRC Report, vol. 6, p.486). We sympathise with the difficulties in expression. It is not easy to find the proper balance. But facts do not necessarily speak for themselves. If the Foucauldian view that language ‘creates the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault, 1972, p.49) has merit, then the TRC cannot claim merely to be factual conveyers of ‘truth’. In talk of ‘killings’ and ‘incidents’ we have no way of telling whether the acts were committed in a frame of heated fury and with ‘malice’, or with cold, callous calculation.

Finally, this case raises the question of remorse. In this hearing, remorse was expressed along with recognition of the ‘grief which it caused his family and his community’ (TRC Report, vol. 6, p.487). Amnesty hearings could not insist on expressions of remorse or apology, nor (understandably) insist on forgiveness on the part of victims’ families. At times remorse was expressed spontaneously, at other times withheld. Apologies or remorse were in no way linked to the eventual decision of the AC; the outcome turned on sufficient evidence tested against the criteria. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to remark that the wider brief of the TRC, some would say more important even than the truth-finding aim, was that of promoting reconciliation, healing and nation-building. The whole TRC process,

including the amnesty component, was guided by a notion of restorative justice rather than retributive justice – a predominantly western notion in the view of the TRC chair (Tutu, 1999) – the former being regarded as ‘a new kind of justice within the complexities and contractions of a political transition’ (Villa-Vicencio & Doxtader, 2003, p.xv). Issues of apology, remorse, forgiveness and reflexive awareness are relevant to this wider aim of reconciliation, of healing and restoring balance to a fractured and damaged nation. The larger question would be: did the amnesty process facilitate the TRC objective of reconciliation?

### DECISIONS

Amnesty decisions were made by the AC, usually in the form of at least a three-person panel, one of whom had to be a judge. Decisions were made either following public hearings or consideration of documentary evidence in chambers. Of the total of 7 115 applications, 5 489 (77 per cent) were dealt with in chambers (*TRC Report*, vol. 6). This was the procedure when there was no evidence of political motive (3 559 cases), in the many cases involving common criminal crimes or when the grounds were administrative (late or incomplete applications, guilt denied). A total of 1 626 amnesty cases took the form of public hearings, involving 2 548 applicants, some heard more than once, held at 267 different public venues, involving over 1 000 interpreters and some 11 680 interpreted hours (Coetzee, 2003, p.194). It certainly presented a formidable logistical challenge. Public hearings frequently involved lawyers from both sides, the amnesty applicants and families/supporters of victims, resulting in lengthy and complex arguments and procedures. One small but significant feature involved the presence in all public hearings of the media, including television cameras. As Boraine (2000) reports, the amnesty judges were initially adamant in their refusal to admit television coverage. After some tension, the TRC view prevailed and ‘cameras were used in all public hearings’ (p.271). Boraine, deputy-chair of the TRC, was clear in his view that the co-operative role of the media was most positive in promoting transparency, the TRC process in general and, not least, in the ‘public shaming of the perpetrators’ (p.293).

Once an amnesty decision had been made, administrative tasks involved notification of all interested parties: applicants, victims, implicated persons and, where applicable, prosecution bodies, correctional services and registrars of courts. After due notification, the final decision, along with names, was published in the Government Gazette. If amnesty was not granted, applicants could still face prosecution and/or civil claims regarding their deeds. This was the ‘stick’ in contrast to the ‘carrot’ of amnesty; freedom from all legal liabilities. There was no provision for appeal against AC decisions. The only remedy for any dissatisfied party, including victims’ families, was to ask the High Court to review the decision, after which it could be referred back to the AC for consideration. Only seven applicants took

this route. A final point relates to the potential for vengeance against perpetrators following their revelations. Boraine (2000, p.293) reports that (at that stage) 'there was no single case of vengeance taken by any victim or family of a victim in response to the grotesque stories told by security force members and other perpetrators'.

## AMNESTY APPLICATIONS

The AC received a total of 7 116 applications for amnesty (Coetzee, 2003, p.193; reported as 7 115 in the *TRC Report*) by the closing date of 30 September 1997. This figure is rather misleading since the vast bulk of applicants were refused administratively mainly due to (as sketched earlier) lack of political motive, late or defective applications, no guilt, personal gain or no full disclosure. Most of these applications were from convicted criminals, already in prison and hoping for an early release. Nevertheless, as argued earlier, excluding these applicants skewed a potential finding that criminal actions were more intertwined with political actions than is generally recognised. The total of all applicants refused administratively, including duplicates, not applicables and withdrawn (Coetzee, 2003, p.193), amounted to 5 442, leaving a total of 1 674 applications which met all requirements.

Was the South African TRC process of 'carrot' and 'stick', allowing amnesty in exchange for disclosure, actually successful in drawing perpetrators out of the cupboards? 'Yes', if the larger figure of 7 116 is given, but 'no, not really', if the more limited total of 1 674 is juxtaposed with the nearly 40 000 violations reported by victims. Many persons, it has to be said, simply did not come forward. They remain unknown.

Who submitted amnesty applications? Table 1.1 was compiled from figures given in the *TRC Report* (2003, vol. 6), but the figures are not reported in summary tabular form in the *TRC Report*. Furthermore, the totals do not correspond with figures supplied by the chief executive officer of the AC (see Coetzee, 2003). Table 1.1 gives a summary view of the applicants in terms of major political affiliation.

Does the list of applications tell us anything about the numerical pattern of violations? Certainly not. It reflects, rather, the attitude of the various parties towards the TRC and the amnesty process itself. Relatively few applications came from the parties recognised as the largest single category of perpetrators, the former South African government and its security forces. The TRC reports that most security force members viewed the amnesty process with antipathy and 'deep suspicion' (p.183). Many were 'bitter and confused' (p.183) and angered by what they regarded as betrayal by former political masters, almost none of whom came forward. By contrast, the ANC were initially positive towards the TRC and, despite some internal divisions (non-compliance on grounds of a 'just war'), generally encouraged

**Table 1.1** Amnesty applicants by political affiliation

| Political affiliation | No. of applicants | Percentage   |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| ANC and allied groups | 998               | 60.6         |
| SA state and security | 293               | 17.8         |
| PAC                   | 138               | 8.4          |
| IFP                   | 109               | 6.6          |
| Right-wing groups     | 107               | 6.5          |
| AZAPO                 | 1                 | 0.1          |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>1 646</b>      | <b>100.0</b> |

members/supporters to co-operate with the TRC, arguing a desire for reconciliation in order to 'build South Africa together', 'extend a hand of friendship' (p.267) and take responsibility for their actions. In this respect a large number of members of the National Executive Committee of the ANC submitted a joint application, which stated that 'we collectively take full responsibility' (p.272) for actions on the part of the ANC, military operatives or by the SDUs. Initially granted amnesty, this 'declaration of responsibility' was subsequently overturned by the Supreme Court and ultimately refused by the AC on grounds that it did not comply with the requirements of the Act, in failing to specify particular acts, omissions or offences. Nevertheless, this is one of the few instances in which senior personnel took responsibility.

Applications from the IFP are also sharply under-represented given that the overall *TRC Report* found them, on the basis of victims' statements, to be one of the leading categories of perpetrators. While this finding may itself be misleading, since more victims from the ANC than from the IFP gave testimony, there are still good grounds, given the sheer scale of violence in KwaZulu-Natal and around the East Rand IFP-dominated hostels, to claim that IFP applicants, mainly from the lower rankings, were not fully representative. The IFP had expressed sharp reservations about the TRC from the outset, and throughout the process were hostile towards and failed to co-operate fully with the TRC. The IFP leader, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, with two other seniors, Frank Mdlalose and Ben Ngubane, appeared before the TRC to express their reservations. Buthelezi himself stated that 'I have never made any decision to employ violence anywhere for any purpose whatsoever' (cited in Boraie, 2000, p.150). Despite the fact that the TRC did formally conclude that Inkatha was responsible for gross violations of human rights on a number of grounds, the IFP has never really conceded accountability. Due to this distancing, any overall statistics regarding the IFP are likely to be misleading and skewed.

What else can we learn from the amnesty applications? Clearly the TRC volumes contain a great deal in terms of details, usually in the form of 'snapshot' pictures rather than depth analyses, and all we can do here is to sketch some broad patterns.

### FORMER GOVERNMENT AND SECURITY FORCES

On the side of the former government and security forces, 256 (87 per cent) came from former South African Police (SAP) members and 31 (11 per cent) from the former South African Defence Force (SADF) (two from white conscripts). Of the police applicants, 229 (78 per cent) were from the Security Branch sections, roughly half of which were linked to incidents involving Eugene de Kock, who had been tried in criminal court, found guilty on 89 charges and sentenced in October 1996 to two life sentences and 212 years. His early amnesty application in 1997 led to a stream of applications from co-perpetrators.

All of these government applicants were male; the majority (86 per cent) were white. Seven black Security Branch operatives and five black *askaris* – all from Vlakplaas, a 44-hectare farm and a Security Branch centre outside Pretoria, and all of low SAP rankings – submitted applications. Of those known by rank, 48 per cent were lower ranking personnel at the time, 52 per cent were commissioned officers, but few were from the very top ranks – three former heads of the Security Branch and one Minister of Law and Order (A. Vlok). The relatively few (31) SADF applications were channelled through a ‘nodal point’ or ‘gatekeeper’ (*TRC Report*, vol. 6, p.185) run entirely by SADF members. Since amnesty granted in South Africa does not preclude foreign states from pursuing prosecutions, the top SADF personnel advised members not to apply for incidents outside South Africa. Herein lies a very considerable missing chapter in the history of apartheid-related crimes and atrocities.

Applications from the 293 former government agents comprised a total of 550 incidents resulting in 1 583 acts (p.186). For instance, one incident involving the SADF raid on Kassinga in Angola in 1978 resulted in 624 acts of killing. Of the 1 583 acts, 889 (56 per cent) involved killings (apart from Kassinga, mainly directed at activists from the ANC and its armed wing *Umkhonto we Sizwe* [MK]), 143 involved attempted killings, 98 involved torture or assault, 83 involved bombings or arson, 80 involved abductions, 72 involved intimidation, 44 involved body mutilation or destruction and 42 involved ‘other’ acts. These incidents were mostly in the period 1985 to 1989; only 13 per cent pertained to incidents outside South Africa.

What is missing from the former government applications? We have already alluded to the missing information from senior people and relating to incidents outside South Africa. Incidents in the rural areas are under-represented. Many deaths in the victims’ reports were linked to public order or ‘riot control’ police actions; there were only two amnesty applications in this category. Since we know that torture of political detainees was common (Foster, Davis & Sandler, 1987), the 90 applications for torture represent only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. A Captain Zeelie of the Security Branch told the TRC that torture was ‘general practice in the police...police engaged in such practices with the tacit approval of their seniors’

(*TRC Report*, vol. 6, p.207). Of the many cases of deaths in detention only two applications, for the death of Steve Biko and Stanza Bopape, were submitted. All the rest remain unknown. The *TRC Report* remarks that perpetrators 'seldom seem to have regarded torture as a major violation' and not as a 'human rights violation in its own right' (vol. 6, p.191), since they only came forward as part of wider applications for killing and abduction. Although there were pieces of information on the role of the apartheid regime in 'intimidation and disinformation', mainly regarding Stratcom activities in the Witwatersrand Security Branch, and in 'fomenting violence' – particularly regarding state support and provision of arms and training to the IFP and former homelands – a great deal still remains missing. Taken overall, the TRC did not really succeed in flushing out the security operatives of the apartheid state.

#### ANC AND ALLIED ORGANISATIONS

Turning to the ANC and allied organisations (MK, SDUs, the United Democratic Front [UDF] and civilians acting in the name of these groups), a total of 998 persons made applications for 1 025 incidents relating to some 2 339 violation acts, predominantly attempted killings (1 185 or 51 per cent), killings (448 or 20 per cent), illegal possession of weapons (153 or 7 per cent), arson or public violence (140 acts), robberies (84), assaults (56), abductions (58) and 'other' acts (175). The incidents took place mainly in the geographical regions of the former Transvaal (61 per cent) and KwaZulu-Natal (17 per cent) with only two per cent outside South Africa, for example in ANC camps, where torture and assaults were certainly practised, particularly in respect of suspected spies and 'dissidents'. Incidents took place mainly in two periods: 33 per cent occurred between 1985 and 1989, a time during which MK attacks increased sharply. The *TRC Report* (vol. 6) gives the picture of MK attacks as follows: 44 in 1984, 136 in 1985, 228 in 1986, 242 in 1987 and 300 in 1988 when there was widespread resistance to black municipal elections in October. Thereafter MK attacks decreased: 216 in 1989 and 80 up to the end of May 1990. Forty-eight per cent of incidents took place between 1990 and 1994, the era of SDUs, explosive violence in the townships and continuing conflict between the ANC and the IFP. Since the armed struggle of the ANC was suspended in August of 1990 – MK formally disbanded on 16 December 1993 – the violence showed a sharply different pattern from earlier periods when MK operations were aimed at the state, its organs and collaborators. The stated objectives of MK were not to engage in operations that deliberately targeted civilians or white people. Of course there were 'mistakes' which the ANC acknowledged. The post-1990 period featured an escalation in 'lateral' or 'horizontal' violence (unhappily labelled as 'black-on-black' violence), heightened conflict in townships and spontaneous crowd violence in which exerting 'political control was extremely difficult' (*TRC Report*, vol. 6, p.313).

Of the ANC-related applicants, the majority were from men, but 26 or three per cent were from women. It appears that of all the amnesty applications these were the only submissions from women. In previous writings, Foster (2000a,b) and Coleridge (2000) claimed that, as far as it was known then, no woman was directly responsible for any deaths in the 34 years of struggle considered by the TRC. The final *TRC Report* (vol. 6, p.294) challenges this assessment. It reports on the crowd killing of 19-year-old Skuse Maarman in 1985. Maarman, a suspected informer, was abducted by a crowd of some 200, brought to a student meeting, stoned to death, then burned with a tyre around his neck. Eight people were subsequently charged. One of them was a woman, Ms C.N. Febana. She was also later killed in December 1985. However, even in this case, the details are rather hazy. Was she directly involved in the murder, or was she merely part of the crowd? In other widely publicised cases of crowd killings during the 1980s, notably in the cases of the 'Sharpeville Six' (Parker & Mokhesi-Parker, 1998) and the 'Uppington 26' (for which UDF supporter Mr Justice Bekebeke was later granted amnesty), women were part of the crowd. In both cases, however, there was no evidence of their direct contribution to the deaths. They were part of the shouting, chanting crowd and may have thrown a stone, and were convicted under the notorious doctrine of common purpose (Durbach, 1999). The central point here is to raise the issue of gender in relation to political violence. Some writers (Campbell, 1992; Seekings, 1991) have argued that young male activists were active in keeping women away from direct participation in violence, positioning women in support roles of chanting, singing and ululating. Alternatively, women may have distanced themselves from acts of violence. The *TRC Report* did provide a chapter on women (see Volume 4), but the focus was mainly on women as victims (see also Krog, 2001; Ross, 2003). It also touched on the issue of masculinity as a factor (see Volume 5, Chapter 7) but in general the issue of gender, particularly among perpetrators, was largely missing or underdeveloped in the work of the TRC (see Brudholm, 2003; Posel, 2002).

#### PAC AND ALLIED ORGANISATIONS

The PAC, along with its armed wing APLA and the Pan Africanist Student Organisation (PASO), submitted a total of 138 individual applications for 80 incidents involving 204 acts of violations, including 109 killings. All were male. Most were between the ages of 17 and 35. Incidents were concentrated in the Western Cape and around the former Transkei homeland, which was used as a base for APLA. Applications were mainly for incidents during the 1990 to 1994 period as part of the PAC's 'Operation Great Storm', which set targets at white-owned farms and white urban areas. PAC applicants were adamant in claims that they were not motivated by racism, but rather that all whites were regarded as complicit in apartheid. 'We did not attack whites because they were white, we attacked them because they were oppressors' (Luvuyo Kulman, cited in the *TRC Report*, vol. 6, p.439).

The PAC/APLA/PASO submitted applications for the following kinds of actions:

- Armed robberies: 39 applications for 59 acts between 1990 and 1994, resulting in the deaths of 27 civilians. Some of these were the actions of ‘repossession units’ condoned by the PAC.
- Attacks on civilians: 32 applications for 24 deaths and 122 serious injuries. These included the well-publicised attacks on the St James Church (11 killed, 58 wounded) and the Heidelberg Tavern in Cape Town in 1993, the attack on the King Williamstown Golf Club (four killed, 17 injured) and the killing of Amy Biehl in Gugulethu<sup>7</sup> in August 1993.
- Attacks on security forces: 28 applications, for 13 deaths of SADF members.
- Farm attacks: 27 applications for the period 1990 to 1993.
- Four applications for violations within the PAC’s own ranks against people suspected of collaborating with the security police.
- A few applications for sabotage and arms possession.

The PAC repeatedly claimed the lack of distinction between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ targets, or between civilian and non-civilian targets. The expressed belief was fighting a just war for liberation from white domination, in which the enemy was held to be all those identified as ‘settlers’ rather than ‘Africans’. On the whole, ‘applicants refused to apologise for lives lost’ (*TRC Report*, vol. 6, p.440), but expressed a wish for reconciliation with survivors.

### THE IFP

The IFP did not officially co-operate with the TRC, and this position of non-engagement with the amnesty process did adversely affect submissions. Nevertheless, 109 applications came from IFP supporters for the period 1983 to 1994. The largest number had already been convicted of offences, was still in prison and evidenced poor literacy. Applicants included SPU members, a few officials (for example, 11 from IFP Youth Brigade leaders), members who received military training from South African security forces in the Caprivi, and ordinary members. No applications came from the political leadership, from senior ranking IFP persons or from senior officials of the KwaZulu police. Most were from ordinary ‘military’ operatives of the IFP. These operatives described the difference between the public face of non-violence and the private face of the IFP leadership, which encouraged violence and attacks directed against the ANC, the UDF and trade unions. Unfortunately the final *TRC Report* does not give details regarding types of violations in these IFP submissions. It is not clear whether the TRC fully got to grips with the conflict in KwaZulu-Natal other than reporting the complicity of IFP with state security forces, an alliance against common political foes. It is more clear that revenge and reprisals against previous attacks featured prominently in incidents in this region, and that political aspects were intertwined with traditional structures, showing that the purely political could not be disentangled from other

motives. We do know that the violence in KwaZulu-Natal was 'more extreme and widespread than in any other part of the country' (*TRC Report*, vol. 6, p.320). Undoubtedly there is more to be unearthed on the conflict in this region.

### RIGHT-WING GROUPS

From the right-wing groups that drew support mainly from conservative Afrikaner circles, the AC received 107 applications, the majority (71 per cent) from the AWB, 10 per cent from the CP and the remainder from a variety of groups. The *TRC Report* gives a brief description of 10 such right-wing groupings. Before February 1990 and the unbanning of the liberation movements, violations involved isolated attacks that were strongly racist in direction. After 1990 it shifted to more organised and orchestrated forms of violence such as the June 1993 occupation of the World Trade Centre in Kempton Park where negotiations were held, the 1994 invasion of Bophuthatswana, attacks on racially mixed schools and the bombing campaigns aimed at derailing the democratic elections (from January to April 1994). As a general pattern, 35 applications were for attacks on individuals and target assassinations, such as the killing in 1993 of Chris Hani and roadblock murders. Most of these cases were refused amnesty, with killings regarded as disproportionate to political objectives. For the 41 applications involving attacks mainly on symbolic targets such as schools, business premises, railways and power installations, 95 per cent were granted amnesty. The TRC stated that the right-wing groups were fuelled by threats of the impending non-racial democratic order, along with a quest for self-determination and the creation of an independent *volkstaat*. As one witness at the TRC noted, 'If the African liberation struggle in SA was a "just war", so too was the struggle of Afrikaners to restore the Boer republics' (cited in the *TRC Report*, vol. 6, p.509).

### WITCHCRAFT APPLICATIONS

Finally, the AC reported separately on witchcraft applications in the period between 1990 and 1994. Two AC hearings on this issue were held at Thohoyandou, Northern Province. The TRC reported that belief in witchcraft was 'still widely prevalent in certain rural areas of SA' (p.40). Particularly in the former homeland of Venda, people believed that those in power had used witchcraft to achieve their prestige and fortune. This became a source of political discontent from the late 1980s. An increasingly politicised youth, enthused in support of the liberation movements, came into conflict with the old order; homeland leaders were viewed as 'corrupt, self-serving and as lackeys of the apartheid regime' (p.334). Political ideas became intertwined with witchcraft beliefs. There were popular perceptions that the South African government, as well as chiefs and traditional leaders, were protectors of witches – persons believed to be endowed with powers to cause

illness or death to their enemies. Some 54 applications were received for 21 witchcraft-related incidents involving 48 acts, including 32 killings in which victims were mainly stoned and burned. The majority were women, indicating inter-relationships between gender, traditional structures and shifting political beliefs. Incidents usually took the form of large crowds, mainly male youths, in the most remote and rural areas of Venda, seeking retribution against witches seen as dangerous and as political sell-outs.

In summary, the TRC applications provide us with a detailed if rather superficial view of the wide array of deeds committed by various protagonists in the struggle, mainly in the period between 1985 and 1994 – a time during which violence spread increasingly into horizontal forms even while orchestrated by the apartheid state. It does provide a fairly good overview of the broader patterns of violations, not necessarily the same for all sides. For instance, in applications from the state and security forces, 56 per cent of incidents involved killings; for the ANC and allied organisations it was only 20 per cent. Searching through the *TRC Report* and the descriptions given earlier, one could find a range of other forms of difference in violence, a consequence of the inequalities of power and resources. With some view of the overall patterns, we turn to the findings of the TRC.

#### FINDINGS OF THE TRC

Hardly surprisingly, given the procedures and applications, the TRC found that all parties, as outlined earlier, were responsible and accountable for gross violations of human rights. While officially finding that the organisations and parties, and their senior leadership, were to be held accountable for the violations, in practice the most senior leadership was let off the hook. While senior personnel of the various parties submitted party political statements to the TRC outlining their perceptions and positions, individuals did not come forward. This must be regarded as a limitation and a weakness of the TRC process. The ANC leadership showed the most commendable stance in their 'declaration of responsibility', but as individuals they did not come forward. Perhaps the TRC could have done more to direct findings of principal responsibility against the apartheid state (it did formally make such a finding) but, given its brief on reconciliation and the delicate political climate at the time (all within the first five-year term of the fledgling democracy), it was reluctant to find boldly in one direction only, favouring instead the moral evaluation of 'all sides culpable'. All sides did indeed commit grievous acts; whether they were morally equitable is another question.

What about the amnesty findings? If we take the full statistical figures as given by Coetzee (2003, p.193), then 1 312 (including amnesty granted for some incidents, but refused for others) out of a total of 7 116 applications were granted amnesty (18 per cent). However, this figure is rather misleading, since so many applications were refused on administrative grounds. If we delete all the duplicate, withdrawn

and technically refused applicants, then the picture changes: amnesty was granted for 1 312 of 1 614 cases – amnesty granted: 78.4 per cent; amnesty refused: 21.6 per cent.

In summary, a clear majority was granted amnesty when compliant with the procedural requirements of the TRC. When amnesty was refused, it was done so on grounds of a lack of clear political motive, no full disclosure or lack of proportionality.

How were amnesty decisions apportioned across various parties? Unfortunately the final amnesty report is not absolutely clear on this, and no tidy summary table is provided. Information appears as bits and pieces, scattered through Volume Six. Table 1.2 shows an approximation based on the scattered data.

**Table 1.2** Amnesty granted by political affiliation (approximate)

| Political affiliation        | Valid applications | Percentage granted amnesty |
|------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| ANC and allied               | 998                | ±90                        |
| SA state and security forces | 293                | ±90                        |
| PAC                          | 138                | 76                         |
| IFP                          | 109                | 60                         |
| Right-wing groups            | 107                | 68                         |
| AZAPO                        | 1                  | 0                          |

While award of amnesty was based on the merits, as tested against the AC criteria, these were not the only factors at play. We have already reported on claims of inconsistency in evaluation of the ‘full-disclosure’ test, and there are doubts also about the even attribution of the ‘political motive’ as criterion. In many cases, particularly of township clashes, the strict dividing line between political and other motives was rather hazy. In the case of the PAC, IFP and right-wing groups, a greater proportion of applicants were in prison at the time of application and therefore had less support, less legal advice and less opportunity to prepare cases. At public hearings there were wide differences in the degree of support from legal expertise. Families of victims contested applicants’ versions more severely in some cases, with varying degrees of legal expertise in support. Literacy levels also presented various problems. All of these factors may have contributed to apparent differences in the amnesty decisions shown in Table 1.2. Nevertheless, across the board, the majority of valid applications – played by TRC rules, which did not find agreement among all parties – were granted amnesty. Of those formally processed by the TRC, the majority of perpetrators did walk free. Many others refused to apply; yet others are still unknown.

## WHAT KIND OF TRUTH?

It is rare that government commissions comment reflexively on the kind of truth that they are producing. To the credit of the TRC, that is just what they did (Boraine, 2000). It is ironic that this truth-finding venture appeared at a time in which 'truth' itself has been fiercely contested in terms of social movements such as post-modernism, social constructionism and post-structuralism. In the face of post-modernist scepticism and suspicion about the possibility of objective truth, the TRC bravely, or naively, set out to reveal the truth of the recent past. What kind of truth was it seeking?

The *TRC Report* distinguishes between four kinds of truth. We briefly explore each of them. The first kind refers to objective, factual or forensic truth. This dominated the amnesty investigations and shaped what the TRC could say about perpetrators. Its concern was directed to findings on particular incidents involving specific persons. The investigative unit (including police personnel seconded from foreign governments) was intended to corroborate and verify testimonies; to match stories of victims and perpetrators.

The second kind was personal or narrative truths. This was primarily the procedure for collection of victims' testimonies. Roughly 22 000 such stories were gathered, about a tenth of them heard in public hearings. Through the media these stories were passed on to a wider public. One aim through such storytelling was to restore both memory and humanity. An assumption and hope of the TRC was that such stories would affirm healing potentials, to 'restore the human and civil dignity of victims' through the opportunity to 'relate their own accounts' (Boraine, 2000, p.289).

The third kind was social or dialogical truth; a form of experiential truth created through debate, interaction and discussion. The 'special hearings' of the TRC could be held to be examples of this sort of truth. Here the purpose was to hear reflections on the past from particular sectors – the business community, health sectors, the media, women, witchcraft issues, religious views, perspectives from conscripts, political party hearings and various angles of the 'just war' debate – rather than the restricted focus on victims or perpetrators. The successful contributions of the media hoped to open wide public discussion and reflection. Such processes of dialogue were intended to promote participation, transparency and democracy. The intentions and efforts of the TRC were commendable, the outcomes less successful as the sectarianism of the deeply divided legacy prevailed.

The final kind referred to restorative or healing truth: a simultaneous reflection on the past and optimistic gaze into the future. It involved the laudable aim of 'never again'; a prevention of the reoccurrence of past events. But as Boraine (2000) puts it, knowledge or truth wasn't enough. For healing to be possible, knowledge would have to be accompanied by 'acknowledgement'; an acceptance of accountability.

Public acknowledgement would hopefully restore human dignity to victims/survivors and contribute to healing.

The TRC held the position that such truth-telling took place in the context of social transformation, arguing that it was a critical part of transformation, a process which ‘challenges myths, half-truths, denials and lies’ (Boraine, 2000, p.291). The TRC repeatedly asserted that such truth-telling was not a once-off event or a kind of cure-all, but a process that should continue into the future.

Researchers inside the TRC provide support for this picture that the TRC quested after a variety of kinds of truth. They also note some problems associated with competing forms of truth:

Drawing on a variety of models and methodologies – the commission of inquiry, the courtroom, the archive, the psychological counselling room, the statistical graph, even the theatre – the South African TRC and its report satisfy neither lawyer, historian, psychologist nor statistician. Nevertheless, they open up a range of possibilities for important work in these fields. (Cherry, Daniel & Fullard, 2002, p.34)

Recognition by the TRC of various kinds of truth may have its merits. Given its multiple mandate, at the very least it concedes that different sides of the full TRC operation went about their business of truth-seeking in different ways: forensic truth for perpetrators; narrative truth from victims; dialogical truth from special hearings, public hearings and media interventions; restorative truth through reparations to victims (eventually very poorly handled) and amnesty for perpetrators. It also links superficially to some post-modernist critiques about truth problems. But the TRC scheme of four modalities of truth also has its critics. As Posel expresses it, ‘This is a very wobbly, poorly constructed conceptual grid. The grounds for differentiating the four types of truth are poorly specified and remain rather opaque’ (2002, p.155).

The greatest problem for Posel is that no grounds are spelled out for evaluation of competing forms of truth. ‘If the “forensic” version of events is at odds with the “social” truth in any particular community, on what basis is the conflict to be adjudicated?’ (p.155). A further question pertains to the interrelationship between these four modalities of truth. Are they simply separate and distinct, could one form be subsumed beneath another, are they hierarchically ranked or could one form be related to another, as in the case of methodological ‘triangulation’, where different truth claims either converge or diverge? The *TRC Report* doesn’t say much in this regard, ceding only at one point its heterogeneity: ‘to view the Commission as homogenous, as all of one piece, is a rather oversimplified approach...[it] is made up of many people with different perspectives’ (*TRC Report*, Vol. 5, Chapter 7, paragraph 52). Yes, but which truth perspective prevails?

There is a further problem with the TRC’s brave foray into epistemological terrain. If epistemologists such as Habermas (1972) are correct, then different kinds of

knowledge or 'truth' are not merely distinct, but have different interests. No form of knowledge is simply neutral or impartial. For instance, positivism, that form of truth which is supposedly objective and value free, actually serves human interests of prediction and control. We want to know what causes violence in order to control its occurrence. By contrast, interpretative or discursive truths – in the TRC's scheme, seen as narrative or dialogical truths – serve human interests of achieving intersubjective understanding, or of achieving practical tasks such as denial in order to escape censure. One may ask then, what were the interests in the TRC's scheme of four kinds of truth? An answer, to some extent, is possible. The various, and at times competing, mandates of the TRC produced different truths. They do not necessarily hold together. For instance, one interest was the positivistic one of achieving control over future violence, of prevention: 'never again'. Another interest was achieving reconciliation. Towards this interest a 'restorative' truth version could usurp a forensic truth. For instance, the top leadership, particularly of the apartheid regime, was relatively speaking let off the hook in the interests of forging national unity. One kind of truth – narrative truth – was for victims, whose accounts in general were taken at face value; another kind – forensic truth – for amnesty applicants, whose accounts could be investigated, cross-examined and subjected to different tests of veracity. When the voices of victims and perpetrators clashed in amnesty hearings, there were some tricky moments, with neither party necessarily happy about the 'truth' proclaimed.

Ultimately, despite the disclaimers, one form of truth did prevail: a positivistic one that places the *TRC Report* as the formal, official and objective view. Official 'findings' had to be made before victims could be granted reparations, or perpetrators granted amnesty. The *TRC Report* comes across as the impartial, neutral and relatively value-free authority on past events. We are mindful and appreciative of the difficulties faced by the TRC. Nevertheless, the epistemological mode of positivism – the TRC's objective, factual or forensic truth – does in the end take pride of place. Posel (2002, p.156) gives an illustration:

The apartheid 'context' within which gross human rights violations took place is written in a 'factual' mode, effacing any issue of historiographical debate or contestation.

What interests are served by privileging this kind of truth? They are twofold. First, it elevates the status of the TRC process as *the* authoritative view. Second, it carries the positivistic interest in control; in this instance, control over this view of the past: 'Here are the facts.' As we have argued, this kind of truth is particularly prominent in the amnesty-related area. Dominated by the forensic frame, the amnesty report presents a largely factual account. There is surprisingly little on motives, despite the TRC brief. Furthermore, the AC report is mute on the issue of how its own procedures contributed to producing such facts.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter, situated after the life of the TRC, has summarised its work on those responsible for human rights violations. It went on to point out gaps and silences, to comment on working procedures of the amnesty process and to sketch areas in which the TRC could only provide patchy and incomplete information. There are a number of such gaps; we need not repeat them here. Perhaps above all, the amnesty procedures placed limits on the versions of stories told by those who were responsible for violations. Krog hints at this when she claims that overjudicialising the amnesty process ‘turned it into something it was never supposed to be’ (2003, p.120). Separate from the TRC, only a few other alternative versions have appeared: Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) on Eugene de Kock; Cooper (2000) in dialogue with Brian Mitchell, the man responsible for the Trust Feed killings in 1988; Eugene de Kock’s own version (1998) as told to journalist Jeremy Gordin (see Foster 2000d); and the autobiographies of Letlapa Mphahlele (2002) from the PAC, and Ronnie Kasrils<sup>8</sup> (1993) and Carl Niehaus (1993) both from the ANC. In this book, the modest aim is to contribute to this small volume of work.

Our position here is not so much to go ‘beyond’ the TRC as to open a dialogue with the rich, perhaps unique and irreplaceable, material tabled by the TRC. We wish to open up, problematise and look again at that arena concerned with political violence and the people responsible. Towards this end, the present chapter has raised some grey areas in respect of the very notion of ‘perpetrators’, discussed problems of balance regarding violence in unequal social formations and argued about the notion of truth as forwarded by the TRC. Subsequent chapters will examine representations of ‘perpetrators’ in popular discourse and review international literature that claims to provide ‘explanations’. Exploration continues with presentation of narratives from protagonists from various places and sides of the struggle; stories told, with limited editing (only to enhance readability), in their own words in their own way. Many, perhaps all, of these storytellers would refuse the ascription and the very term ‘perpetrator’. That is why this book is – and is not – about perpetrators.

### Notes

- 1 Biko, founder of the black consciousness movement, was arrested for disobeying a banning order. He was beaten and tortured and died in custody. His killers were not granted amnesty since the AC was not able to find an act or omission that resulted in a crime. Because the Criminal Procedures Act stipulates that a case cannot be made after 20 years, they were never prosecuted.
- 2 *Askari* is an Arabic-derived East African name for a soldier or policeman. In South Africa, it denoted former liberation movement operatives recruited by the security forces.
- 3 An execution method that involved putting a petrol-filled tyre around the neck of the victim and setting it alight, burning the victim alive.

- 4 Armed paramilitary units established by the IFP in response to the ANC's SDUs.
- 5 Armed paramilitary units set up in the early 1990s by the ANC to protect neighbourhoods.
- 6 Professor C. Norgaard was former president of the European Commission on Human Rights.
- 7 Gugulethu (alternatively spelled Guguletu) means 'our pride' and is one of the oldest black townships in South Africa. When Langa became too small to house the migrant workers from the Transkei, Gugulethu was established in 1958. It was initially known as Nyanga West.
- 8 Ronnie Kasrils, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry at the time of writing, was a senior MK member and the ANC's head of Military Intelligence. He was one of the leaders of MK's 'Operation Vula' in 1990.

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## 2 POPULAR REPRESENTATIONS OF PERPETRATORS

A surprising aspect of public memory is that many ordinary folk are bemused when asked if they could name ‘those responsible’ for violence in South Africa after 1960. Many cannot name any persons. Others invoke generalised depictions of white security policemen or seething black crowds. Given the deep racialised legacy, white people may raise one set of images of ‘those responsible’, black people another collective representation. When ordinary people can provide names, they are usually perpetrators identified in recent years. High on that list of names is Eugene de Kock, one of the few who is still in prison. His criminal trial, which ran from February 1995 to November 1996, received widespread media coverage, including a television documentary titled ‘Prime Evil’. Others may name Ferdi Barnard, also one of the few in prison, or Barend Strydom, who gunned down eight innocent black people in Pretoria in 1988. Others might querulously name Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, who was after all convicted, then later subjected to intensive TRC hearings, one of which was widely televised. But some are dubious, not certain: was she a person responsible for violence or a victim of circumstances? Some people recall the name of Dr Wouter Basson, whom the media dubbed ‘Dr Death’ (see Burger & Gould, 2002). But after a lengthy and widely publicised criminal trial he was finally acquitted of all charges in April 2002. In June 2003, the Court of Appeal refused to grant the state a retrial. So in official terms at least, he was not one of those responsible for violence. Other names may appear briefly, only to swirl away in yellowing pages of old newsprint. It is surprising that public memory is so hazy.

In this chapter, we look at public images, representations and discourses of those people responsible for violence. How have they been portrayed? Who are they? How have their actions been regarded: vilified, condoned or justified? Have they indeed appeared at all, or have they slipped quietly off the pages into public oblivion? This chapter offers a cursory overview of the way in which perpetrators have appeared – or not appeared – in the public domain. Along the way, we look at the silences which have shrouded them, contestations over the images and the very ‘label’ of accountability, as well as strategies which enable us either to justify their actions or to distance them as ‘others’ – not like us ordinary folk.

## ON SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

How do we come to hold representations or images of public events and people? The French theorist Serge Moscovici (1984, 2001) offers us a view through his notion of social representations. The primary function of this phenomenon – a social or collective, not an individual process – is to transform something unfamiliar into the familiar. It works through talk and communication of all sorts, largely through multiple forms of mass media, but also conversations in homes, pubs, shebeens and lecture halls. It operates not only through language, but also through iconic or pictorial forms. If we hold mental images of perpetrators, they are often achieved through photographs, television footage and cartoons.

Social representations serve twin roles. First, they *conventionalise* a range of persons, objects and events we encounter in daily interaction. They establish meaning, or a frame of meaning, in order to allow people to relate to such objects. Second, they have a *prescriptive* role – they impose their meanings of persons and events upon us with a substantial force. They are frequently differentiated along lines of salient group cleavages such as gender, class, ‘race’, ethnicity, religion or region. A crude example is the differentiated meanings of ‘freedom fighter’ and ‘terrorist’ for the same person. Indeed, differentiated representations may be what define groups as different. They are to a large extent collectively shared meanings and attributions within a particular social grouping. Social representations are dynamic and mobile phenomena:

...once created they lead a life of their own, circulate, merge, attract and repel each other, give birth to new representations, while old ones die out.

(Moscovici, 1984, p.13)

Social representations are not primarily shaped by reasoning. Rather, the process is a form of social thinking, and ‘social thinking owes more to convention and memory than to reason’ (Moscovici, 1984, p.26). Two central processes are seen to generate social representations. The first is *anchoring*, a process that involves classifying, labelling or naming something, as well as linking it to apparently similar and familiar constructs in the past. Once achieved, three sets of consequences follow: the object acquires certain characteristics, the object becomes distinct from other things and it becomes an object of convention among those who share such meanings. Put in other terms, that which was unidentified is given social identity. For instance, a label such as the ‘enemy of the people’ provides an image of identity which justifies exclusion or elimination.

A second generative process involves *objectifying*, a more active process, less associated with past conventions than anchoring. Certain words or iconic forms are selected and integrated into a core construct or a ‘figurative nucleus’. Once established it takes a form of autonomy; it becomes detached from its origins and becomes ‘reality’. Representations, in short, objectify through a process of reification; they transform words and icons into objects. For instance, the term ‘inferiority complex’ becomes

detached from its psychoanalytic (actually Adlerian) origins and, once established, is used as a thing or as a mechanism to explain the actions of certain people. As another example, nation states, which in Anderson's (1983) phrase are 'imagined communities', become transformed into objects with specific contents. People can be motivated to kill in defence of this objectified 'entity': a nation. This has resonance for our present concerns, since two of the leading protagonists, the NP and the ANC, were driven in terms of a nationalistic struggle.

This is not the only approach in understanding popular meanings, but it does give us some handle on the processes involved in generating public representations. Some critics, for example Billig (1995, 1996), have claimed that Moscovici's perspective remains overly static, with a tendency toward the monolithic. Billig claims instead that the process is driven by rhetoric and argument, a more two-sided and dialogical set of dynamics. People argue for one perspective against another version; a two-sided dynamic. Furthermore, in Billig's terms, people do not merely follow rules and conventions; they challenge, argue against and break rules. They argue for a new set of rules. The South African struggle involved just such forms of challenge. In Foster and Skinner's phrase (1990) it entailed a 'dialogue of violence'. Billig's criticism may be taken as a useful extension to an understanding of the formation of public representations.

## A TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Before turning to an examination of popular representations of those persons responsible for gross violations of human rights, we turn the clock back to give a rough and oversimplified historical sketch of events over the period covered by the TRC, that is, since 1960. A sketch of this sort provides not only a background framing of events, but also the grounds for a substantive argument about popular representations. We have raised a large question: why in popular consciousness do we not have shared, clear and unambiguous images of perpetrators of violence? Towards an answer we offer the following argument. We have only hazy or clouded images of 'those responsible' because, firstly, in the time period between roughly 1960 and 1990, they were shrouded in silence or hidden from view. Secondly, in the time period since 1990, when perpetrators were identified, the process was akin to the vacillations of a light switch – the spotlight went on to illuminate, then went off, to plunge us into darkness. Perpetrators appeared in public discourse, then disappeared. Allied to this, in the same period, there were arguments and contestations over the attribution of the label of perpetrator. Despite best intentions to put a final seal on the matter, the TRC in the end managed only to effect a fairly dim – and flickering – light upon the matter.

The social amnesia and hazy awareness about those responsible is not only due to wilful denial or to psychological repression – an unconscious process of pushing

away and forgetting dreadful, intolerable or shameful thoughts and events – although both of these processes may be part of the picture. It is rather that actual events, and particularly the portrayal of events through the mass media, have created this situation. Social amnesia or forgetting is not just an individual dynamic; it is largely created through the public discourse of the mass media, through talk and language (Billig, 1999). To put substance to our argument, we turn to details of a rough timeline of events and media representations.

### THE PERIOD BETWEEN 1960 AND 1990

Very soon after election victory in 1948, the ruling NP signalled its tough intent to segregate the population along racialised lines, to exert heavy controls and regulations over disenfranchised black people and to institute a repressive form of governance, that is, to crush dissent. Repressive legislation flowed: the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950, which banned the SACP and allowed for banning orders on individuals; the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1953, which aimed, in the wake of the ‘defiance campaign’, to crush mass disobedience; and the Public Safety Act, also of 1953, which enabled the declaration of a state of emergency and the detention without trial of individuals (see Foster, Davis & Sandler, 1987). Following continued black resistance in the 1955 Freedom Charter campaign, the police raided hundreds of premises and charged 156 people with treason (Sampson, 1958). Although the four-year-long treason trial ended in acquittals, it effectively suppressed black resistance.

After the Sharpeville massacre due to police action in March 1960, the state invoked emergency laws to outlaw the ANC and the PAC and to detain roughly 11 500 persons. With all legitimate political doors closed, the ANC and PAC turned to armed struggle. In his speech at the Rivonia trial, Mandela outlined this shift in strategy: The ANC

...could not escape the conclusion that fifty years of non-violence had brought the African people nothing but more and more repressive legislation...Africans either had to accept inferiority or fight against it by violence. (In Karis & Carter, 1972, Document 75)

Yet even more repressive measures followed: the Sabotage Act in 1962, the ‘90-day’ detention law in 1963, the ‘180-day’ detention law in 1965, ‘anti-terrorist’ legislation in 1966 and the Terrorism Act in 1967 allowing for indefinite detention without trial. Along with all the other regulatory mechanisms, the state effectively closed down any form of expression from dissenting voices. In 1962 the state issued a list of 105 people whose speeches and writings could not be published. They included the names of Tambo, Sisulu, Luthuli, Mandela, Kathrada and Helen Joseph. Luthuli’s (1962) book *Let my people go* could no longer be imported. In 1962, all protest meetings against the arrest, trial or conviction of any person, for any offence, were banned. The first house arrests began. More names were added

to those already 'listed' as communists, and silenced. When Mandela was sentenced in his 1962 trial, the Survey of Race Relations noted laconically: 'Mr Mandela made a lengthy speech, describing his frustrations and political views. This cannot be reported' (Horrell, 1962, p.53). The silencing of black resistance also took a more ominous form: 1963 saw the first deaths in detention, B. Mampe and Looksmart Ngudle. Others were to follow. Persons responsible for these deeds were never revealed. After the Rivonia trial in 1964, when the leadership of the ANC and MK – including Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Sisulu and Kathrada – was sentenced to life imprisonment, black resistance was largely crushed until the Soweto revolt in June 1976<sup>1</sup> (see Herbstein, 1978).

In the wake of the Soweto uprising of June 1976, unrest spread widely. In Parliament Helen Suzman of the opposition said that she had heard 'a great many ugly stories about unprovoked violence in almost every township where there were disturbances' (cited in Kane-Berman, 1978, p.30). Minister of Police, Jimmy Kruger, vehemently defended the police. 'He refused to disclose details of deaths at the hands of the police' (Kane-Berman, 1978, p.31). Kane-Berman estimated a death toll of 661, but it could 'be even higher' (p.27). Media photographs of victims and police shootings spread across the world. Over the subsequent year some 2 500 persons were detained under security laws. Ten people died in detention during 1977 alone, including Steve Bantu Biko. All the black consciousness organisations were banned and black newspapers, including the *World*, were closed down. The Christian Institute and its publications were banned. Black journalists were detained. Some 60 more individuals were banned, bringing the total under banning order up to 160. All outdoor meetings, 'except those of a *bona fide* sporting nature', were banned throughout the year (SAIRR, 1977, p.123). The news reporting over that period was segregated, with some of the bigger newspapers producing different editions for black and white readers. For example, the death list at the end of 1976 was printed in the black edition of the *Sunday Times*, but not in the white edition (Kane-Berman, 1978). A memorandum on police conduct by the Rev. David Russell (later bishop), titled *The riot police and the suppression of truth*, was banned for possession in May 1977.

The findings of the commission of inquiry into the riots in Soweto and elsewhere (the Cillié Commission) were only released in 1980. The Commission exonerated the police. While conceding that the police were unprepared for such events, they could not be held responsible for the riots. It found that the police force 'had acquitted itself very well in executing its duties' (SAIRR, 1980, p.234). While there may have been exceptional cases where a particular policeman went too far, the Commission found that there were no 'deliberate and impermissible assaults' (p.235) by police. No policeman was 'criminally responsible for the death of anyone' (p.235). Much of the blame was pinned on the young black rioters. In 1980, a total of 402 white policemen were awarded medals for 'combating terrorism'; 22 black policemen received the same awards (p.237).

In the wake of security crackdowns after Soweto, the Cillié report mentions 5 980 arrests in the seven months after June 16. Many young black people fled the country and bolstered the dwindling ranks of the liberation movements. Attacks from the armed wings of the ANC and PAC increased. The TRC reports 265 such incidents between 1976 and 1984, including high profile attacks on economic and energy installations and military bases such as the Air Force headquarters in Pretoria (19 dead). There were attacks on police stations and deaths of black police personnel, but sabotage remained the dominant mode of attack. The state responded with the Internal Security Act of 1982, which streamlined the repressive apparatus against very broadly defined offences of 'terrorism' and 'subversion' (Foster et al., 1987).

After 1984, the activity of MK increased sharply, with a diversification of targets. There was an increase in attacks in public places where civilians were at risk, despite this being contradictory to official MK policy. In September 1984 the black townships exploded and this local pattern of violence continued through uneven waves, and in different forms, until 1994. The previous year, 1983, had seen the launch of two new political organisations in resistance to the proposed tricameral constitutional reforms – coloureds and Indians were to get the vote, but only in ethnically separate houses of Parliament. These new organisations were the National Forum, aligned to the banned black consciousness movement (Marx, 1992), and the UDF (Seekings, 2000), closely linked to the charterist movement of the ANC. The UDF rapidly came into conflict with Inkatha in KwaZulu-Natal, and violent clashes between these two fronts continued into the 1990s. In 1984, simmering tensions, including boycotts of black schools, rent boycotts and violence over the tricameral elections, erupted in township violence. A commentator at the time, Foster (1986, pp.50–51) described it thus:

On this day (3 September 1984) the tri-cameral constitution got under way, and in response to protests over housing rent increases, the first wave of SA Defence Force troops entered the townships of Sharpeville, Sebokeng, Evaton and others. This pattern of violent clashes between 'security' forces and township dwellers was to persist and spread to well over a hundred townships in wide areas of the country throughout 1985.

Damage to property amounted to roughly R140-million according to the Minister of Law and Order in February 1986 (*Cape Times*, 7 February). Attacks were largely directed at symbols of state and capitalist domination. The death toll by the end of 1985 had risen to well over a thousand, 'roughly two-thirds killed by state forces' (Foster, 1986, p.51). Mass shootings took place in Langa, Mamelodi, Alexandra and Athlone. A national state of emergency was declared in July 1985. Tens of thousands were arrested on 'unrest'-related charges, some 10 000 were detained and there were numerous public reports on the standard use of torture in detention (see Foster & Sandler, 1985). During 1985, a total of 56 persons faced treason charges in eight different trials (Foster, 1986, p.53). Meetings, gatherings, individ-

uals and organisations were banned. Funerals, often the site of mass political resistance, were severely restricted. Heavy prohibitions were placed on the media. In November 1985 the state issued a proclamation that prohibited any person from photographing, filming, or recording as well as broadcasting and distributing within or outside SA any...recording...of public disturbance, disorder, riot, public violence, strike or boycott or any conduct of a force or member of a force with regard to the maintenance of the safety of the public or the public order...

unless with the permission of the Commissioner of Police (*SAIRR*, 1985, p.460). Regarding television coverage in the period between 1985 and 1988, 'many violent clashes between township residents and the security forces were simply never reported' (Posel, 1989, p.263), since the state ideologues wished to convey the message that the 'SAP and SADF were always on top of the situation' (p.263). When there was television footage of crowds it was portrayed in terms of explosive images in which the crowd was depicted 'as if violence and the ensuing disorder constituted its essence' (Posel, 1989, p.268). This pattern, characterised predominantly by a spiral or 'dialogue' of state and security force repression and black resistance, also saw the increase of 'lateral' violence between Inkatha and the UDF/ANC, attacks on black councillors, police and collaborators, and the increase of 'necklace' killings. This pattern continued until the unbanning of many organisations on 2 February 1990, the release of Mandela on 11 February and the beginnings of political negotiations.

#### REFLECTIONS ON THE PERIOD 1960 TO 1990

We have claimed, rather sweepingly, that this period was largely characterised by silences regarding 'those responsible' for violence. We have seen examples of this process in respect of state perpetrators: silence from inquests into deaths, silence from commissions of inquiry, denial from government sources and politicians, silence on police shooters in large crowd gatherings, silence on those responsible for torture or the deaths of those in detention, restrictions and banning of organisations and persons representing dissident voices, and censorship on a rampant scale.

These silences were partly due to the restrictions placed on the media and the manipulation of information by the previous government and its security forces. Fear of prosecution also led to a degree of self-censorship. During the 80s it was said that, 'Not even Louis le Grange<sup>2</sup> has got around to drafting some of the frightening press restrictions which editors impose upon themselves' (Irwin Manoim, in Pinnock, 1986, p.49). Other elements of the media colluded with the government by remaining silent or actively suppressing the truth. As journalist Tony Weaver testified before the TRC, even 'the so-called liberal English press bent over backwards to accommodate versions of the truth put out by the police and the National

Party' (*Mail & Guardian*, 29 November 1996). Tony Heard, former *Cape Times* editor, agreed: 'When people say they did not know what happened, we are the reason for their ignorance' (*Mail & Guardian*, 29 November 1996).

Scanning the newspapers of that era, it is noticeable how incidents in which black people died took backstage to reports of sports events (notably rugby), romantic liaisons of the (white) rich, famous and beautiful, and other salacious titbits. 'Loss of life warranted no more than a mechanical entry by reporters alongside a long list of arrests from fire bombing, stone throwing and illegal gatherings' (Lacey, 1986, p.5). Just enough information was provided to reach the objective, namely, sowing terror. The silences also provided the opportunity for political expediency, for example in the case of the Khotso House bombing, the Wit Wolwe (White Wolves) could use the silence to claim responsibility.

In reviewing newspapers and magazines at the time of various massacres both pre-1990 (Sharpeville, Soweto, Uitenhage, Alexandra) and post-1990 (Boipatong, Katilehong, the Shell House shootings), as well as the height of the so-called 'black-on-black' violence in KwaZulu-Natal and the East Rand, one is struck by the lack of information regarding perpetrators. Time and again the newspapers report – in the passive voice – that people 'were shot', 'were gunned down', 'were killed', 'were wounded'. Victims or bodies were just found, for example 'a man was found with his leg chopped off' or 'a man found dead' or 'shots were fired' – with no indication of who did these things (*The Star*, 28 March 1994). The only safe assumption is that they were male.

Alternatively, the perpetrators are nameless, faceless groups: 'unknown gunmen' or it is 'not clear who had been shooting' (*The Star*, 28 March 1994). In other instances too numerous to cite, the appellations are 'unidentified gunmen', 'a group', 'a mob' or 'an armed mob', 'youths', 'rival party supporters', 'a band of men', 'terrorists'<sup>3</sup> or 'guerrillas' (and various combinations of these). The contexts of these words and phrases invariably imply that the perpetrators are black. Since little is known about them, an exploration of motives is evaded and perpetrators remain primitive, violent 'others' (who by implication do not need motives to kill). Not only did this style of reporting serve to criminalise the popular resistance and desensitise the readers to incidents in 'ungovernable areas' (Lacey, 1986, p.5), but the lack of information also fuelled the paranoia regarding the *swart gevaar* (black threat).

Nevertheless, some could argue that our generalised claim of silence about perpetrators in the pre-1990 period is exaggerated, or simply false. They would point in particular to innumerable cases where certain persons – in particular black people – were tried and convicted. That is quite correct. Some people were indeed identified. One thinks readily of John Harris, executed for the Johannesburg station bomb in 1964; Dimitri Tsafendas for the murder of Verwoerd in 1966; Gordon Webster sentenced in 1988 to 25 years for murder and terrorism; Robert McBride

for the Magoo's Bar bombing; and Barend Strydom, sentenced to death in May 1989 for shooting eight black people. There were of course others. Two things could be said. First, particularly regarding black persons responsible, the cases were many and the media coverage thin and skewed. Black perpetrators, even when named, were treated in the media as relatively faceless; they slid off the pages into oblivion. See Duncan (1996) for an insightful study of racism in the media discourse of public violence. Second, in many trials involving more prominent black people, including the Rivonia trial (Bernstein, 1989) or the string of treason trials in the late 1980s, the accused were not convicted for offences which would amount in the recent parlance to gross violations of human rights. They were convicted either for sabotage of installations or for very broadly defined acts of 'terrorism' or 'subversion'. For instance, in the long-running Delmas treason trial in the 1980s, leading members of the UDF were either acquitted or, in the case of Popo Molefe, 'Terror' Lekota and Moses Chikane, convicted of treason for being 'part of the UDF's conspiracy to render SA ungovernable' (SAIRR, 1988/89, p.572). The Appellate Division later overturned their convictions. In the Bethal trial of 1988, Ebrahim Ebrahim was sentenced to 20 years for high treason as 'part of the ANC conspiracy to overthrow the government of South Africa' (p.571). In 1988 the Pretoria Regional Court convicted Enoch Zulu and six others on charges of 'terrorism' and 'subversion', which involved recruiting people for military training and promoting the aims of the PAC. In all these cases, and more, the accused were not convicted of any acts of violence, but for general activities in the liberation movements regarded then as part of a 'conspiracy'.

It is also true that a number of security policemen were identified during court cases and inquests as torturers. In their study on police violence, for instance, Foster & Luyt (1986) listed the names of Sergeant K.J. Matthee, Lieutenant Andries Struwig, Sergeant van Slys, Major Visser, Major Arthur Cronwright and others as responsible for the torture of detainees during the 1980s. Despite the court evidence, no further action was taken against them; most were rapidly promoted in rank. Since there was little or no press coverage of such cases, there was little public awareness. It was rare for security police to be exposed or convicted. There was one such case. In 1983 Sergeant J.H. van As was convicted of culpable homicide for shooting detainee Paris Malatji through the head at point blank range during interrogation (Foster et al., 1987, p.38). Van As was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. Few would remember the incident.

Clearly not all was silenced. From another angle there appeared a range of writings from those in exile which described their experiences and identified those responsible. Soon after the advent of 90-day detention, Ruth First (1965) wrote of her experiences in detention. State agents later assassinated her in 1982. In exile, Albie Sachs (1966, 1968) wrote of his spells in detention and named one 'Spyker' van Wyk as a torturer. Hilda Bernstein wrote about torture in South Africa (1972), as well as a novel about the death of a detainee (1983). Brian Bunting (1969) wrote

on the rise of the police state. Barney Desai (1978) wrote on the murder of the Imam Haroon in detention. Donald Woods (1978, 1980), also in exile, wrote on the murder in detention of Steve Biko. Former security policeman Gordon Winter (1981) wrote about death squads in the former Bureau of State Security (BOSS). Former political prisoners recounted their experiences (Dlamini, 1984; Naidoo, 1982; Pheto, 1983). All of these works identified many of those responsible. However, all these writings had one thing in common – they were all banned in South Africa. Not even academic libraries kept copies. As a result they did not much trouble the relative silence surrounding perpetrators of violence.

In reflecting on the pre-1990 period, one last point is significant. It relates to the media and newspapers in particular. The press clearly has a considerable influence in shaping popular consciousness. But who is behind the media? Writing in the late 1980s, Tomaselli & Tomaselli (1987, p.46) put the matter succinctly:

...with the exception of a few trade union and community-based and distributed newspapers, there are no commercial newspapers, radio stations or television networks which are owned or controlled by blacks.

While there were efforts to create black media outlets in the 1950s, all three such publications were banned in the general crackdown in 1960. Perhaps the most widely known black-oriented newspaper, the *World*, was totally owned by the Anglo-American Corporation from 1963. It avoided politics and showed a chief concern with sensational crime, violence and sex. *World* was banned in 1977, along with other black consciousness groupings. Radio and television, the latter of which only arrived belatedly in 1976, were both entirely controlled by the state apparatus. Attempts to establish a truly independent black press were quashed. The disenfranchised people, denied all normal political channels, were also denied an independent voice.

#### THE POST-1990 PERIOD

Quite suddenly, beginning in late 1989, the tide turned; those responsible for the violence began to be named and identified. However, the process of clarification was uneven; as we argue, they tended to appear and then disappear. Simultaneously, while political negotiations were continuing and there were repeated efforts at securing peace (a peace accord between Inkatha and the ANC in January 1991, the National Peace Accord was signed in September 1991, the ANC suspended the armed struggle in August 1990, MK was formally disbanded on 16 December 1993), the violence continued, took different forms and even escalated. While some of those responsible for the recent past were identified, those behind the violence of the early 1990s were unknown. There was much talk of a mysterious 'third force' purportedly orchestrating this violence.

The turning point regarding death squads came about in a strange way. On 19 October 1989, Butana Almond Nofemela, a prisoner about to be executed the next

day for the cold-blooded murder of a Brits farmer, produced an affidavit claiming that he was a former security policeman and part of a death squad operating since 1981. He claimed the squad was responsible for numerous abductions and assassinations, including the killing of Durban attorney Griffiths Mxenge. He named his co-members of the hit squad, Brian Ngqulunga, David 'Spyker' Tshikalange and Joe Mamasela, and his leaders, Dirk Coetzee and Brigadier Willem Schoon. The story was run in the *Weekly Mail*. Meanwhile journalists of the newly founded and critical Afrikaans language newspaper, *Vrye Weekblad* (see Du Preez, 2003), had been talking to Dirk Coetzee, the former commander of this Vlakplaas unit called C1. They arranged a meeting between the ANC and Coetzee in London, then published the story of hit squads in the *Vrye Weekblad* of 17 November 1989 (Pauw, 1991) with the headline '*Bloedspoor van die SAP*' ('Bloody trail of the SAP'). The stories spread widely; books were written (Laurence, 1990; Pauw, 1991). Pauw's book contained photographs of many of those named: Calla Botha, Pieter Botes, General Johan Coetzee (head of the security branch), 'Staal' Burger, Ferdi Barnard, Almond Nofemela, Ronald Bezuidenhout, General Eddie Webb, 'Slang' van Zyl, General Lothar Neethling. Faces had started to appear as well as sketchy details of secret units of the security forces, such as the ironically named Civil Co-operation Bureau (CCB). In late 1989, the Attorney-General of the Orange Free State, Tim McNally, was appointed to lead an investigation into hit squads, following the claims in the *Vrye Weekblad*. In February 1990, F.W. de Klerk appointed a commission of inquiry into hit squads, headed by Mr Justice Louis Harms. In 1990, Judge Hiemstra headed another inquiry into spying against union officials in the Johannesburg City Council.

Everywhere, it seemed, investigative lights were being switched on. They were soon to be switched off. These investigations did not produce much at all. During the Harms Commission, witnesses were permitted to use pseudonyms and disguises and couldn't be photographed, in order to conceal their identities. If ever there was an example of responsible persons both appearing and disappearing simultaneously, this was it. Only a few of potentially hundreds of CCB operatives were named. Files went missing; witnesses denied any knowledge of death squads. Eventually Harms found that there was no evidence of hit squads in the SAP. He also found that the Minister of Defence, General Magnus Malan, was only 'politically responsible' and therefore could not be held accountable for activities of the CCB (SAIRR, 1991/92, p.493). According to Pauw: 'He [Harms] could not cut through the tissue of lies' (1991, p.144). Much later Max du Preez (2003, p.219), then editor of the *Vrye Weekblad*, described the Harms Commission briefly: 'It was a circus.' Eugene de Kock (1998, p.185) is even briefer: 'We lied.'

The government made promises: 'No government cover-up on CCB, promises FW' (*Cape Times*, 5 March 1991). Meanwhile the violence, particularly in townships, continued into 1991 as indicated in awful repeated headlines like these:

- 'Curfews in six townships' (*Cape Times*, 12 March 1991)
- 'More deaths in Reef violence' (*Cape Times*, 13 March 1991)
- 'Alexandra death toll reaches 46' (*Cape Times*, 14 March 1991)
- '48 killed in trains in six months' (*Cape Times*, 28 March 1991)
- 'Death toll in Eshowe rises to 11' (*Cape Times*, 19 April 1991)
- '24 killed in Reef violence' (*Cape Times*, 28 April 1991)
- '50 killed in violence' (*Cape Times*, 30 April 1991)
- '34 die in weekend of township violence' (*Cape Times*, 6 May 1991)
- 'Mass protest against violence' (*Cape Times*, 9 May 1991)
- '27 die in dawn attack' (*Cape Times*, 13 May 1991)
- 'Unrest areas declared' (*Cape Times*, 10 September 1991)
- '14 September – National Peace Accord signed: Peace gets its chance' (*Sunday Times*, 15 September 1991)
- 'Accord at risk as 36 killed' (*Cape Times*, 22 October 1991)

At the close of 1991, De Klerk appointed Justice Richard Goldstone to chair a commission of inquiry regarding the prevention of public violence and intimidation. Hopes were raised. Also in December 1991 the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) met for the first time.

Through this dreadful continuation of violence, there were also further revelations in the press regarding political forces lying behind the violence. More secrets began to be revealed:

- 'Vlok admits government gave money to Inkatha' (*Cape Times*, 20 July 1991)
- 'Editor to name "SADF men" in train massacre' (*Cape Times*, 23 July 1991)
- 'Massacre: Seventh cop in court' (*Cape Times*, 10 September 1991). This referred to the Trust Feed massacre in December 1988.
- 'R1.5 billion spent covertly' (*Cape Times*, 23 July 1991). This referred to money allocated to the government's Secret Services Account to be spent in the 'national interest'.
- 'R100 million more' (*Cape Times*, 26 July 1991). This referred to government admission of money paid secretly to anti-SWAPO (South-West Africa People's Organisation) parties in the 1989 Namibian elections.
- 'SADF's hidden hand in Inkatha' (*Weekly Mail*, 13–19 December 1991). This referred to secret training of Inkatha members by the SADF and how this was related to continued township violence.
- 'How army sponsored violence' (*Weekly Mail*, 3 January 1992)
- 'What the SADF's covert funds cost taxpayers: R150 million' (*Weekly Mail*, 31 January 1992)
- 'Orders to kill: New inquest on UDF killings' (*Cape Times*, 9 March 1992). This made reference to the reopening of an inquest into four Cradock activists – Matthew Goniwe, Fort Calata, Sparrow Mkonto and Sicelo Mhaulti – after new claims that they were assassinated on the orders of state security forces

- In April 1992 Captain Brian Mitchell, a former police commander, and four black special constables were convicted for the killings of 11 persons in the Trust Feed massacre in 1988. Mitchell was sentenced to death. These events involved a planned attack on UDF supporters in order to bolster Inkatha in the Trust Feed area. The Ministry of Law and Order appointed an independent investigation into irregularities of police investigations regarding this event.

Despite optimistic hopes for the Goldstone Commission, the 1992 year saw little; lights were again dimmed. In April 1992, it reported on receiving 'no evidence of a third force' and claimed that the causes of violence were 'many and complicated' (SAIRR, 1992/93, p.28). A special sub-committee set up to investigate train violence reported in July 1992 that 'it cannot be determined who is to blame for violence on the Reef' (1992/93, p.29). In July 1992, Judge Goldstone criticised the government and security forces for failing to act on some of the Commission's recommendations.

Journalists did better. Following the story of one J.A. Cuna, evidence was found of clandestine operations in KwaZulu townships. *Vrye Weekblad* published this evidence on 30 October 1992 under the headline 'At last proof of the Third Force', with a photograph of Cuna. This evidence was presented to the Goldstone Commission (Du Preez, 2003, p.197). Further leads produced confiscated files showing that Ferdi Barnard had been employed by Military Intelligence in order to discredit MK. The Commission had stumbled on a secret front for Military Intelligence called the Directorate Covert Collection (DCC). Goldstone went public and the *Cape Times* of 17 November 1992 reported as follows: 'SADF lied: Army paid CCB man for smears.' However, in Max du Preez's view, the Commission made a grave mistake in confiscating files only relating to Ferdi Barnard. Over subsequent days the DCC 'removed or destroyed a large number of even more sensitive files, the contents of which we will never know' (Du Preez, 2003, p.198). Lights were switched on only to be switched off again; in this instance perhaps forever.

Yet another example of the double-clicking of illumination – on and off – came with the release of the 74-page report of the ANC's own internal commission of inquiry, resulting in the headline 'Chilling abuse: ANC confirms camp torture' (*Cape Times*, 20 October 1992). To his credit, Mandela openly acknowledged the ANC's responsibility for 'abuses of the most chilling kind' that took place in its detention camps. He then refused to disclose the names of those responsible for the torture of detainees. One recommendation of the report was that 'urgent and immediate attention be given to identifying those responsible' (*Cape Times*, 20 October 1992).

Violence continued. Under the banner 'Bloodbath shocks South Africa', the *Cape Times* of 19 June 1992 reported the Boipatong massacre, in which at least 39 residents, including children and a nine-month-old baby, were 'butchered in their

homes'. Days afterward, the political talks were in tatters. On 24 June the ANC alliance withdrew from negotiations and called for rolling mass action in protest against the government's failure to contain violence. The insinuation throughout this period was that government agents were fomenting violence. In response, De Klerk in July 1992 disbanded three controversial security force units, Koevoet, 31 and 32 Battalions. Supporters of the ANC alliance undertook mass marches across the country. One of these led to the Bisho massacre, the killing of at least 32 marchers by security forces of the Ciskei homeland government, headlined as 'The march of death' (*Argus*, 8 September 1992). Negotiations were further jeopardised. In mid-September a United Nations corps arrived to help stop violence. Shortly thereafter at least 26 people were killed by 'men clad in balaclavas and armed with AK47 rifles' in the Umbumbula area south of Durban ('Killers slay 26 in Natal nightmare', *Cape Times*, 26 October 1992). It was just such 'men in balaclavas' that the *Vrye Weekblad* had referred to as proof of the mysterious 'third force'.

The year 1993 was dominated by positive progress towards a negotiated settlement despite attacks by right-wing groups on the World Trade Centre at Kempton Park, the nerve centre of negotiations. July saw the unveiling of the draft Constitution. In December the era of white power was effectively ended with the first sitting of the Transitional Executive Council. In the same month both Mandela and De Klerk were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The way was open for democratic elections in April 1994. The interim Constitution, passed at the final sitting of the white Parliament on 22 December 1993, made provision for a truth commission and amnesty for perpetrators.

Alongside negotiations, violence continued in similar patterns. On 10 April 1993, ANC and SACP leader Chris Hanu was assassinated. By October of the same year, two right-wingers, Janusz Walus and Clive Derby-Lewis, were sentenced to death for the murder. There were increased attacks on white areas and targets, including the St James Church massacre (11 dead, 58 injured) on 25 July, the killing of Amy Biehl in Gugulethu on 25 August, and the attack on the Heidelberg Tavern, Cape Town, on 31 December, all later attributed to the PAC. Despite further efforts to broker peace between ANC and IFP supporters, violent clashes continued mainly in the East Rand townships and KwaZulu-Natal. From late 1993 through to elections in 1994, numerous bomb attacks, attributed to right-wing groups, took place. In March 1994, the IFP march around the ANC headquarters at Shell House ended in violent clashes and over 30 deaths. Bombings continued to the eve of the elections. Mercifully the democratic elections were peaceful. According to the South African Institute of Race Relations, overall political fatalities increased in 1993: 3 706 deaths compared to 3 347 in 1992 (*SAIRR*, 1993/94, p.653). Only in 1994 did fatalities decrease somewhat: 2 434 deaths in 1994, a decrease of 36 per cent from 1993 (*SAIRR*, 1994/95, p.437).

Regarding identification of those responsible, the pattern of flickering lights persisted. There were further rumours about hit squads in KwaZulu, but few facts. The

Goldstone Commission was still short of hard evidence of security police involvement in current violence; in October 1993, he reported 'strong circumstantial evidence' (SAIRR, 1993/94, p.29). In March of 1994, the Goldstone Commission was still investigating the role of top policemen, including Basie Smit, in 'third force' activities, but there was no final clarity. A few names emerged. In May 1993, Michael Phama of the ANC was convicted on 21 counts of murder, as well as 14 attempted murders for an attack with others on IFP members in Thokoza in 1991. He was sentenced to 21 terms of life imprisonment. At times the naming was erroneous, and in hindsight rather amusing. In May 1993, the Minister of Law and Order, Hernus Kriel, 'produced documents naming Mr Happy Letlapa as head of APLA operations in the Transkei' (SAIRR, 1993/94, p.314; see also the interview with Letlapa Mphahlele in Chapter 7 of this volume).

Further names appeared during the Goniwe inquest. They included Eastern Cape security police Harold Snyman, Eric Winter, General Joffel van der Westhuizen, Colonel Lourens du Plessis and army chief General Hans van Rensburg. But the inquest finally found 'no *prima facie* evidence to pin the murders on any specific individual or group of individuals' (*Cape Times*, 30 May 1994). The truth about those responsible was still not out: 'Goniwe truth must out' (*Cape Times*, 31 May 1994). This pattern of appearance and disappearance of senior security personnel was to continue with the subsequent criminal trials of military general and former minister of defence Magnus Malan and others, and Dr Wouter Basson. Both cases were widely publicised; all were eventually acquitted.

Probably the most publicised criminal trial was that of former Vlakplaas commander Eugene de Kock. It got under way in 1995 and lasted until the end of the first year of the TRC. During 1995, a few other faces and details appeared. In July 1995, a policeman, Sergeant Gary Pollock, told the Supreme Court that he was involved in 'third force' activities, including arming of IFP supporters and attacking busloads of ANC supporters. He claimed he was acting under orders of senior police at all times. He requested this matter to be placed before the TRC (SAIRR, 1995/96, p.76). In August 1995 three former KwaZulu police – Romeo Mbambo, Israel Hlongwane and Gcina Mkize – were sentenced to long prison terms for six counts of murder, kidnapping and malicious damage to property. As 'self-confessed members of a police hit squad' they named several senior IFP members, including Prince Gideon Zulu and senior KwaZulu police under whose orders they were operating. The judge accepted that four of those murders were on orders of those who controlled the hit squad, but he did 'not say who they were' (SAIRR, 1995/96, pp.78–79).

Meanwhile the trial of De Kock was under way. Here, at last, lights were switched on and the public received insights into the machinations of the top layers of the security police: 'De Kock unravels web of debauchery' (*Sunday Times*, 10 December 1996). Many witnesses appeared. Many were named, from lowly *askaris* to top generals. Of those implicated, many scurried to file amnesty applications

with the TRC. At the close of his trial the media reported on De Kock's life. The public at last had a clear picture of one of those responsible. This 'clarity' – and the brutality of the acts to which he confessed – is why he is held in memory. In late October 1996, De Kock was sentenced to two life terms and 212 years on 89 charges. Just days later Dirk Coetzee, an earlier Vlakplaas commander, was testifying before the TRC. A year later there was some recognition that De Kock may have been a scapegoat: 'Shrinking from a greater evil, we make Eugene De Kock a scapegoat' (*Sunday Independent*, 21 December 1997). One light had provided some illumination, but where else? Where individual perpetrators had been identified, it provided the illusion that responsibility had been established.

### UNDERSTANDING PERPETRATORS: A TRICKY ENDEAVOUR

A few authors have grappled with the complexities of understanding perpetrators. Gobodo-Madikizela contends that the issue of understanding perpetrators is a contentious one, as some people argue that perpetrators are unworthy of scholarly study. 'No language should be created to understand evil' (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p.17). Foster points out that trying to understand perpetrators may not only 'reduce the attention given to victims', but may 'diminish our outrage towards their acts, shift the deeds out of focus, and potentially draw our sympathies' (Foster, 2000c, p.10). If we formulate an aetiological psychological understanding of the perpetrators, would we not realise that we could all potentially be perpetrators, and would it not ultimately impair our sense of justice? (Foster, 2000c)

Earlier, Du Toit (1993) also cautioned that our need to understand political violence is not always as innocuous as it may seem. According to him, the answers and the explanations are readily available (the violent legacy of apartheid, the socio-economic disparities, etc.). Why, in the face of so many relevant explanations, do we need to know what else lurks behind it? He offers the following possibilities: a need for a singular explanation to make sense of a complex, multi-determined reality; a need to stress the senselessness of the violence; the need for a conspiratorial explanation; and perhaps most importantly a need to distance oneself from the violence – to make it clear that civilised, reasonable people would not partake in such senseless massacres. He reminds the reader of our rich colonial legacy of 'othering discourses' – cultural and political discourses depicting black people as 'different', as the 'other', as primitive, unreasonable and violent. The need to 'understand' political violence often consciously or unconsciously paves the way for biased 'misleading exculpatory corollaries of explanation' (Rosenbaum, 1999, p.195). These kinds of explanations (why other parties need to get the blame, why one's own violence is necessary and justified) not only risk becoming 'evasion or consolation', but fuel the cycle (Rosenbaum, 1999, p.195). To a large extent the popular media (newspapers, magazines, radio and TV broadcasts) have done exactly that.

## CONTESTED IDENTITIES

The identity of the political perpetrator remains a contested one. This contestation happens on various levels. On the primary level, the TRC's position that everyone who committed gross violations of human rights is a perpetrator (regardless of their political affiliation), is contested. In the narratives that follow, virtually everyone refuses to wear the label. The liberation movement members maintain that they were fighting a just war against a dehumanising evil system, and should therefore not be considered to be perpetrators. With one exception, the people linked to government structures do not consider themselves perpetrators either. They concede to perhaps having made a few mistakes, but their hands – like those of F.W. de Klerk – are essentially clean. It is maintained that the perpetrations in their camp were – in the words of De Klerk – ‘the criminal actions of a handful of operatives of the security forces of which the [government] was not aware and which it never would have condoned’ (in Villa-Vicencio, 1997, p.2). They were ‘rotten eggs’ (De Klerk, in Villa-Vicencio, 1997, p.4). Only the extreme cases manage to educe agreement: the Barend Strydoms, the Eugene de Kocks, the Joe Mamaselas – *they* are clearly perpetrators and they have duly been punished.

The media reporting following the death of Chris Hani clearly illustrates this contestation. Firstly, the killers (Derby-Lewis and Walus) and the right wing are seen as the perpetrators. They, however, see the ‘communists’ (including Hani himself) as the ‘real’ perpetrators (thereby justifying the assassination). See Durrheim (1997) for an insightful analysis of this mode of argument. The ANC blamed the police for not protecting Hani (despite requests for them to do so), implying that the responsibility for his death should rest on their shoulders. Suggesting that Hani’s popularity was too threatening, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela is reported to have pointed the finger at the ANC (Thabo Mbeki in particular) (*Argus*, 4 February 1997). In addition, Bantu Holomisa, at that stage leader of the Transkei, blamed the SADF for Hani’s murder.

On another level, the debate continues whether the individuals who perpetrated the act – in most cases the foot soldiers – or the people in command should be seen as the ‘real’ perpetrators. This debate is discussed in Chapter 1 of this volume.

On yet another level there are accusations that the apartheid system *per se* was a gross violation of human rights. Therefore everyone who had a hand in it would be a perpetrator. The PAC narratives in Chapter 7 all agree that everyone who benefited from and/or condoned the system was a perpetrator. Letlapa Mphahlele maintains that Bantu Education, forced removals, migratory labour systems and pass laws – and the ‘more subtle brutality of legislated poverty’ (*Cape Times*, 25 November 1997) – were all gross violations of human rights. This throws up the question whether the civil servants and the administrators of the system (for example, the members of the National and Military Intelligence who did not directly take up arms) can also be regarded as ‘desk perpetrators’. From there it is a

small step towards questioning whether all institutions that reproduced apartheid (for example, the media, the church, schools, medical and legal services, corporate business, etc.) were not perpetrators in one way or another. Is everyone who ever partook in the apartheid system by voting (not only for the NP) not at least politically and morally responsible too? If one considers the 'more mundane but traumatising dimensions of apartheid life which affected every single black South African' (for example, the way in which black employees were treated, the names black people were called, etc.), could it not be said that all whites are responsible (Villa-Vicencio, 1997, p.3).<sup>4,5</sup>

These contestations leave one with the dilemma that everyone and no one is a perpetrator.<sup>6</sup> If one turns to the media, one finds that perpetrators were either unknown, or the reports reflect that against which Du Toit warns, that is, covertly or overtly 'othering' perpetrators or justifying their actions.

## REPRESENTATIONS OF IDENTIFIED PERPETRATORS

In the comparatively fewer cases where the perpetrators are identified by name, 'othering' or justifying discourses are used. The reader either decodes the violence as necessary and justified, or sees the perpetrators as bloodthirsty monsters who committed senseless deeds for no good reason. The latter affords us the 'luxury of moral indignation' (Gordin, 1998, p.23) and creates the necessary distance.<sup>7</sup> Since we are patently not like that, we can in no way be complicit. Our innocence remains intact and our own aggression (and potential for violence) remains unexamined.

To illustrate this point, a few repertoires have been selected. These do not claim to be exhaustive. Often conflicting descriptions are applied to the same perpetrator, often in the same article.

### STEREOTYPICAL DESCRIPTIONS

Since they have names like Snor (Vermeulen), Slang (van Zyl), Staal (Burger), Brood (van Heerden), Suiker (Britz) and surnames like Van der Gryp, it is hardly surprising that the popular media reveals rather stereotypical descriptions of apartheid state perpetrators – predominantly white and male (Krog, 1998). The one hackneyed image is that of the typical Afrikaans civil servant. Krog describes the 'military squad' as having 'clipped *snorretjies* (moustaches), the shifty eyes, the arrogant circumnavigation of questions...the brutal Afrikaner accent' (1998, p.57). She describes the security policemen with their 'specific salacious laughter, that brotherly slap on the hairy shoulder, the guffawing circle using crude yet idiomatic Afrikaans. The *manne*... The Afrikaans *manne*. Those who call their sons "*pa se ou rammertjie*", or "*my ou bul*" ["Dad's little ram" or "my old bull"]' (Krog, 1998, p.90).

Ferdi Barnard fits the wrong-side-of-the-railway-tracks, rough-guy image: he is big, built 'like a heavyweight body builder' (*Die Burger*, 6 June 1998, our translation) and is a rugby player. 'En die hare was nog altyd kort geskeer bo die ore en op die kop, en het lank in die dik nek, onder die vierkantige kakebeen, gekrul... Hy het nog altyd geloop soos 'n moegoe...soos 'n breker, 'n uitsmyter...baie macho' ['The hair was always cut short about the ears and on top of the head, and grew long down the thick neck, curling under the square jaw bones. He always walked like an idiot...like a bruiser, full of arrogance...very macho.'] (*Die Burger*, 6 June 1998). Another popular stereotype is that of the incorrigible right-winger – the brandy-and-coke brigade (*Mail & Guardian*, 14 September 2002) – personified by the likes of Barend Strydom and Eugene Terre'Blanche.<sup>8</sup> Terre'Blanche is described as the typical khaki-clad boer on the horse, hat and all (*Mail & Guardian*, 31 March 2000); a 'burly' bearded man wearing 'velskoens' with a 'vice-like handshake' and 'an exaggerated idea of his own importance' (Ngwenya & Mhlambi, 1993, pp.30,32). Barend Strydom grew up in an AWB home; his father occupied a senior position in the organisation. He himself is 'vurig AWB' ('passionately AWB'). He identifies himself as a boer: a boer of the ZAR (an Afrikaner of the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek*). He only speaks 'Boers' (Afrikaans). He accepts the 'Vierkleur' as the national flag and 'Ken jy die volk' as the national anthem (*Die Burger*, 17 November 1988).<sup>9</sup> Both Strydom and Terre'Blanche are regarded as neo-Nazis (Ngwenya & Mhlambi, 1993).

Jann Turner offers the following fictional depiction of the stereotypical security police captain, Frans Nel of John Vorster Square:

A vain man who wore a permanent smirk beneath the stiff brush of his moustache. A squat sadist who prided himself on his light touch, his terrifying success rate. He was a master of 'tubing', a torture technique that involved near suffocation of the prisoner... Nel climbed out of the car like a snake uncoiling, smooth and confident and deadly. He hadn't changed much since his last visit; his mullet haircut seemed a bit longer, his sideburns were just as excessive. These long burns were a Security Police trademark<sup>10</sup> like the patchwork leather jacket he wore with his ironed jeans and silver grey slip-ons. He scanned the front of the house with scaly precision...(2002, pp.5–6)

Nel stepped down with barely a dent in his confidence. The smirk on his lips and the swagger in his step spoke of the smug certainty he felt about getting away with it, getting away with murder. (2002, p.40)

In contrast, there are far fewer individualised descriptions of liberation movement perpetrators, bar a handful of exceptions (and most of these are white, or so-called 'coloured' – Ronnie Kasrils, Hein Grosskopf,<sup>11</sup> Carl Niehaus,<sup>12</sup> Robert McBride, etc.). In general they seem to remain nameless and faceless. They are seen as a collective bloodthirsty, savage, primitive 'other'.

Fuelled by the slogans 'One Settler, One Bullet' and 'Kill the Boer, Kill the Farmer', APLA members are portrayed as bloodthirsty youths. A photograph in *Die Suid-*

*Afrikaan* portrays black youths with a poster saying 'APLA, kill a cop a day, Viva APLA' (Sono, Johnstone, Mbengo & Collins, 1993, p.13). The introduction to the article states that the PAC and APLA 'cast a dark shadow over the South African political landscape' and that the media portrays their leaders as 'inherently dishonest' and their followers as 'undisciplined, blood thirsty and racist' (Sono et al., 1993, p.13, our translation). The attack on Amy Biehl is similarly described as 'mindless and savage' (*Mail & Guardian*, 11 July 1997).

### AS RELIGIOUS

Religion is often used as a justifying discourse. Barend Strydom is described as a Calvinist and a Christian, fighting the Christian struggle and wanting to reinstate the '*Christelike Protestantse Boerevolksrepubliek*' (*Die Burger*, 17 November 1988). His Christianity allows him to construct 'the enemy' as (among others) the satanists, the communists, the heathens and the Zionists. He also compares his actions with those of Moses and Samson, who 'murdered when God's chosen people were threatened' (*Rapport*, 4 October 1992, our translation). Giving mitigating evidence in the case of Greta Apelgren, who appeared with Robert McBride on charges of murder and terrorism following the Magoo's Bar bombing in 1986, a professor of psychology describes her as someone who is committed 'to a Christian way of life' (Manganyi, 1987, p.34).<sup>13</sup> Clive Derby-Lewis maintained that he acted according to the Bible and that killing Hani was justified in terms of his 'Christian beliefs'. Hani was killed 'in the fight against the Anti-Christ' (*Cape Times*, 14 August 1997). In his book about the Special Forces, Paul Els frames the war as one of protecting 'our God-fearing country' from 'un-Christian communist movements' (2000, p.1). He also describes the Recce (member of an elite military unit) as 'just an ordinary God-fearing and family-loving person' (Els, 2000, p.73). Slang van Zyl, ex-CCB man, prayed for guidance before he planted a bomb (S. Brümmer, 2000). Krog relates a telephonic report from P.W. Botha's secretary at the time of the TRC: 'Mr Botha is deeply religious... He knows his Bible' (1998, p.58).

### AS A GOOD, KIND PERSON

Perpetrators are often portrayed as essentially good people. Robert McBride is described as 'a young man of a generous disposition. He was selfless to the point where he used to give all his earnings to his mother before taking his own needs into account' (Manganyi, 1987, p.31). Wouter Basson is described as 'the good doctor' who wants to save lives (*Rapport*, 8 June 2003). He characterises himself as someone who is 'sensitive to human pain and suffering', but admits that he is no longer the 'sensitive softy' he used to be (*Rapport*, 8 June 2003, our translation). Staal Burger, ex-CCB cop who applied for amnesty for the bombing of the Early Learning Centre in Athlone and the attempted murder of Dullah Omar and Gavin

Evans, is described as a hospitable ‘*gawe kêrel*’ (‘nice fellow’), and tells a journalist how much his black workers respect him, how well they communicate and how well he pays them (W. Brümmer, 2000a, p.48). Peaches Gordon, a gangster employed by the CCB, is said to have been ‘respectable’, a ‘gangster with a difference’. According to his mother he never swore, never smoked, never drank, never used drugs and loved going to school, and would never had killed someone (W. Brümmer, 2000b, p.48).<sup>14</sup>

Their concern for children and animals is often used to illustrate their integrity. Gobodo-Madikizela cites that Eugene de Kock was passionate about never harming children, to the point that he vowed to execute any of his men if they ever killed a child (2003). Almond Nofemela, one of De Kock’s Vlakplaas colleagues, verified this. Similarly, Els relates that the Recces were deeply affected by ‘the death of civilians – or worse still, children – accidentally caught in crossfire during a contact’ (2000, p.79). Eugene Terre’Blanche tells two black reporters how much he has done for the blacks who live on his farm, how he has rescued orphans from police cells and given them shelter on his farm: ‘They will tell you the truth about my kindness because children do not lie’ (Ngwenya & Mhlambi, 1993, p.32). Barend Strydom (who, ironically, admits to regarding black people as animals) says he would never harm an animal in need. Even during his days as a policeman, he could never put a badly injured dog out of its misery – he had to ask a colleague to do it (*Rapport*, 4 October 1992). There are yet more bizarre examples: police captain Jacques Hechter testified that he allowed his victims to hold an ANC flag and sing *Nkosi Sikekel’ iAfrika* before they were killed. That ‘says Hechter, is proof that he is a just man’ (Krog, 1998, p.94).

#### AS VICTIM

Another way in which perpetrators and their actions are understood – and by implication pardoned? – is by depicting them as victims. ‘“I am a victim. Victim. Victim.” These words resonated throughout Joe Mamasela’s public testimony’ (Vollenhoven, 2000, p.8).<sup>15</sup> He is described and regards himself as a victim of both the ANC (who burned his brother to death) and the security police (who captured and tortured him). He justifies his position as ‘a mere *askari*’ by presenting himself as a prisoner of war, who ‘had no alternative’ but to obey (Vollenhoven, 2000, pp.3,4). In mitigating evidence, Manganyi describes Robert McBride as a victim of his childhood environment. He cites that McBride grew up in ‘one of the most violent urban communities’, a ‘dehumanising environment in which very little value was placed on individual lives’ (1987, p.31). He furthermore points out that McBride had had a number of ‘close shaves with death on account of attacks from lawless gangsters’. That he killed someone in 1985 is viewed as ‘self defence’ (Manganyi, 1987, p.3).

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, who ‘stood accused of perpetrating gross violations of human rights’, was simultaneously a victim of gross human rights abuses

(Vollenhoven, 2000, p.1). John Deegan, a Koevoet member whose story is related in this volume, is regarded as a victim of his father's murder (Boraine, 2000); Janusz Walus is a 'victim of Communism' (*The Citizen*, 12 April 1993);<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Benzien, the Western Cape policeman famous for the wet-bag torture method, was a victim of his 'inhuman working conditions' (Krog, 1998, p.77); Captain Wouter Mentz of Vlakplaas is the victim of 'a deeply traumatic childhood' (Krog, 1998, p.95).

#### AS OBEDIENT SERVANTS/PROFESSIONALS

If being a victim does not adequately justify the actions of the perpetrators, they are depicted as servants obedient to a higher authority. Walus' defence argued that 'he was merely a foot-soldier taking orders from Derby-Lewis in killing Hani' (*Cape Times*, 20 March 1998). Bassie Mkhumbuzi, one accused in the St James Church massacre, told the TRC he was (only) 17 and followed the orders he was given without questioning (*Cape Times*, 10 July 1997). De Kock maintains he was 'a loyal and trustworthy servant of the previous state' (*Argus*, 30 September 1997), following 'orders from highest level of government' (De Kock, 1998, p.249). To prove his point, he cites the decorations he received. Concomitantly, De Kock is seen by the co-author of his autobiography as being 'merely a tool', as the 'proverbial fall guy' and 'merely the executioner' (Gordin, 1998, pp.16,23). Mamasela also merely carried out instructions. In the process he believes he was 'used like a condom and thrown out by both the white and black politicians' (Vollenhoven, 2000, p.1). In similar vein, perpetrators are depicted as trained professionals, implying that their deeds were merely part of their professional duties. Mamasela calls himself a 'militarist' and a 'well-trained intelligence officer' (Vollenhoven, 2000, p.7). Ferdi Barnard is described as being 'highly professional' (*Die Burger*, 6 June 1998, our translation).

#### AS 'MAD'

Not only do the perpetrators cite their various psychiatric conditions (from auditory hallucinations, to trichotillomania, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression), but in the struggle to comprehend their motivations, the public discourse depicts them as mentally unstable (a strategy which both excuses and 'others' them.) De Kock, Strydom and McBride are all described as being 'unstable' (Manganyi, 1987; *Huisgenoot*, 29 October 1992; *Die Burger: Oos-Kaap*, 8 December 1995). According to Mwezi Twala, the brutal Quattro guards 'often became mentally disturbed' (Twala & Benard, 1994, p.89). Wouter Basson is seen as being driven by 'psychotic megalomania', and the people around him as having 'delusions of grandeur' (Du Preez, 2002, p.1).

### AS FEARLESS AND TO BE FEARED

In an apparent attempt to justify why the perpetrators were allowed to commit their deeds, they are portrayed as people that no one would dare confront. Ferdi Barnard is described as ‘*n magtige man*’ (‘a powerful man’), ‘*hels intimiderend*’ (‘hellishly intimidating’), ‘*magsugtug*’ (‘power-hungry’); a Rambo-like murderer (*Die Burger*, 6 June 1998). One of the victims describes Warrant Officer H.C.J. Barnard, a Western Cape policeman, as ‘a frightful man – the cop we couldn’t kill... Whenever his car appeared on the shimmering horizon leading the yellow Caspirs, we knew: someone dies today’ (Krog, 1998, p.29).

Mamasela is viewed as ‘fearless’ (Vollenhoven, 2000); Terre’Blanche is called ‘a dangerous megalomaniac’ (Ngwenya & Mhlambi, 1993, p.30). De Kock admits that ‘we began to believe we were *supermen* who could behave ruthlessly in the name of patriotism and state security’ (1998, p.96, our emphasis).

### AS CRIMINALS

While the perpetrators ascribe political motives to their deeds, they are often seen from the outside as morally corrupt – criminals, thugs, dirt. At the most benign level, F.W. de Klerk is regarded as having committed apartheid crimes. A photograph in *The Sowetan* (22 June 1992) depicts a black man holding a placard with De Klerk’s face on it. The caption underneath says: ‘Wanted for apartheid crimes. Sweep the crooks and assassins out of power.’ The murder of Amy Biehl, the St James Church massacre and ‘the many other “mistakes” perpetrated by the PAC in 1993’ are seen as ‘unjust and criminal’ (*The Star*, 28 July 1997).

According to Boraine the Vlakplaas killers come across as ‘thugs, who...enjoyed their work’ (Boraine, 2000, p.127). Mamasela, in turn, wants to expose the ‘dastardly, nefarious, nocturnal acts of both the ANC and the Nationalist Party’ (Vollenhoven, 2000, p.1). The killers of Amy Biehl are seen as ‘mindless political thugs’ (*Mail & Guardian*, 18 July 1997). *Rapport* describes the (at that stage unidentified) man responsible for the car bomb in Quartz Street in 1987, as a ‘*booswig*’ (‘thug/villain’) (2 August 1987).

Following the killing of 50 people in Bophuthatswana in 1994, the AWB is described as a ‘murderous gang’, as ‘bastards’ (*Weekend Star*, 19/20 March 1994). June Esau describes how the police tortured her and says: ‘One can never never cooperate with dirt like them, because they are nothing better than that. They are *dirt*’ (Pienaar & Willemse, 1986, p.57, our emphasis). De Kock and Nieuwoudt are likened to ‘sewer rats’ scurrying about before the TRC (*Cape Times*, 1 October 1997).

### FROM BAD TO EVIL

One step further down the moral scale, perpetrators are not only seen as bad, but also as evil and demonic. Mphahlele talks of the ‘evil deeds’ of De Klerk and

Magnus Malan (*Cape Times*, 8 October 1997). De Kock was given the name 'Prime Evil', the title of Jacques Pauw's TV documentary on Vlakplaas. Gobodo-Madikizela also refers to him as 'the embodiment of evil' (2003, p.6). In an article on the 'third force', the *Saturday Star* reporter uses the word 'evil' seven times ('a small band of very evil men', 'the evil ones', 'evil itself incarnate', 'empire of evil', 'a tale of evil', 'this latest revelation of more evil', 'the kingpin of evil' (A small band, n.d.). Amos Dyantyi, a Zwelethemba civic leader, says of his police torturers: 'Those people were so evil, you could liken them to Satan' (*Cape Times*, 25 June 1996). In the same vein, Mamasela describes Vlakplaas as 'this devil's belly' (Vollenhoven, 2000, p.3).

### AS CRUEL, SAVAGE, BRUTAL

A similar discourse describes perpetrators as violent, cruel and brutal, to the point of not being human. Following their incursion into Bophuthatswana, a family member of one of the victims says of the AWB: 'These people are cruel' (*Weekend Star*, 19/20 March 1994). Max du Preez calls the story of Wouter Basson one of 'blood-chilling cruelty and mass murder' (2002, p.2). Benzien is called a 'sadist-in-chief' (*Mail & Guardian*, 15 June 2000). Ferdi Barnard is described as 'gewelddadig' ('violent') and aggressive (*Die Burger Oos-Kaap: Landelik*, 12 February 1998). He admits that his past is 'vrot van geweld' ('rotten with violence') (*Die Burger*, 6 June 1998).

Mamasela is often referred to as being brutal, the security police's 'own lethal weapon' (Vollenhoven, 2000, pp.1,5). Judge Mall describes his actions as 'sheer brutality' (Boraine, 2000, p.127). He protests to being called the 'cleanest killer of them all', saying that 'people are killed brutally! They died worse than animals!... It was a sadistic, well-calculated method of killing people... And I was part of it' (Vollenhoven, 2000, p.5). The ANC's Azhar Cachalia says Stompie Seipei was 'murdered in a savage fashion', with Jerry Richardson describing how they stuck garden shears right through his neck and made cutting motions (Vollenhoven, 2000, p.12). The Boipatong killers are depicted as follows: 'The men...indiscriminately attacked their victims, *savagely* killing screaming women and children and while cowering men were equally *brutally* murdered' (*The Star*, 31 March 1994, our emphasis).

Similarly, Twala tells how prisoners in ANC camps were being 'slaughtered...beyond civilized imagination' (Twala & Benard, 1994, p.49). To illustrate the brutality in an ANC camp, Twala describes how, on a visit by Oliver Tambo, 'the entrance to the admin building was lined...with men, bloodied and filthy, hanging from trees' (1994, p.52). Among the state counterparts are the stories of the Vlakplaas cops *braaiing* (cooking on a campfire) next to burning corpses. The lack of feeling and respect extends to family and acquaintances. While Dirk Coetzee relates the horrific details of Mxenge's murder to the TRC, his son's

'blonde girlfriend' is busy painting her nails: 'Her left hand is splayed on Klein Dirk's<sup>17</sup> thigh – he holds the bottle while she applies neat layers of dark Cutex to her nails' (Krog, 1998, p.62).

### AS PSYCHOPATH, ANIMAL, MONSTER

In other depictions the brutality, cruelty and savagery are given labels: perpetrators are seen as psychopaths, animals or monsters. Dirk Coetzee is regarded as a psychopath by an advocate in the Lothar Neethling libel case (*Die Burger*, 29 November 1990). Although the specific label is not used, Barend Strydom is portrayed in psychopathic terms. Justice Harms says he committed the murders in 'an unfeeling and cold-blooded manner that I have never before experienced' (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 May 1989). The same applies to Brian Mitchell (Ottaway, 1992). Ferdi Barnard reportedly boasted about his killings and kept a photo album of his 22 victims (*Die Burger Oos-Kaap: Metropool*, 5 March 1998). Staal Burger, his CCB colleague, calls him 'the nicest psychopath ever' (W. Brümmer, 2000a, p.44, our translation). Eugene Terre'Blanche is also seen as 'boasting to the press of having killed 50 people and injuring 500' (*Weekend Star*, 19/20 March 1994). Paradoxically Eugene de Kock, who is deemed to be a psychopath (*Mail & Guardian*, 15 June 2000), is also seen as 'sane'. In the preface and afterword of De Kock's autobiography, Gordin stresses that psychological tests revealed that he is 'not a psychopath' and that he had 'never suspended his moral judgement' (1998, pp.37,293).

Yet another step further is the distancing appellation of perpetrators as animals. Twala refers to the ANC security in the Angolan camps as 'vultures...looking for carrion' (Twala & Benard, 1994, p.91). The accused in these camps were 'subjected to security *bestiality*' (1994, p.51, our emphasis). White cops like Nieuwoudt (the notorious security policeman of the Eastern Cape, who blew up three colleagues in the Motherwell bombing) are called dogs (Vollenhoven, 2000). Mamasela calls himself and his colleagues dogs: 'I used to call myself a dog. I used to call other *askaris* dogs. Together we were calling each other dog. Dog! Dog! Dog!' (Vollenhoven, 2000, p.8). Amy Biehl's killers are likened to 'a pack of sharks smelling blood' (*Mail & Guardian*, 11 July 1997). Even Mandela described the Boipatong massacre as 'the work of beasts and not human beings' (*The Sowetan*, 22 June 1992). Yet another step down the ladder, perpetrators are seen as monsters: Mamasela calls himself 'this monster, Mamasela' (Vollenhoven, 2000, p.9).

### FICTIONAL ANALOGIES

In order to 'hold' these contradictions together or, as Hook points out, to cover up the 'points of breakdown in explanation', perpetrators are – not surprisingly – compared to fictional or film characters (2003, p.6).<sup>18</sup> De Kock and Mamasela are described as 'Frankensteinian creations' (*Cape Times*, 30 October 1998). Gordin also

calls De Kock Dr Frankenstein, ‘the creator and creature’ (1998, p.27). In his preface to Gobodo-Madikizela’s book on De Kock, Albie Sachs invokes the image of Hannibal Lecter (2003). Gobodo-Madikizela herself alludes to *The Silence of the Lambs*.

The two Barnards both evoke the same movie character: Warrant Officer Barnard called himself ‘the Rambo of the Western Cape’ (Krog, 1998, p.29) and Ferdi Barnard is described as a Rambo-like killer – although he complains that his business connections regard him as a James Bond (*Die Burger*, 6 June 1998). The judge who convicted Oscar Mpetha for participating in ‘terrorist activities’, referred to him as one of the many ‘Jekyll and Hyde characters’ (*The Sowetan*, 7 June 1983).

## REFLECTIONS

What are the subtexts underlying these representations and what do they achieve? Hook points out that the production of stereotypes is driven by the ‘urge to objectify and otherise’ (2003, p.6). In analysing the work of his students regarding serial killers, he highlights a few ‘forms of objectification’. Although media representations cannot *per se* be equated to academic study, his comments are nevertheless pertinent. Hook found that two commonly used forms of objectification were sensationalisation and sentimentality. Sensationalisation refers to the ‘accentuation of those grizzly and macabre details that “de-normalise” the narrative, which ensure that it counts as highly and disturbingly extraordinary, as larger than life’ (2003, p.6). Sentimentality refers to ‘the employment of a stylised or stereotypical emotional response, perhaps best epitomised by the use of over-stated descriptive terms (e.g. descriptions of the “vicious”, “inhuman”, “predatory”, “monster”)’ (2003, p.6). As shown earlier, the popular media also employ these objectifying strategies. In representing the perpetrators in these terms, it sufficiently ‘others’ or distances them from the reader. In the words of Villa-Vicencio, this undermines ‘the ability of ordinary South Africans to see themselves as “represented”’ by these perpetrators. We fail ‘to recognise that there is perhaps a “little perpetrator” in each one of us’ (1997, p.4). Without accepting moral responsibility, we are unlikely to effect reconciliation and we are less likely to ensure that it does not happen again (Villa-Vicencio, 1997).

The alternative repertoires – those that portray perpetrators as religious, good, moral people, who were either victims of circumstances or socio-political systems – make us empathise (if not identify) with them, and their actions are condoned, if not justified. If they are portrayed as ‘mad’, their actions almost become tragic or leap into the realm of fiction. Again, there is no moral appeal for introspection to the reader; as sane people we are exempt from such urges.

The media representations (either in their silences, their formulaic entries or their sensationalist and sentimental portrayals) therefore contribute to ‘othering’ or

justifying perpetrators and their actions. Collectively they help us evade an examination of our moral responsibility. The narratives in this volume show that it is not merely the sadistic, inhuman monsters that were directly or indirectly capable of and involved in political violence. As Du Toit (1993) says – and Milgram's (1974) experiments have shown – they are more often than not 'ordinary', 'normal' people.

### Notes

- 1 Thousands of students held demonstrations in protest of mandatory schooling in Afrikaans. Police opened fire and, according to official figures, 25 children were killed and 200 injured. Unofficial figures claimed several hundred children were killed. Rioting spread through the country within days. June 16 is now known as Youth Day and is a national public holiday.
- 2 Louis le Grange was Minister of Police at the time.
- 3 Contrary to its usual associations, Mbeki called the police involved in fomenting violence 'terrorists': 'It doesn't matter how high people are, it does not matter where they are within the politics of South Africa. The terrorists must be punished' (*The Star*, 21 March 1994).
- 4 As Krog says, 'In a sense it is not these men but a culture that is asking for amnesty' (1998, p.96).
- 5 Listeners to a South African Broadcasting Corporation radio programme about the amnesty hearings of security policemen bring in another level of contestation: not all whites are guilty, 'it is the work of Afrikaners and Nationalists' only (Krog, 1998, p.97).
- 6 Eugene de Kock captures this lack of accountability in the police, pointing out that people like De Klerk have 'run away', that the generals are 'traitorous' in their efforts to distance themselves from his actions, and that former operatives tried to convince the TRC that everyone who issued orders 'were now dead' (*Cape Times*, 1 October 1997).
- 7 Krog describes this process of needing to distance ourselves from these people. At an amnesty hearing of security policemen, she goes to sit closer to them. 'To look for signs – their hands, their fingernails, in the eyes, on their lips – signs that these are the faces of killers, of The Other' (1998, p.90).
- 8 Terre'Blanche is the leader of the AWB. At the time of writing he was serving a prison sentence for assaulting Paul Motshabi and John Ndzima.
- 9 The *Vierkleur* was the flag of the ZAR and *Ken jy die volk* was its anthem.
- 10 The sideburns and the moustaches are seemingly ubiquitous: Gideon Nieuwoudt is described as 'the last non-impersonator alive with Elvis Presley sideburns' (*Mail & Guardian*, 15 January 1999); Suiker Britz sports 'an impressive moustache'; Craig Kotze's moustache is described as 'a vast, gabled affair that is more a parody of the thing than the thing itself' (*Mail & Guardian*, 2 August 1996).
- 11 Hein Grosskopf was a member of MK who was associated with three car bomb explosions in 1987 and 1988. He applied for amnesty for an attack on the Wits Command in 1987 in which one person was killed and 68 injured.

- 12 Niehaus and his partner were jailed for high treason in 1983. He later became the South African ambassador in the Netherlands.
- 13 Greta subsequently converted to Islam and is now known as Zahrah Narkedien.
- 14 However, neighbours tell how Peaches and another gang leader shot at each other every afternoon at five. People started telling the time by the commencement of their gunfire (W. Brümmer, 2000b).
- 15 Mamasela eventually becomes a born-again Christian (Vollenhoven, 2000).
- 16 Conversely, the victim is seen as the perpetrator: following his death, Chris Hani is seen as having been 'no saint', as having had a 'violent and murderous career' (*The Citizen*, 14 April 1993) and a reader even compares him with Hitler, Stalin and Jack the Ripper (*The Citizen*, 14 April 1993).
- 17 Dirk Coetzee's son.
- 18 Hook sees this as an epistemological problem and a political problem. Not only do 'fictions filter into what counts as fact', but 'the biases of popular opinion seep into what counts as...knowledge' (2003, p.6).

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## 3 WIDER ACADEMIC UNDERSTANDINGS

This chapter provides a third lens or perspective, one which draws on academic writings from a wide array of social contexts in a period roughly since the Second World War. While showing a range of variations, academic accounts of ‘those responsible’ differ from popular representations in that they focus on the ordinary. Where popular representations see ‘those responsible’ primarily in terms of images of ‘deficiency’, ‘dysfunction’ or ‘deviance’ (Griffin, 1993), academic accounts predominantly view them as ordinary people, pulled into or swept up by extraordinary circumstances. Where popular media versions tend to vacillate between the polarities of debased monsters or heroic patriots defending a just cause against intolerable enemies, academic understandings eschew either extreme, instead painting pictures of ordinary people (albeit usually men) doing their duty, following their authoritarian leaders and obeying orders. This picture has something in common with one version of popular representation: the tendency to portray those responsible as victims. While it has considerable merits, this view can also be questioned and challenged.

### THE BANALITY OF EVIL

The phrase ‘the banality of evil’, drawn from the subtitle of the book by Hannah Arendt (1963) on the legal trial of Nazi operative Adolf Eichmann, has come to dominate recent reviews on political violence. Arendt came to agree with Eichmann’s own views that he was not a ‘dirty bastard’; nor was he particularly anti-Semitic, but rather an ordinary and ambitious bureaucrat who had felt duty-bound to obey instructions from the Nazi leadership. As a career bureaucrat he conducted his duties with meticulous care, even when this entailed sending people to their death. Although not entirely uncontested (see Goldhagen, 1995), other leading Holocaust scholars (Browning, 1992; Hilberg, 1985) concur with this emphasis on the banal, administrative and bureaucratic aspects of destruction.

Instead of seeing mass atrocities as due to irrational and regressive aberrations, some writers (Bauman, 1989; Giddens, 1984) have argued that modernity itself is implicated in the prevalence of violence which has washed across the span of the twentieth century. The general argument is that the ‘civilising process’ (Elias, 1982) of modernisation involved a shift in which ‘violence work’ has become sequestered, taken out of sight, enclosed and segregated into particular units. Police work,

for instance, is a fairly recent invention. Violence has become both specialised and concentrated. Violence work within modernity has been transformed into a 'technique' – a 'reasonable' set of actions to transfigure undesirable others into a 'desirable object' (Bauman, 1989, p.98) through the most efficient and cost-effective means. According to Bauman, this bureaucratic dissociation of modernity is facilitated by three interwoven processes:

- The functional division of labour which creates distance between people in a command chain, as well as distance between them and the outcome.
- A substitution of technical for moral responsibility, in which efficiency becomes an end in itself.
- The dehumanisation of the objects of bureaucratic operations, in which people are turned into objects, reduced to efficiency criteria.

Bauman argues that modernist bureaucracy is not merely a tool to seek optimal ends; it operates with a momentum and logic of its own.

Bauman's (1989) proposition is that mass atrocity is the outcome when there is a connection between two sets of factors: (i) an ideologically obsessed power elite, and (ii) the bureaucratic and technological facilities, including specialised functional units, of the rational modern nation state. Separately, each of these factors is normal and commonplace. It is only in the rarer and more unusual encounter, a spark between the two normal factors, that mass atrocities ensue. Bauman makes a strong case. Here is a picture of ordinary people, compartmentalised in a rational division of labour, a chain of orders, just doing their duty in proper fashion. Does it account, however, for the face-to-face butchery in Rwanda, or the relative spontaneity of crowd violence and 'necklace' murders?

It is not only Holocaust studies that have alluded to the banality of evil thesis. A number of recent studies of torturers from various places (Conroy, 2000; Haritos-Fatouros, 2003; Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros & Zimbardo, 2002) have emphasised the ordinariness of those they studied. Their cases showed no evidence of pre-morbid personality factors, psychopathology or particularly disturbed conditions of upbringing. Subsequent to the period of violence, they found little evidence, apart from a medium range of 'burnout', that such people were out of the ordinary. They returned to rather ordinary lives. These studies argue that ordinary people are transformed by particular practices in their routine work environments into killers and murderers – they are not dispositionally predisposed towards violence.

## SITUATIONISM

Evidence from social psychology reinforces this perspective. The single most dominant lesson emerging from 50 years of studies and experiments is that social situations exert considerable persuasive powers. The message in explaining human conduct is that situational forces take precedence over dispositional tendencies.

In persuasive experiments on norms, conformity, obedience to authority and the failures of bystanders to participate in emergency situations, social-psychological studies have shown that people tend to 'go along' with the prevailing and immediate situation to a far greater extent than was previously thought possible. The work of Solomon Asch (1952) showed that ordinary people evidenced considerable conformity to or compliance with others, even when the others were palpably incorrect. What factors promote conformity? Research has indicated two processes. One is informational influence, in which people are persuaded by the information of others, particularly in situations where things are uncertain or unclear. The second is normative influence, in which people 'go along' with others to avoid 'sticking out', that is, to avoid censure and gain approval from others. But would we 'go along' with others to the point of violence?

A startling set of experiments by Stanley Milgram (1974) showed the link between compliance or 'obedience to authority' and violence. In these studies, a majority – some 65 per cent – were found to 'go along' with and obey instructions from an authority figure, in delivering an apparently maximum measure of electric shock to a hapless victim strapped into a chair. The aim of Milgram's experiments was to account for some of the processes involved in the Holocaust. The details of the experiments need not detain us here: they are widely reported. Of more importance is the range of experimental variations (18 studies in all), which showed the processes involved in the link between authority and violence, as well as potentials for disobedience or resistance to situational forces. Increased degrees of the hierarchy, surveillance and legitimacy of authority figures were associated with increased obedience in delivery of electric shocks. When the authority was contradictory, obedience reduced markedly. Potential for resistance turned on two factors, psychological distancing from the victim and collective support for disobedience. As direct proximity to the victim increased, so obedience was reduced. When circumstances were arranged so that others were seen to be disobedient, the level of obedience dropped considerably. Resistance to authority entails collective efforts. In Milgram's words: 'Revolt against malevolent authority is most effectively brought about by collective rather than individual action' (1974, p.116).

While contentious and widely debated and interpreted (Blass, 2000; Miller, 1986; Mixon, 1989), this set of studies conducted in the 1960s at much the same time as Eichmann's criminal trial has been used and taken up by prominent scholars on the topics of mass violence and injustice, among others Bauman (1989), Fromm (1973), Kressel (1996), Moore (1978) and Staub (1989). In the wake of the My Lai massacres in Vietnam, the American scholars Kelman & Hamilton employed Milgram's studies to account for conditions that 'weaken the usual moral inhibitions against violence' (1989, pp.15–16). Apart from authority processes, they raised two further conditions: 'routinisation', in which tasks are organised as routine, mechanical or repetitive and involve little thinking, and 'dehumanisation', in

which victims are distanced and treated as creatures to whom normal morality does not apply.

The study by Phil Zimbardo and colleagues contributes further evidence to this thesis of situationism. In this work, ordinary young healthy male students were assigned to roles of prisoners or prison guards in a mock prison set-up in the basement of Stanford University (Zimbardo, Haney, Banks & Jaffe, 1973). Within a short time the 'prison guards' became authoritarian and even sadistic in some cases, while the 'prisoners' became passive and totally submissive. The situation had transformed them as people, enabling propensities to violence. In their study of Brazilian violence workers, Huggins et al. (2002) draw strong parallels between the Stanford prison experiment and the situational forces in the repressive Brazilian military regime in the period between 1964 and 1985.

We could give further studies, cite more examples, provide richer details, but the argument is clear enough. Experiments in the arena of social psychology lend reinforcement to Holocaust research and other studies of mass atrocities and genocide (Du Preez, 1994; Kuper, 1981) to promote the thesis of the perpetrator as fundamentally an ordinary person who is transformed through complex situational circumstances which enable violent actions. Those responsible for terrible deeds, or so goes the argument, are more or less like you and me. But are they?

## ARGUING ABOUT THE BANALITY THESIS

There is merit in the obedience to authority model. It serves to refocus attention on a range of other processes and actors including those who manufacture ideological conditions, those in higher authority and others (including facilitators) in a chain of command. It places useful emphasis on particular organisational dynamics. It refuses to allow us a reassuring distance from 'those responsible' for actions conducted sometimes in our name, for a cause we may hold dear. It holds moral implications and points to the culpability of higher authorities. It draws us in, due to the frequently made assertion that potentially any one of us could be in the same shoes. It allows for a possible empathy with those responsible.

But is it just anyone? The deeds, if not the persons, are clearly not ordinary; thus our very need for explanation. Indeed, relatively few people are responsible for political violence. For example, in the South African case, Kane-Berman (1993, p.13) claimed that between 1983 and 1992 there were over 118 000 criminal murders of which approximately 15 000 were politically-related fatalities (assuming that it is possible to differentiate so neatly). Criminal murders, even in South Africa where the rate is high, are still relatively rare events; the rate is roughly 60 per 100 000 population. Only some 10 per cent are attributed to political reasons. It is not just any ordinary person, as common sense might suggest. We need something like a filtration model to sift out those who are highly unlikely to be responsible.

Consider gender, for instance: in the South African case at least, it was generally only men who were responsible for political violence. That whittles our population down by half. Consider age profiles: generally not the very young or the elderly – whittle down by another half or so. Actions were limited in the main to those in the security forces – reduce further. And as we show later, it involved usually only those in specialised units within the armed forces. A simple filtration model of this sort hints at processes involved in selection of the relatively few who were responsible.

The obedience model also tends to remove agency from those responsible; they are transformed into automata, acted on by others. This, in turn, raises problems regarding their moral accountability. It reminds us as well that there are alternative accounts. One such alternative suggests that perpetrators may be psychopaths, sadists or just bullies – people who gain pleasure out of hurting others. In a review of pertinent literature, Baumeister (1997) concedes that this may be possible, but all evidence suggests it applies to only a small proportion, perhaps less than five per cent – and he was reviewing all kinds of perpetrators, not only political ones. Even in these cases, the behaviour was largely learned and likened to a process of addiction. Due to sequencing of repeated episodes over time, Baumeister suggests that violence may become habit-forming.

A more significant alternative perspective suggests that perpetrators may be quite willing and self-initiated; that is, active agents rather than victims of circumstances. Goldhagen (1995) takes this position regarding the Holocaust. He argues that vicious anti-Semitism, long prevalent in Germany, was the underlying dynamic and that people were quite willing in their eradication of Jews. Investigating details of two cases, the action of Police Battalion 101 and the death marches in late 1945, he claims little evidence for the situationist model. He found that people went against orders not to kill and showed self-initiative, in many cases volunteering for action. Among the police, there was scant evidence of prior training or of direct propaganda and many were not Nazi sympathisers. These were not the actions of bureaucratic careerists; there was no goal of enrichment or advancement. They were zealous in action; they chose to kill. Small squads undertook hunts for Jews. Killings were personalised; they boasted of actions; photographs like trophies celebrated their deeds. The degree of brutality indicated deep-seated hatred and a desire for revenge against Jews. During the death marches, in which many prisoners were women, the more brutal treatment was reserved for Jews. Due to the long and widespread anti-Semitic bigotry among ordinary Germans, victims were regarded as deserving of suffering.

While a controversial position and rather too voluntarist, Goldhagen's thesis has merit in reintroducing agency and arguing for links to virulent racialised discourses which fuel hatred for others. It could be regarded as a competing theory of mass atrocities, against that of situationism, or a complementary account; different routes of explanation for differing circumstances. As Kressel (1996) has suggested, there are likely to be many routes in understanding of large-

scale human destruction. There are two other aspects to be drawn from Goldhagen. It takes into account the identities of both victims and perpetrators, as opposed to some versions of situationism in which the particularisation of victims tends to get lost. Goldhagen's thesis makes a case for stating why particular victims are selected for brutalities. From his elevation of perpetrators' active agency, it is but a short step to argue the case for the notion of 'entitlement' (Foster, 2000c) as a plausible ground for understanding violence work. We take this up later. For the present we pause to ask what it is exactly that we are trying to explain or understand.

### WHAT IS THE OBJECT OF UNDERSTANDING?

It may seem odd to pose such a question at this stage. Bear with us. The question could be refined: what are we dealing with in the particular case of South Africa? In the theories discussed earlier, explanations were directed at unidirectional violence, that is, brutality from the more powerful over the less powerful; a top-down situation. The burden of explanation was concerned with the actions of state-led atrocities (torture, genocide, massacres, death squads) or, in the case of psychological experiments, orchestrated hostility with hapless victims as the targets. In such situations we are more likely to see the operations of bureaucracies, segmented division of labour, formal chains of command and unidirectional instructions, propaganda, orders and dominant ideologies. But what about violence emanating from the 'victims'?

The top-down version is not the only form of violence. There are three further modalities of political violence, which we label as 'state-supportive' (in contrast to state-led), 'bidirectional' and 'lateral' or 'horizontal' violence. Taken together, in all four forms, we could talk of multi-directional or multi-sided violence. The first of these involves violence by oppressed people in support of the state. In South Africa there were a number of instances of 'state-supportive' violence, including the actions of homeland security forces (for example, the Bisho massacre), the actions of Inkatha, the *askari* murderers of Vlakplaas, the vigilante groupings such as the *Witdoeke* in urban townships (see Cole, 1987; Haysom, 1986) as well as black security police in state employ.

The second (bi-directional violence) involves violence on behalf of the oppressed people. In South Africa there are a number of such examples: the armed wings of PAC and the ANC, resistance groupings in the townships who attacked the so-called 'puppets' of the apartheid regime (black councillors and black policemen), the 'young lions' acting under the umbrella of the UDF and trade union supporters (see Bornman, Van Eeden & Wentzel, 1998; Cobbett & Cohen, 1988; Manganyi & Du Toit, 1990). Outside South Africa these movements were supported by some governments (for example, Scandinavian countries, the Soviet Union), various pressure groups, such as the anti-apartheid movement, as well as anti-colonial

forces across Africa. Inside South Africa they were aided and abetted to some extent by what some have labelled the 'liberal slideaway' (Kane-Berman, 1993; Wentzel, 1995), that is, white liberals or radicals who excused, condoned or even supported the upsurge of violence in black townships. In a more active fashion, some whites joined the liberation movements and participated fully in armed struggle. One thinks readily of Joe Slovo, Ronnie and Eleanor Kasrils, Hein Grosskopf and the African Resistance Movement (ARM) of the 1960s. We have labelled this form of violence 'bidirectional', since it simultaneously involves repression on the part of the state, as well as revolt from the oppressed. It is well described by Frantz Fanon (1963):

...the colonial situation is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations...it is here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force. (p.29)

[The colonial situation]...is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence. (p.48)

For Fanon 'decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon' (p.27). In reaction to repression and a colonial world 'strewn with prohibitions' (p.27), the colonial masses gradually develop an awareness that 'their liberation must, and can only be achieved by force' (p.57). Fanon holds a positive view of this reactive violence which:

...invests their characters with positive and creative qualities...it binds them together as a whole...part of a great organism of violence which has surged upwards in reaction to the settlers' violence in the beginning. (p.73)

At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority-complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect. (p.74)

While some regard Fanon's views as controversial, few would doubt that he correctly identified the central axis, the pivot of violence; a struggle predominantly between 'natives' and 'settlers' in the view of the PAC. The ANC also recognised this in terms of the more nuanced notion of 'colonialism of a special type', a blend between national (or racialised) and class struggles (Van Diepen, 1988; Wolpe, 1988). In its bidirectional form, the oppressed were no longer merely victims, but were transformed into active protagonists (Davis, 1987). Indeed, so far were they no longer victims that the South African state, by a sleight of propagandistic hand, turned the liberation movements into the supposed primary protagonists of violence. From the late 1970s the state labelled resistance as a 'total onslaught' against the South African nation, which in turn required a 'total strategy' – justification for a substantial increase in the militarisation of the security apparatus (Cawthra, 1992, 1993; Cock, 1991; Cock & Nathan, 1989; Grundy, 1988). This in turn escalated the spiral or 'dialogue' of violence.

The final form is lateral or horizontal violence – between and among oppressed people. Some refer to this as 'spontaneous' violence. Instances in the South African case include taxi wars, 'necklace' killings, witchcraft-related killings, clashes

between SDUs and SPUs and crowd violence of various sorts – around marches, funerals, strikes, stay-aways, boycotts and ‘rolling mass action’. In the eyes of some people this is the least political and the most disorganised, unstructured or even ‘chaotic’ form of violence. In our view this is not quite so. While certainly owing less to formal organisational dynamics such as state systems of training and hierarchies, and at times evidencing crossovers with criminal elements and localised power struggles, ‘spontaneous’ violence is also more structured in form than laypersons tend to recognise (Foster & Durrheim, 1998; Reicher, 1987, 1996). Many instances were structured round the central axis of struggle, that is, violence was directed against those seen as sell-outs, *impimpis* (traitors), or collaborators, spies and informers of the apartheid system. Even when links were rather loosely connected, the majority of those responsible in ‘spontaneous’ situations evidenced some affiliation to or sympathy with youth or civic or union organisations (Marks, 2001). They were not simply random or anarchic events. The central point, however, is that such situations may require different explanations and understandings. The dominant models may not fit so well here.

Thinking of all these forms together, the burden of understanding in the particular case of South Africa is to grasp the multi-directional or multi-sidedness of political violence, along with one caveat: multi-sidedness does not mean equal-sidedness. To do so may well require revisions of the dominant explanatory models, perhaps a repackaging with a relocation of emphases. It may require searching for a ‘third space’ between the competition of existing models, which argue for inner-directedness on the one hand (willing executioners) and outer-directedness on the other hand (obedience and regulated conduct). If the object of our inquiry is multi-directional violence, then perhaps it requires understanding of a multi-vocal form, not necessarily entirely well suited to unidirectional and linear models that still predominate in the human and social sciences. The events in South Africa are not unique. The insights of Fanon showed us similarities with the processes of decolonisation elsewhere. Large-scale violations of human rights have sadly occurred too frequently, in too many places, to argue for local exceptionalism. Nevertheless, a focus on the local, with its characteristic multi-directionality of ills, may permit us to propose new theoretical tools which could fruitfully be employed more widely. That is what we shall propose further on. More immediately we examine the array of positionings in the theatre of violence, akin to the cast of actors in a dramatical production.

## THE CAST OF POSITIONINGS

We use the terms ‘position’ or ‘positionings’ (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999) to raise questions about the usual ascribed roles of victim and perpetrator and to signal that real people are separable from the positions. People can shift into different positions. For example, in the routine scenario of police shooting at a criminal, the

police regard the criminal as the real perpetrator. As we saw in Chapter 1, the labels of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' are far more muddled than is usually taken for granted. They are relative terms. The positions of victim and perpetrator could better be regarded as a form of achieved or ascribed status. This requires two moves: first a series of events or deeds, and second the evaluation or attribution of reasons for the events. If the event is evaluated as an accident, there are no perpetrators. The position of victim is achieved if a person is regarded as the recipient of undeserved harm. The position of perpetrator is achieved if a person is evaluated as deliberately inflicting harm or hurt on another or assisting in that harmful deed.

In the dramatic arena of violence, there is a range of positions. The usual claim regarding relevant personae is triangular in form; that is, victims, perpetrators and onlookers. We suggest a far wider array of subject positions such as facilitators, gatekeepers, reporters, bystanders, producers and go-betweens, that together in complex relations co-construct the mix that both enables and constrains the likelihood of atrocious deeds. By widening the array we open up the lens for a more complicated picture and shift the spotlight away from the central protagonists. Nevertheless, in the drama of violence the interrelated couple, victim and perpetrator, usually take central stage; top billing.

#### THE PERSPECTIVES OF PERPETRATOR AND VICTIM

In an extensive review of the literature, including some of his own experiments, Roy Baumeister (1997) showed a sharp difference in the perspectives of victims and perpetrators. Baumeister labels this difference a 'magnitude gap' (p.18): a discrepancy between the importance of the deed to victim and perpetrator. The act is of far greater significance for the victims; to the perpetrator it is 'often a very small thing' (p.18). Perpetrators generally have less emotion about their acts than is the case for victims. This gap manifests also in time perspectives. For the victim it remains in memory for a long time; among perpetrators the memory of the event fades more quickly.

Actions also appear less evil – less wrong – to perpetrators than to victims. Perpetrators commonly attribute external causes to account for their actions, ironically counting themselves as victims. Alternatively, they claim their actions as warranted, in defence of some just cause, or due to some characteristic of the victim: the 'badness' of the victim made me do it. Both of these moves act to lessen their responsibility. In the study of 23 Brazilian security personnel, their accounts made equal use of excuses (blaming others, including victim characteristics), justifications (my professional duty) and denials, claiming other people were responsible. Only one of the 23 cases made an admission of wrongdoing (Huggins et al., 2002).

In sharp contrast to the perpetrators' perspectives, victims view the acts as due to internal motives of perpetrators such as cruelty, maliciousness, hatred or

alternatively they see the acts as senseless, without any reason. Here is Quentin Cornelius (now a paraplegic), a victim of the APLA attack on the Heidelberg Tavern, Cape Town, speaking to his attackers in a TRC hearing: ‘...explain to us if there was any logical reason...is there any reason, sensible reason why you had to continue with something like that?’ (cited in *TRC Report*, Vol. 6, p.404). Where victims view events through a perspective of ‘stark, absolute categories of right and wrong, perpetrators see a large grey area’ (Baumeister, 1997, p.40). Perpetrators’ accounts rarely concede direct maliciousness; most offer comprehensible reasons for their deeds, but in the main, reasons that reduce their culpability.

In this notion of positioning, the same person can shift from one perspective to another. This is graphically illustrated in the case of John Deegan in a written testimony to the TRC. (Deegan is also a contributor to this volume; see Chapter 5.) In one instance Deegan is the perpetrator, a member of the notorious police unit Koevoet, describing the interrogation of a wounded SWAPO soldier.

...he was denying everything and I just started to go into this uncontrollable fucking rage and I remember thinking, ‘How dare you?’ And then...I pulled out my 9mm, put the barrel between his eyes and...I executed him... I got onto the radio and said to Colonel X, ‘We floored one. We are all tired and I want to come in.’

Later, the same man is the victim, talking of the death of his father:

He was cold-bloodedly shot... I cannot come to terms with his death in that it was a senseless act of violence in the pursuit of greed. This is the first time my family and I have come so close to experiencing the horror of violence. (Cited in *TRC Report*, Vol. 5, p.273)

If we really want to understand perpetrators it will be necessary to grasp what the acts mean to them, even if it ‘entails seeing the acts as relatively minor, meaningless or trivial’ (Baumeister, 1997, p.19).

#### OTHER POSITIONINGS

Around the central players is a whole range of other positions which either enhance or inhibit the possibilities of violence. Among those who are ‘atrocities facilitators’ (Huggins et al., 2002) are people who produce ideologies of prejudice or indifference regarding ‘others’, those who give instructions or fail to give inhibitory orders, those who oil the bureaucratic machine and those in partnership or alliance with murderous regimes. Given that secrecy is a condition that enables atrocities, all those who fuel secrecy are part of the story. Organisations have ‘gatekeepers’ of silence, the media are trammelled by censorship or their own restraints, witnesses fail to come forward, academics turn blind eyes. It is not only local third parties; international governments may be facilitators. There are other shadowy facilitators – spies, crossover agents, informers and people who compile reports in intelligence agencies.

The notion of bystander apathy is well recorded. Bystanders stand by for various reasons, chiefly diffusion of responsibility (let others do the action), interpretation of events as benign (it can't be as bad as they say), lack of identification with victims, evasion of being implicated in cumbersome procedures and sheer indifference, a phenomenon that Cohen (2001) is at pains to unravel. Among the onlookers is a range of other positions: legal officials who judge, therapists who counsel, clerics who may hear and heal, academics who try to understand, the media who may (or may not) report and media consumers who may express opinions. Among all of these is a small cluster of those who strive to report, document, expose, oppose and prevent violations of human rights. One of the more strange positions is that of people who claim simultaneously to know and not to know. Akin to our earlier image of a light flickering on and off, it is a puzzling phenomenon, beyond the scope of our present discussion (see Bar-On, 1999; Billig, 1999; Cohen, 2001 for some explorations). In the South African case, it was most aptly put by Leon Wessels, former deputy minister of Law and Order, in a TRC hearing:

I do not believe that the political defence of 'I did not know' is available to me, because in many respects I believe I did not want to know. We simply did not, and I did not, confront the reports of injustices head on... The National Party did not have an inquiring mind about these matters. (Cited in Boraine, 2000, p.140)

In the previous section we argued that political violence in South Africa was multi-sided rather than unidirectional. That creates new challenges for understanding and questions the incompleteness of dominant models. In this section, we have extended the picture by adding in a range of subject positions, all with differing perspectives, which add to the troubles of appropriate theorising. Abuses are seldom committed by solitary individuals acting all alone. It is the assemblage, the relationship between and among these various positions, that either enables or constrains the possibilities of atrocities. We are all more or less ordinary people, until we adopt one or other of these positions in the theatre of violence. Then we become out-of-the-ordinary: either heroes or villains; perhaps the indifferent in-between. And who says that the indifferent are ordinary? They might be the most unusual. We summarise our position in the form of two quotes from those who know better than we do:

Cruelty is social in its origin much more than it is characterological. (Bauman, 1989, p.116)

Evil is socially enacted and constructed. It does not reside in our genes or in our soul, but in the way we relate to other people. (Baumeister, 1997, p.375)

## TOWARDS A RELATIONAL MODEL

If one agrees with Baumeister's quote, then it opens the way for what we call a relational model for the genesis of political violence. It is a hybrid model, drawing on

ingredients already identified, perhaps adding some emphases, but mainly hoping to blend it into a new mix. The centrepiece of this relational model proposes a shift in the direction of search. We suggest that the origins of violence are not to be found within the enclosed figure of the individual perpetrator, but in the constellation of relations between persons, groups, ideologies and juxtaposed positionings which eventually emanate in the 'toxic mix' (Huggins et al., 2002, p.182), the 'volatile mixture' (*TRC Report*, Vol. 5, p.291), the spark of connections seen as a 'short-circuit' (Bauman, 1989, p.93) or the 'multiple identities which intertwine and resonate to generate violent propensities' (Foster, 2000b, p.9). It bears a resemblance to Said's (1992) notion of a contrapuntal view in which he proposes that: 'No one today is purely one thing' (p.407). Rather, we are made up of the juxtapositioning of various, sometimes discrepant, fragments. Even the figure of the perpetrator is not one thing, if Lifton (1986) is correct in claiming that 'doubling' – a process of keeping discrepant parts of the self separate and compartmentalised, splitting the good and the bad from each other – is commonly found among those responsible for violence.

We sketch the main points of departure for a relational model:

- A shift away from self-contained individualism and essentialism which keeps asking what is the true or real nature of the perpetrator.
- A relational notion of a perpetrator, which assumes its alter, the victim.
- An emphasis on relations between groups, presupposing that groupings are constituted through ideological processes.
- A greater emphasis on language in its constitutive modality (that is, that language not only represents things, but actually does things).
- A relational view of power, that is, power in relation to resistance and challenge.
- A time-related dimension in which notions such as incremental steps, sequencing, spirals and dialogical relations are significant.
- A multiple, fluid, contested notion of subjectivity which allows for shifting identity positions (as opposed to fixed, static and essentialist identities).
- Greater emphasis on organisational affiliations and internal dynamics, presupposing that subjectivity is constituted in and through collusion or collision with particular organisations.
- Greater consideration for unwarrantedly neglected emotional aspects, regarded both as emergent from and constitutive of relational forms.

This approach treats political violence as an emergent phenomenon, that is, it emerges when a particular combination of circumstances meet, converge and ignite. The standard model proposes that people are sucked in by these processes. That, we suggest, is too passive a model to be entirely appropriate; people are viewed as puppets of circumstances. Rather, people take up positionings (guerrilla, freedom fighter, defender of the realm) which enable and construct emerging situations.

## AN ILLUSTRATION

A characteristic picture of political violence, particularly in situations of decolonisation (in contrast to protracted wars or patterns of criminal violence), is the rapid escalation of events to a peak or crescendo, then a quite rapid decline, an image of an inverted U-shaped graph. This in our view is an illustration of the emergent notion of political violence. As different conditions of possibility meet, connect or collide, so political violence escalates. When these toxic relations disaggregate, as occurred with the first democratic elections in 1994, identity positionings change (guerrillas became government officials) and violence begins to decline. See Table 3.1 for figures of political fatalities from 1987 to 2000. During the height of this period, the years 1990 to 1994, characterised by an intensification of competition and jockeying for political ascendancy, all four forms of violence as described earlier (state-led, plus right wing; state support; bidirectional; and lateral) were operative (which was not so systematically the case in earlier periods) and fatalities reached a crescendo.

**Table 3.1** Political fatalities in South Africa 1987–2000

| Year | Deaths | Year | Deaths |
|------|--------|------|--------|
| 1987 | 661    | 1994 | 2 476  |
| 1988 | 1 149  | 1995 | 1 044  |
| 1989 | 1 403  | 1996 | 683    |
| 1990 | 3 699  | 1997 | 470    |
| 1991 | 2 706  | 1998 | 356    |
| 1992 | 3 347  | 1999 | 325    |
| 1993 | 3 794  | 2000 | 196    |

Note: The above totals represent an average of minimum and maximum figures. Whereas minimum totals represent those which can be assumed to be politically unrest-related, maximum totals include fatalities where the political nature is not certain, that is, taxi feuds, faction fighting, etc. The figures have been calculated on the basis of information taken from press articles and various reports on political violence.

Source: SAIRR 2001/2002

Once under way of course, violence is not that easy to stop. It tends, like social representations, to take on a life of its own. It enters cycles of revenge and becomes intertwined with criminal violence – all four modalities of violence evidenced some degree of crossing the political-criminal divide. It was common parlance in this period to speak of ‘com-tsotsis’ (a hybrid of ‘comrade’, an ANC/UDF-aligned political identity and a township ‘gangster’, a criminal identity). As one set of circumstances – the political one – transformed rapidly, certain forms of violence decreased quite rapidly, while another set of conditions – the marginalisation, exclusion and powerlessness of black youth – did not change, so that criminal violence continued and even escalated somewhat into the post-apartheid era (Simpson, 2001). The ‘comrade’ identity became superfluous under changed conditions and the marginalised youth became merely ‘tsotsis’ (gangsters) involved now

in cash-in-transit heists. The pattern of violence, with changes in the forms of identity salience, shifted from one form to another. One characteristic did not change: both political and criminal violence was predominantly committed by young males. Perhaps that is because neither patriarchy nor maleness – for those who wish to espouse a biological or evolutionary view of male violence – evidenced any changes.

## A RELATIONAL MODEL: TWO CORE CONSTRUCTS

Here we attempt to put some flesh on the sparse theoretical skeleton of a relational model outlined earlier. This hopes to deal with a number of problems in the standard accounts discussed. First, it suggests a more active model of perpetrators. Second, it suggests a modification, but not a total abandonment, of the ‘ordinary person’ model of perpetrators. Third, it hopes to foreground the relationship between perpetrators and victims. Fourth, it takes into consideration the multi-sidedness of violence, that is, it treats power, even when unequal, as contested rather than only as a top-down model. Earlier more sketchy outlines of this theoretical approach appeared in the *TRC Report*, Volume 5, Chapter 7, and in Foster (2000a,b,c). We propose two central constructs: (i) the idea of ‘entitlement’ and (ii) the idea of multiple, intertwining strands of identity (or subjectivity) which, when connected or interlocked, create propensities for violence. It assumes the idea of a filter model; that certain forms of subjectivity are filtered out while others take up positions of responsibility for potentially violent acts.

### THE IDEA OF ‘ENTITLEMENT’

The general idea is to stretch or modify the banality thesis, which suggests that perpetrators are really just ordinary people. We concur with the banality thesis insofar as it argues that they are not pathological or dysfunctional in psychological terms, but then argue that ordinary people become other-than-ordinary by feeling entitled to do certain deeds. After the event, it is standard for ‘those responsible’ to excuse, justify or deny the deeds. However, during the act we propose that they are enabled, not only because of social pressures, but also because of a psychological process of entitlement. It transforms the image of ‘those responsible’ from a passive into an active mode.

What is meant by entitlement? At the centre, it is a sense of deservingness. It is a relational concept, since it entails a particular kind of relationship between self and other. It says to the other: ‘You must respect me.’ It manifests as a set of rights – the right to fulfil own wishes, the right to speak or be heard, the right to space or to bodily integrity (Lamb, 1996). One should distinguish between healthy and exaggerated entitlement. Oppressed groups have struggled for a sense of deservingness which has been denied. That is an instance of healthy or positive entitlement. It becomes exaggerated when showing two further characteristics:

- a sense of superiority, as in the right of access to others' bodies (rape, abduction, torture) or the right of my spatial freedom over the spatial freedom of others (for example, apartheid); and
- inattention to others' reactions, showing little or no concern for victims, a lack of empathy, or alternatively, a selective empathy, for one group but not for another.

For Lamb (1996), in her study of perpetrators of sexual abuse, exaggerated entitlement is a quasi-emotional state which marks the perpetrator as superior, and is the dominant state of perpetrators-in-action. Lamb uses the example of anger, one of the most gender-laden emotions in our culture. Men come to experience anger as a sense of moral indignation – a kind of superior status – while women mainly experience anger as frustration and with less self-righteousness. Entitlement is also a kind of identity or subjectivity. We view the notion of identity through a discursive theory which treats identities not as fixed inner states, but as a positioning in relation to others. For example, a man may be meek and respectful in relation to other men, but abusive to women. Entitlement is a relational form that is fuelled in and through ideologies, in this instance the ideology of patriarchy. Racism is that ideological form which fuels the idea of 'whiteness' as a superior entitled positioning.

A new conceptualisation of the psychological notion of self-esteem adds further supporting evidence for our notion of entitlement. The traditional and still dominant view is that dreadful deeds are committed by those with low self-esteem. This popular viewpoint holds that it is supposedly people with an inner sense of worthlessness who are likely to employ anger, abuse and violence in order to gain a sense of esteem. But thorough reviews of the evidence (Baumeister, Smart & Boden, 1996; Baumeister, 1997) suggest otherwise, namely, that it is those with higher self-esteem who are more prone to violence and abuse. Regarding oneself as superior can 'cause people to be indifferent to the suffering of others' (Baumeister, 1997, p.167). But it is only a subsection of those with high self-esteem who are violence prone. The 'potent recipe' (Baumeister, 1997, p.141) is the discrepancy between a superior self-appraisal and a poor appraisal by others: a situation of threatened egotism. It is particularly those with an inflated sense of superiority who are vulnerable to challenges and threats to their self-esteem. Baumeister also reviewed studies showing that people with inflated self-esteem, who are prone to emotions of shame, evidence greater tendencies towards violence. We note in passing that the issue of shame has also been raised by Scheff (1994) as a link in the chain of violence. While Baumeister's work bolsters this idea of entitlement, it is mainly applicable to individuals. What about groups?

The whole enterprise of Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory was to examine relationships between groups. Tajfel argued that dominant groups who were unchallenged had no need for aggression; their relation to others was one of benevolence. When their dominance was under threat, when the legitimacy of

their superior status was challenged, they were likely to retaliate in the form of increased repression or increased discrimination. The picture is similar to that of threatened egotism. This matches the situation of the apartheid state whose legitimacy was, over time, increasingly called into question and challenged both internally and internationally. They reacted to the challenge with escalating and more varied forms of repression – death squads, political assassinations, detentions and torture, shooting against unarmed crowd demonstrations and increasingly repressive legislation.

But surely this notion of entitlement cannot be applicable to oppressed people? We think it can, but in different forms. Inequalities of power, status and resources must be accorded key significance in relational theories. Actions and dynamics are not the same across the dividing lines of power. In Tajfel's scheme the powerless, once able to perceive the system of oppression as illegitimate, initiate two sets of moves. One is a process of identity-retrieval, the recovery of a positive sense of identity – in our terms, a healthy sense of entitlement. This process assists in constructing a collective consciousness, to overcome divisions among the oppressed. Black consciousness and African nationalism form two examples of this process. Another move is the translation of collective consciousness into collective action, including violence directly against the system of oppression. Entitlement is part of this process; a sense of righteous demands for equality. For Fanon (1963), violence against the system is one of the few forms available; it is the *enactment* of a newly found entitlement.

Tajfel's theory posits yet another category in which entitlement plays a role. Among the oppressed there are groupings that accord some degree of legitimacy to the system; they collaborate with the dominant group instead of challenging it. Inflated to positions of superiority over their fellow-oppressed people, they frequently resort to violence against their own people. Often they are armed and resourced by the dominant group to conduct violence, as was the case with homeland leaders and state-supportive vigilante groups. The result of this different form of entitlement is another form of violence: what we have termed 'lateral' violence. Tajfel specifically used the term 'self-aggrandisement' to label this position. Taxi-bosses and gangster leaders in the townships provide further nuances in the general depiction of the link between entitlement and atrocities. A fuller picture emerges when we examine the idea of the interlocking of multiple identity forms.

#### INTERLOCKING OF MULTIPLE SUBJECTIVITIES

The basic idea is straightforward. We all have multiple aspects of identity. Which aspects become more significant than others, depends on situations. In one situation gender may be more salient, in another religious identity may be more important. When a number of kinds of identity meet together, combine and resonate, the combination or the interrelationship becomes a 'potent mix' that facilitates a

propensity towards violence. The focus here is on ideological aspects of identity. Attention should be given to three separate but interrelated processes:

- ideology,
- construction of identities/subjectivities, and
- construction of the image of the 'other', the potential victim, the 'enemy'.

The term 'ideology' is used here in its critical sense to denote ways in which meaning serves to sustain and reproduce social relations of domination (Eagleton, 1991; Thompson, 1990). Racism, sexism (or patriarchy), colonialism and capitalism all constitute examples. Ideology is not merely any set of ideas, but involves particular discourses, language games, practices and associated emotions that shape forms of domination by making claims regarding 'what exists' or is not, 'what is good' or bad, and 'what is possible' or impossible (Therborn, 1980). Language as the principal medium of ideologies 'does things' – it constructs identities, says who is good and bad, claims what can be changed or not changed. Ideology is an emotionally charged set of discourses that shape how we relate to each other as human beings. The main ideologies that fuelled the apartheid state included racism, Christian Nationalism, capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy and militarism. They combined in certain clusters to manufacture particular 'enemies' worthy of 'elimination'.

Ideologies do two things. They create positive subjectivities through a process of 'interpellation' or addressing the individual subject, akin to the commonplace notion of calling or hailing: 'Hey, you there.' Individual persons, in recognising such an address, become subjects (Althusser, 1971). The process is not necessarily passive. People actively take up or resist particular subject positions or identities. Ideologies also construct negative identities, the 'others' who can then be rejected, marginalised or, if they challenge the dominant ideology, be held to be threats and enemies, justifying the use of violence.

The central argument here is that a potentially lethal 'potent mix' only emanates from an interlocking of combinations of these ideological subjectivities. For example, masculinity is an identity form that suggests a greater proclivity towards violence for men than for women. But only some men were involved in gross violations of human rights. If masculinity is combined with militarism – discourses which promote and justify the use of force and encourage certain 'macho' ideals of masculinity – then in terms of a filter model, the probabilities towards violent action increase. If militarised masculinity in turn resonates with strong racist beliefs and strong support for white Christian Nationalism (Baumeister's [1997] 'true believer', or Bauman's [1989] ideologically obsessed power elite), then further selectivity occurs. The interlocking of combinations of ideological subjectivities constitutes the sense of exaggerated entitlement.

In similar fashion, it is combinations of ideological subjectivities that filter out victims as targets. For example, the ideology of racism may produce the conditions for regarding all black people as inferior and as worthy of exclusion and marginal-

isation. But it does not necessarily select all black people as targets of violence. In South African parlance, there were long-held discourses of 'good' and 'bad' blacks; the latter were those who spoke out against the system, organised against apartheid or, even worse, took up arms – the 'terrorists'. This process of ideological subjectification sets up hierarchies which filter out and restrict both the identities of perpetrators and the 'others', the targets of violence.

But this model only accounts for the top-down situation. If the very term 'ideology' is used in its restricted and critical sense to signify discourses which create domination, then how would it account for oppressed people? There are two main scenarios. On the one hand there are those who, to varying extents, take up and come to believe some combinations of the dominant ideologies, and collude or collaborate with the ruling elite. We discussed this position earlier. On the other hand there are those among the oppressed who develop 'counter-discourses'; the Freedom Charter and black consciousness (Biko, 1978; Gerhardt, 1978; Marx, 1992) are two immediate examples. Such counter-discourses set up possibilities for alternative identities and subjectivities, spur on a positive sense of entitlement, and in particular combinations, select out those who are likely to become combatants (or perpetrators) and shape the identities of targets. In some areas, the oppressed may share dominant ideologies with oppressors. One example of this is patriarchy. That would account, in part, for why perpetrators were overwhelmingly male. (Others would argue that male preponderance in violence is due largely to biological or evolutionary reasons, not ideological. See Ghiglieri, 1999. We will not take up this debate here.) But again, it was not males in general, only some of them. Militarism was also an ideological subjectivity shared to some extent across all sides. Again it is combinations at work; it was militarism, or quasi-militarism (in the case of township SDUs or vigilante groups) in combination with masculinity that sifted out some rather than others.

In pulling this section together, we argue that the underlying processes are similar, but they differ in context, meaning and degree across the central axis of the power divide. Different combinations of subjectivities emanate in different forms and shapes of violent acts. Whatever the merits of the detailed examples, it does not negate our central argument that violence is chiefly relational. Despite our dearest desires to locate the essence in the body or mind of the individual perpetrator of bad deeds, it is rarely to be found there. Rather, violence is to be located 'in the way we relate' to each other (Baumeister, 1997, p.375).

## TWO OTHER FACTORS

We haven't quite exhausted this relational model of the roots of violence. In mulling over the large literature and our present case studies, it became clear that some perpetrators do not profess strong ideological grounds. Many do not claim that they were driven by grand notions of defending the realm or fighting for

liberation. They express far more immediate, everyday and local concerns. The general sense is one of being ‘caught up in the situation’. We are back to the ‘banality of evil’ thesis. We agree to some extent. We have also expressly argued that there are many cogs in the wheel that turn the cycle of violence. But two other factors need to be brought out to make sense of the view that perpetrators are fuelled by being caught up in the situation. We refer first to the role of special organisations and secrecy, and second, to time-related and conversation-like steps such as sequencing, escalation and spirals.

#### SPECIAL ORGANISATIONS AND SECRECY

We make three claims here. One is that atrocities thrive in a climate of secrecy and silencing. The second is that perpetrators are not just anyone, but tend to be those actively involved in special organisations of various types. The third is that the dynamics of special organisations assist in bolstering a climate of secrecy. These are the more immediate and local factors in accounting for perpetrators’ actions. There is one notable exception to the claim of the significant role of special organisations; the case of so-called ‘spontaneous’ violence. We will deal with that separately.

The landscape of South African state history is littered with acronyms of special organisations of a semi-secretive nature designed to do repressive work. The military and police are habitually semi-closed establishments, but within them, given the specialised divisions of labour of modern bureaucracy, some sections are even more clandestine: BOSS, the State Security Council (SSC), the National Security Management System (NSMS), Joint Management Centres (JMC) and the Security Branch. Inside each conventional arm of the security forces there were more secretive units: the military had Special Forces, the CCB and Project Coast, the chemical and biological warfare unit (Burger & Gould, 2002); Military Intelligence had the DCC; the police had special task teams such as Koevoet; the Security Branch had so-called Terrorist Investigation Units, of which one was known as Section C10, now better known as Vlakplaas. Reporting on the Northern Transvaal Security Branch the *TRC Report*, Volume 6, claims that most violations emanated from a covert group under command of Lieutenant Jacques Hechter (p.235).

As other studies have shown, these specialised groups increasingly become worlds of their own, split off from wider aspects of common morality. They live by their own rules, progressively becoming involved in criminal activities. They produce their own subculture and language forms (Haritos-Fatouros, 2003; Theweleit, 1989), including euphemisms for violent deeds. The TRC often enough heard of expressions such as ‘business is good’, ‘go for a drive’, ‘neutralised’ and ‘removed’. Eugene de Kock, in TRC testimony, commented laconically that the phrase ‘take them out’ did not mean that you had to take them out and entertain them. Some studies have mentioned quite formalised training programmes, including violent and degrading initiation rituals known as ‘hazing’, as well as formal propaganda

(Haritos-Fatouros, 2003). Other studies found little formal training, but mainly a process of learning on the job; learning directly from other operatives (Huggins et al., 2002). Many studies have referred to the notion of 'doubling' (Lifton, 1986), of operatives living in two mutually exclusive worlds, one at home as pretty normal family members, the other the sealed off and secretly coded world of violence. Martha Huggins and her associates demonstrated this splitting of worlds quite clearly in their work on Brazilian torturers (2002). The insular and secret worlds of the specialised organisations resulted in a sense of moral disengagement.

Special organisations of a sequestered form are breeding grounds for particular forms of hegemonic masculinity. Surprisingly, masculinity is often ignored as a key factor in the chain of violence, as noted by Foster (1997b, p.23).

The most astonishing aspect of ploughing through masses of literature on atrocities of all kinds is to find the sheer neglect of the fact that they are almost exclusively committed by men.

Regarding the South African case, a notable exception is the book by Jacklyn Cock (1991). She notes the link between militarism and masculinity, describes the training of white male conscripts, and is one of the few who deal with the role of women. She presents the position of white women in the SADF, women in support organisations and as ideological supports, the case of two women spies (Olivia Forsyth and Joy Harnden) and women in MK, few of whom were involved in direct combat. Cock noted that 'notions of manliness do seem to be an important theme for male MK soldiers' (p.169) and further concluded that 'overall both armies drew on gender stereotypes' (p.169). Campbell (1992) and Marks (2001) also touched on the pertinent issue of gender dynamics in violence.

In a rare study of masculinity in special organisations, the German scholar Klaus Theweleit (1987, 1989) showed that males in the *Freikorps* became men of steel whose primary aim was to pursue and subdue any form of threat to their masculinity. The *Freikorps* was a volunteer army which was used in the pre-Nazi period to suppress working-class insurrection and communist threat. Many *Freikorps* men went on to become key figures in the Nazi movement. The image of the feminine was a key source of their dread of dissolution, of being engulfed, swallowed, annihilated. The threat of the feminine was linked to the threat of communism and a hatred of the working classes. Communism was seen as breaking down old barriers, as promoting a promiscuous mingling. Language portrayed the 'Reds' as 'flood', as 'tide', a threat that comes in 'waves'. Resort to extreme forms of masculinity, with complete self-control, was the solution; brutality and violence the outcome. As Ehrenreich writes in her foreword to this work, masculinity in this form is not driven by something else; rather, it 'sets forth the jarring – and ultimately horrifying – proposition that the fascist is doing what he wants to do' (1987, p.xi).

Two recent studies of Brazilian (Huggins et al., 2002) and Greek violence workers (Haritos-Fatouros, 2003) both conclude that special organisations, in and of them-

selves, play a key role in the manufacture of violence. Both emphasise that the internal dynamics of rituals, competitiveness, subcultures, hierarchies, secrecy and work routines are more significant triggers of violence than the distal political and ideological factors. Both studies also underscore the importance of masculinity in special organisations. The Brazilian study found three forms of masculinity. The first type they labelled as 'personalistic', with an emphasis on personal attributes of physical toughness, control and pride in their professional reputation, including fighting skills. They were deeply absorbed in their work and the 'excitement' of the job was a central element. Their stories made frequent use of the personal pronoun, as in 'I alone made this happen' and 'I am my own boss', stressing that they did not delegate tasks. They placed a premium on demanding respect, and would use force to obtain it. They argued that those who failed to accord respect, uppity victims, brought violence on themselves. The second type was labelled 'bureaucratising' masculinity. Here discourse was framed in bureaucratic organisational terms, linked to a broader security system and the state. They portrayed themselves as rational, dispassionate and professional functionaries. Personal identity was pushed backstage, with corresponding emphasis on discipline, teamwork, loyalty to the police organisation and mission: to maintain law and order. If torture was required, it was to be properly regulated (not to excess), and instrumentally motivated as a way to gather more evidence. This foregrounding of professional rationality and operational instrumentalism served to erase from visibility both their own violence and the suffering of victims. The third type was labelled as 'blended' masculinity, showing a mixture of both tendencies. Police of this sort hired themselves out for private work such as dealing with debt defaulters. On duty, they operated in institutional terms: respect and entitlement were achieved through structural and organisational means. Off duty, as private vigilantes, they acted via personalistic masculinity: with righteous fury if not accorded respect.

These research findings are useful in reminding us that masculinity is not one thing. It is an ideal type and manifests in various forms and combinations. In the Brazilian research, no one form of masculinity was linked to greater violence. There are again 'different routes' to violence outcomes. In local research Luyt and Foster (2001) have attempted to tease out the ingredients of hegemonic masculinity – a particular version of masculinity 'which holds sway, bestowing power and privilege on men who espouse it and claim it as their own' (Morrell, 1998, p.608). Luyt and Foster identified a cluster of three main factors as constituting hegemonic masculinity:

- Toughness – in which males must present as physically, emotionally and psychologically hardy, show 'solidity' of character and distance themselves from 'weak' femininity.
- Success – characterised as commanding respect, taking leadership roles and achieving job success.
- Control – showing mastery over their own lives, as well as over the lives of other people, specifically women.

In a study in Cape Town, they showed that hegemonic masculinity was more prevalent among boys in areas in which gang culture (including violent crimes) was dominant. Subsequently Luyt (2002) went on to show direct links between hegemonic masculinity and tendencies towards violence.

One further small point: the research by Huggins et al. (2002) hinted at the notion of 'excitement' as one feature of militarist masculinity. It is not often raised and might well be significant. In reviewing some of the literature, Rowe (2000) noted that mention of excitement and a puffed-up sense of grandeur is common fare. There is the excitement of 'having a mission, a common aim, a tight-knit group, united against an enemy' (Rowe, 2000, pp.376–377). There is the thrill of killing. There is the excitement of pride in the unit. There is a certain kind of thrill in secrecy. There is the thrill of the chase, of the hunt for despised quarry. There is also the thrill of 'getting something right' (p.379), of winning the approval of others, including of those in power over you. Here is more fuel to add to our notion of entitlement, which would seem to fit quite readily the lives of operatives from that special organisation called Vlakplaas as described by Jacques Pauw (1991, 1997).

What about the place of special organisations on the other side of the power divide, among the oppressed? Here again, we claim that organisations, if perhaps more loose in form and structure, nevertheless played a significant role in recruiting and then enabling those who would eventually partake in violence. It is clear enough in the case of the armed wings of the ANC and PAC in exile that perforce had to operate underground and in secrecy. Militarism, masculinity and tight internal security were the trademark characteristics; this is also true for the even more secretive underground cells of MK and APLA operating inside the country. But organisations do not only promote and accelerate violence; they also serve to channel it. Until the Kabwe conference in 1985, the ANC was governed by a policy of no 'soft targets', or human casualties. The primary aim was to hit strategic installations, not people (Davis, 1987). Indeed, relatively few deaths occurred directly as a result of MK actions. Even after the distinction between hard and soft targets was dropped, official policy (if not actual events) dictated that 'soft' targets should be limited to police and military personnel.

Inside South Africa, those who were responsible for violence were mainly attached to, or regarded themselves as supporters of, particular organisations, far too numerous to cover. From the side of the Afrikaner right wing there was a range of organisations: the *Blanke Bevrydingsbeweging* (BBB), the *Afrikaner Vryheidstigting* (Avstig), AWB, *Boereweerstandsbeweging* (BWB) and paramilitary units such the *Ystergarde*, the *Wit Wolwe* and the *Wenkommando*. In black areas there were semi-paramilitary or vigilante groupings such as *Mbokodo*,<sup>1</sup> the *Witdoeke*, the *Amadoda*,<sup>2</sup> the A-team, the Three Million gang,<sup>3</sup> the *Inkatha*<sup>4</sup> (not the same as the political party), the *Amabutho*,<sup>5</sup> the Black Cats,<sup>6</sup> the Toaster gang<sup>7</sup> and the Green Berets<sup>8</sup> (Cobbett & Cohen, 1988; Coleman, 1998; Haysom, 1986). Often the war zone was between these vigilante groups and young black activists, the 'comrades', also

channelled through numerous student, youth, civic and trade-union organisations, and often divided into smaller street and area committees (see Marks, 2001). We have previously mentioned the place of SDUs and SPUs in cycles of defence and attack. The point is that organisations served as pivotal conduits, channels and sources in the relational struggle. Often these organisational clashes were very localised (Cole, 1987). Organisations are also vehicles for secrecy and for parading militant forms of masculinity. Here is a young black township activist, who saw himself as a soldier:

I believe in fighting and fighting till we are free. Even if I die I feel it will be worthwhile... I get the strength to believe this and keep going from being with many comrades who feel the same way. (Cited in Straker, 1992, p.42)

#### SEQUENCES, SPIRALS AND DIALOGICAL PATTERNS

Another reason why people may not necessarily cite 'big causes' in their accounts is that events frequently unfold and develop in the form of incremental steps, sequences, cycles and spirals. They draw people in; alternatively people take up positions in the developing sequences. Du Preez (1994), in explaining genocide, sets out a process he calls 'ideological acceleration'. People in political movements take a series of steps that increasingly commit them to the ideological arguments and distance them from outsiders. The sequence 'consists of acts of increasing violent contempt for outsiders. It may start with words and uniforms and end in killing' (1994, p.105). Ideological acceleration is a moral process, splitting and separating the good (us) from the bad (them). This resonates with Lerner's (1980) 'just world' hypothesis in which people are capable of casting moral aspersions on a scapegoated category (them), claiming that they deserve their fate.

The time-related steps and sequences operate at both macro (historical) and micro level of immediate situations. Political violence often has deep, centuries-long, historical roots. On the other hand, the Milgram experiments draw our attention to processes of micro-level sequencing; the sucking-in power of the immediate situation. The first little steps of compliance to situational demands are easy. Subsequent steps become morally more problematic, but by then it is difficult to withdraw. Sequential steps in themselves constitute a significant part of the 'binding in' processes. As Bauman (1989, p.158) nicely puts it, the 'imperceptible passages between the steps' lure the actor into a paradoxical trap: 'the actor becomes a slave of his own past actions'.

Nor is the process simply linear. While step-like continuity is important, the passage of time also involves discontinuities. Rather, it is the contrapuntal assemblage and juxtapositions of events in the form of cycles and spirals of connections that spur on the interrelated elements. Mass violence, while long in historical gestation, often appears to 'burst' into effect in particular 'eruptions'. It is the meeting together of analytically disparate timeline events that constellates into violence. Spirals and 'dialogues' point to intergroup strategic moves which may in cyclical forms produce escalations in the patterning of violence; cycles of revenge and retribution.

The concepts of 'dialogue' and 'violence' appear at first sight to be far removed from each other. Dialogue is used here to draw attention to the intergroup, *relational* character of violence, but also to de-emphasise the naturalistic, mechanical and inevitable connotations that accompany concepts such as 'cycles' of violence. Foster & Skinner (1990) used the notion of a 'dialogue of violence' to describe the detentions of the 1980s. Dialogical relations do not have predictable outcomes. Actors may make other moves. There are unintended consequences. Political detention was a 'reply' to widespread protests, an attempt to destroy political organisations. It produced, however, unintended consequences, another 'reply' in the form of further protests and mobilisation of popular resistance. The state lost legitimacy. To avoid further loss of legitimacy, the state again 'replied' with other measures: restriction orders. These are strategic moves in dialogical relations; they are open-ended, but not entirely free-floating. Actions and reactions are anchored and shaped to various degrees by other actors as well as onlookers (audiences) to the conversation-like exchanges (Shotter, 1993). As Du Preez (1994) usefully puts it, 'the appropriate picture is not mechanical, it is strategic, argumentative or even conversational' (p.108).

There is one special case of dialogical spiralling that warrants mention: the notion of conspiracy mentality (Billig, 1978; Graumann & Moscovici, 1987; Ruthven, 1978). When conspiracies abound, the probabilities of violence escalate sharply. Conspiracy mentality occurs when an already threatened group attributes blame for the woes of that society onto a particular small grouping – usually outsiders or a scapegoated minority. These 'others' are viewed as acting secretly and conspiratorially to undermine and overthrow the existing social order. Conspiracy thinking provides the rationale for persecution of these 'others'. Conspiracies are argued to underlie many atrocities such as the burning of witches, torture, the Holocaust, fascist reasoning and Stalin's purges in the Soviet Union (Billig, 1978; Ruthven, 1978).

Conspiracy mentality works by dividing people sharply into two antagonistic classes: the good, law-abiding and local, and the 'other', bad, deceitful and alien. It attributes blame to the active work of this minority of alien 'others'; that is, it sees *intention* as the moving force of all conspiracy – even if the actors themselves are not aware of it. It sees deceit and masks and disguises; the moving hand is seen as hidden, rendering the threat all the more frightening. Particular language forms are used to incite good citizens to mobilise against the conspiracy. The language of conspiracy ideology is particularly virulent. In Germany, the language of leading Nazis was peppered with imagery of Jews as weeds, germs, vermin or a dangerous virus. The metaphors of gardening, hygiene and surgery indicate the murderous escalation; since neither 'weeds' nor 'cancerous growths' can be rehabilitated or changed in form, they could justifiably be 'eliminated' (Bauman, 1989). In South Africa, the conspiracy mentality pointed to the hidden hand of communism that was behind black resistance. Speeches by senior apartheid government officials

fanned the propaganda. By the 1980s over 90 per cent of white NP supporters believed in the communist threat, and that the 'real leaders' of black revolt were communists from outside the country (Foster, 1991, p.381). Among the oppressed, a kind of conspiracy mentality was evidenced in witchcraft-related incidents in the rural areas and the insidious pointing out of *impimpis* in the townships. Both led to murderous results. Conspiracies sharpen the escalation of violence.

We should point out that violence may also be due to a lack of dialogical relations. South Africa, after all, was hardly characterised by friendly conversations between oppressor and oppressed. On the contrary, the apartheid state refused to enter into dialogue with the genuine political opposition. All alternative political movements were banned and outlawed. Leaders were locked away and silenced. Writings were censored, banned and removed. The state, with increasing powers of violence, became monological. In the absence of real conversation, violence and counter-violence became the 'voice' of dialogue. Analysis of dialogical sequencing, including the absence of dialogue, constitutes an important theoretical resource for understanding the processes involved in political violence and its cessation.

We have provided, we hope, a fairly full picture of the ingredients of a 'relational' approach to understanding the 'theatre' of violence. It is a hybrid account, drawing on a range of wider academic understandings, but providing different emphases and nuances in order to grasp and encompass the multi-directional object of inquiry. It paints a more active (and therefore accountable) picture of 'those responsible', but at the same time recognises that violence is sometimes the only means of expression when possibilities of political dialogue are one-sidedly closed down by the powerful. In summary, a relational approach proposes four main sets of factors:

- Ideological processes that produce and sustain relations of domination, as well as the counter-discourses emerging in reaction.
- Identities (or subjectivities) of entitlement, emanating from constellations of ideological and counter-ideological subject positionings.
- Special organisations and secrecy, which serve to localise and enable conditions of possibility for violence.
- Sequencing, spirals and dialogical relations that provide analytical tools for grasping the dynamics of relations.

Taken together, we trust that these points encompass most of the very useful contributions from wider academic understandings and glue them together in a somewhat new and different way. However, there still appears to be one modality of violence that apparently slips out of the grasp of this approach. We hope it is not quite out of reach, but it may require further nuances. This is the 'special' case of what is sometimes called 'spontaneous' violence.

## AN APPARENT SPECIAL CASE: 'SPONTANEOUS' VIOLENCE

On the surface, it would seem that crowd or 'mob' or 'spontaneous' violence does not really fit the relational model. It seems that, because it is spontaneous, neither ideological factors nor the role of particular organisations are applicable. Nevertheless, as we hope to show, crowd violence is primarily relational in form; it does involve ideological notions and organisational aspects do indeed become significant. The theorising on spontaneous violence has shifted.

For most of the twentieth century, explanations of crowd violence drew heavily on the French theorist Le Bon (1896). He located the tendency for violence on the characteristics of the crowd itself, of which there were several: 'impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, absence of judgement and of the critical spirit, the exaggeration of the sentiments' (p.35). Here, we note, is the antithesis of the banality thesis. The crowd, a sort of collective mind, transforms people from ordinary and normal to abnormal, which 'makes them feel, think and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them... would act were he in a state of isolation' (Le Bon, 1896, p.27). The crowd situation transforms people into monsters, a common public representation of perpetrators, as we saw in Chapter 2. 'Isolated he may be a cultivated individual: in a crowd he is a barbarian – that is, a creature acting by instincts' (Le Bon, 1896, p.32).

More recent and modern theorising about crowd violence coined it in different language, but essentially repeated most of Le Bon's themes. Crowd violence, it was argued, was explained by a psychological state known as 'deindividuation' typified by processes of *lowered* private self-awareness, *reduced* self-regulation, *lack* of planning (impulsivity) and responsiveness to emotional cues (exaggeration of the sentiments). Violence is apparently due to a loss, a lack, a reduction and a regression to more primitive forms. There is, however, a paradox at the heart of the crowd. If crowd action is seemingly so irrational, unrestrained and anarchic, then how is it that the patterning of real crowd action is consistently directed? In the South African case, as elsewhere, crowd violence was repeatedly directed only at particular targets: people believed to be sell-outs or in collaboration with the security forces, as well as targets that were symbolic of apartheid and state oppression – government buildings, beer halls, police vehicles, local council offices (Foster & Durrheim, 1998).

Recent theorising, drawing on social identity theory (Reicher, 1987, 1996), has shifted thinking sharply away from the Lebonian legacy. Crowd action is above all *relational* in form. First, it involves at least two groups. It is an intergroup phenomenon. Le Bon managed to disappear the second group. It involves people who are against the outgroup, or those associated or colluding with the outgroup. Second, it deeply involves ideological issues. People are protesting against and challenging dominant ideologies; that is why they are gathered there in the first place. Third, people in a crowd do not act due to a loss of identity, but because their *social*

*identities* (for example, as black, as oppressed, as marginalised) become more salient. Relational and ideological identities come to be foregrounded. We (as protesters) are against you (the state police). Or, we (as black township residents) are against you (other black township residents) because you are colluding with the police. Even in rural witchcraft-related crowd violence, ideological issues were often present. 'Witches' were simultaneously regarded by crowd members as political sell-outs, aligned to the apartheid machinery. Fourth, crowd action is spontaneous because, in effect, members of the crowd share the same social identity, in part defined in relation to the outgroup. This shared social identity regulates the action of crowd members, directing actions towards or against members or symbols of the outgroup. Crowd behaviours, while spontaneous, are far more patterned, structured and regulated than is generally recognised.

Fifth, somewhat akin to the 'magnitude gap' of perspectives, Reicher (1987) found sharp differences between the perspectives of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Outside observers frequently paint a negative picture of the crowd. Press accounts invariably depict the action as due to a 'rampaging', irrational and senseless 'mob' – a mirror of the picture originally painted by Le Bon in the late nineteenth century. In contrast, descriptions of 'insiders' emphasised three main theses: the meaningfulness of crowd action, a sense of solidarity and unity, and a positive emotional tone of friendship and elation.

Sixth, there is the question of organisational dynamics. Clearly the crowd is the antithesis of the formal organisation with its specified roles, hierarchies, rules and segmented allocation of tasks. Secrecy is not an element; crowd action is frequently out in the public gaze. Yet organisational membership does remain a pertinent dynamic in crowds. One of the present authors gave testimony in over 20 legal trials involving crowd violence (Foster, 1990). One of the key characteristics that emerged in evidence was that the majority of crowd actors were also members of organisations, sometimes taking leading roles in youth, civic or student bodies that were anti-apartheid in sentiment. This provides a 'spontaneous' crowd with a shared sense of social identity. Crowds are, in part, self-selected through their commonly held prior organisational alignments or support. Inside the crowd, participants are not anonymous to each other. They often know or are acquainted with each other, through similar organisational involvement. There was another dominant element to crowd violence, at least in the South African case: masculinity and patriarchy. There is abundant evidence that the majority of crowd violence involved mainly males. In the few cases where women were involved, they were mainly involved in support roles: ululating, singing, chanting.

One minor aside: research by Monique Marks (2001) involving interviews with young township activists suggests that crowd violence in black urban areas changed in character from the mid-1980s into the early 1990s; 'acts of collective violence became increasingly less directed and coherent' (p.87). This was largely due to a decline in leadership of youth organisations. Wave after wave of youth

leaders were subjected to direct state repression, detained, harassed and removed; replacements into the 1990s were less experienced and more naïve, while on-the-ground circumstances worsened. As with the SDUs, the links between top ANC structures and township grassroots were rather haphazard. There were changes in tactics. The ANC, involved in negotiations, now frowned on ‘ungovernability’. Marks argues that, in certain cases, quite well-planned protest actions of organisations were exploited and ‘hijacked’ by non-organised, unemployed and ‘often criminal youth...for personal and material gain’ (p.10). As with the SDUs and SPU’s (see Chapter 8), they became increasingly characterised by cycles of revenge and reprisals. Firearms became more readily available. Nevertheless, Marks argues that it was not simply a case of ‘mob-rule’; rather, these actions evidenced ‘distinct rationality understood by its participants’ (2001, p.87).

Thus, while there are some differences in understanding spontaneous violence, most of the ingredients are in line with the relational model set out earlier. Principally, seen through this new set of lenses and in contrast to Le Bon’s depiction, crowd violence is *relational* in form. It involves the actions of one group (or category) in relation to another, often ideologically despised outgroup. It is patterned behaviour. Despite its spontaneity, crowd violence involves particular subjectivities, not just anybody. Organisational alignment is pertinent in this matter. It involves theoretically a more active model of ‘those responsible’ than the erstwhile dominant models would hold, and is thus more in line with our general relational model. In really understanding violent actions, even while we may not condone them, we have to grasp that it is due to the way active people relate to each other. Along with Theweleit (1987) and Ehrenreich (1987) we come to the jarring conclusion that people do these things, in the main, because they want to do them. Of course, as with all human affairs, accidents do happen, things go wrong.

## A NOTE ON DENIAL

As Stanley Cohen (2001) in his book on the topic sadly remarks, denial ‘is the normal state of affairs’ and that is why ‘so much effort has to be devoted to breaking out of this frame’ (p.249). What we have here is two sets of things:

- sets of events that may (or may not) have taken place, and
- language, stories, tales, versions, descriptions and representations that we tell to ourselves or to others, or fail to tell, even to ourselves, about these events.

The correspondence or the matching up of these two sets of things should be simple and straightforward. However, in the matter of human affairs, this is rarely the case. Particularly in relation to grim deeds such as mass violations of human rights, the more habitual response is to take up a range of stances beyond the correspondence position which may include:

- outright denial – it didn't happen at all;
- discrediting the source of information – the reports or reporters are biased or were manipulated;
- reframing the event – something did happen, but it wasn't like that or it was an accident; and
- justification – yes, it did happen, but it was morally defensible, we were at war. (Cohen, 2001)

Cohen suggests there are three positions regarding the content of denial:

- Literal or factual denial claims that the event did not happen; it is a denial of the facts.
- Interpretative denial involves providing different interpretations of the event; it is not what it looks like.
- Implicatory denial involves minimising or shifting the implications of the event; a case of rationalisation.

The factual account of the event is not the issue; it is rather what is done with this knowledge. The various forms of denial include cognitive (not knowing), emotional (not feeling, no empathy or sympathy), moral (not recognising responsibility or wrongdoing) and active (taking or not taking steps). In the arena of public suffering, action or the lack of it is the most significant issue at stake.

In the full 'theatre of violence' involving victims, perpetrators and the whole cast of facilitators, onlookers, reporters and bystanders, who is most likely to deny? Those with the greatest interest in keeping events under wraps, in particular perpetrators and their allies, including facilitators, senior officials, governments and bystander states. The rest of us, sadly, all too readily look on but don't really see or hear, push things away, are far too busy with everyday things. Most of us are complicit in denial; denial is the normal state of affairs. Victims are the ones with the least stake in denial, yet even there it can occur. During trauma there is often a kind of disbelief – this can't be happening to me. Victims are also capable of interpretative shifts – it wasn't really rape. If Freud is correct, victims may repress the unbearable event, obliterate knowledge of its very existence. In his reappraisal of Freud, Billig (1999) would say that the event is disappeared because we cannot utter it in language. Through the language of disavowal, being unable to say, we push events out of existence (Bar-On, 1999). We may know and not quite know in the same breath. In more banal ways, victims may know yet not be prepared to tell for fears of reprisal or of threats to their reputation. Thus potentially all of us involved in the theatre of violence may have a stake in denial, avoidance, disavowal and distancing from the unbearable events. The stakes may differ across the various sides. But since there are altogether too many grounds and too many readily available strategies for denial, it becomes a phenomenon that is difficult to dislodge.

## PERPETRATORS AND DENIALS

As noted earlier, the ones with the greatest stake in all forms of denial are ‘those responsible’. Nor is it only those responsible for political violations; offenders of all sorts and stripes use these strategies. It will be useful to separate out particular processes as part of the integral stage of violations, and strategies in accounts given after the events. Processes of denial are strangely part and parcel of the acts of violation, particularly in the case of special organisations. The closed-off worlds of security establishments, with their codes of secrecy, segmenting tasks and compartmentalising of activities, honour systems, peer pressure, avoidance of record-keeping and normalisation of work routines, all assist the process of pushing away the evilness even while it is happening. Through the process of ‘doubling’, perpetrators disassociate the grim deeds from their real selves, akin to the notion of knowing but not really knowing, sealing off from self-knowledge. Through the language codes of euphemism, slang, minimising, metaphor and even humour, they transform the events into something else. Lying becomes part of the sub-culture. Codes of professionalism allow for justifications. Victims are blamed for bringing things onto themselves. The very dynamics that enable possibilities of violence also facilitate the culture of denial. The experience of excitement as part of security-related work serves to minimise the significance of the deed itself, turning it into ‘often a very small thing’ (Baumeister, 1997, p.18), and reducing the perceived wrongfulness of the action. This is the ‘magnitude gap’ – the discrepant perspectives of perpetrators and victims. Even before they have left the arena of violence, they have, in experience, transformed the events, altered the meanings and cloaked things into various forms of disguises and denials. (From another perspective, it may be argued that all of the above are defences against the anxiety and other emotions that accompany the perpetration of such acts, and that without these defences the individuals and institutions might not be able to function.)

‘Those responsible’ give accounts after the event. Now accounts are not truth statements, they are social encounters. Accounts will produce different versions tailored to suit the particular ‘performance’ of storytelling, whether to a priest, a spouse, a truth commission or a legal trial. Consequences will differ in each case. People put forward stories that portray themselves in a morally reasonable light. Given what we have seen, that events are already transformed during the acts, perhaps we should not even expect full disclosure (Payne, 2002). Perhaps truth and falsity are the wrong measures against which to evaluate stories. Rather, there are good stories – reasonable, acceptable to the audience, well formed – and bad stories – those that do not fit the conventions of storytelling.

What kind of accounts of their actions do perpetrators give? Knowledge is one thing, but acknowledgment is another. A confession of full acknowledgement involves two steps: (i) I accept that the act was wrong, and (ii) I accept responsibility for the act. Using these two axes in their study of accounts of Brazilian perpetrators, Huggins et al. (2002) found four categories of stories:

- *Acknowledgement* or confession – accepting the act as wrong and accepting responsibility.
- *Excuses* – accepting the act as wrong, but not accepting responsibility; blaming others.
- *Justifications* – accepting responsibility for the act, but not regarding it as wrong; citing just causes, duty.
- *Outright denial* – accepting neither wrongfulness nor responsibility.

Of the 23 participants in the Huggins et al. study, only one gave a confession or full acknowledgement, and even then it was qualified – arguing that his kind of violence was preferable to those of his colleagues. Accounts were distributed fairly evenly across the other three categories: excuses, denials and justifications. Numerically the most frequent account was that of justification, mainly citing their professional duty as cause.

If these were the dominant categories, the Brazilian perpetrators also showed a more dynamic system of moral reckoning that shaped acts into three forms. Some acts of torture and killing were *acceptable*, when done by those who were professionally trained and used psychological cunning to best their foes, and if controlled and done in terms of a just cause. Some acts were not acceptable, but *understandable*, if seen as exploited by superiors ('bad orders'), brutalising work and social conditions, or due to youthful exuberance or ignorance. *Unacceptable* acts for these perpetrators were those described as sadistic, irrational or cruel, out of control due to character disorders or drug inducement, or driven by hedonistic satisfaction or economic goals. Even violence workers, it seems, have hierarchies of moral reasoning about dreadful deeds.

### THE TRC AND DENIALS

The considerable volume of documents assembled by the TRC also yielded various positions of deflections and moral reasoning. In this instance, statements are not only from direct perpetrators (amnesty hearings), but also from all political parties, special hearings into particular sectors (religion, media, conscripts, health) and personal documents made available to the TRC. (See the *TRC Report*, Vol. 5, Chapter 7; also Foster, 2000a,b.) Across all sides of the struggle, four kinds of grounds were given for acts that were held to be gross violations of human rights.

### WE WERE AT WAR

Many acts on both sides were calculated acts of violence. These rational actions (and some excesses) were justified by statements that 'we were at war'. General Andrew Masondo, who was political commissioner of the ANC between 1977 and 1985, at a closed hearing of the TRC dealing with atrocities in the ANC Quattro<sup>9</sup> camp, said: 'There might be times I will use third degree in spite of the fact that it

was not policy...if they were enemy agents, we executed them, and I wouldn't make an apology. We were at war.'

On the other side, General Constand Viljoen, former chief of the SADF, put it in this way, justifying aberrations: 'It was a new kind of war. This war, if it could be called a war, is so unique that the traditional "just war" theory cannot be easily applied.'

#### DENIAL: THE GAP BETWEEN AUTHORITIES AND FOLLOWERS

From all sides there were statements denying giving orders or denial from top leadership that they knew what was happening, even while supporters or foot soldiers consistently claimed they were acting under orders. Former president F.W. de Klerk said in an NP submission: '...but things happened that were never authorised, not intended, of which we were not aware... I have never condoned gross violations of human rights.'

The president of the IFP, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, said in a TRC submission: 'On no occasion has the IFP leadership ever made any decision to use violence for political purposes.' An MK leader testified as follows at an amnesty hearing: 'There were long and insecure lines of communication, command and control...this could and did result in deaths.'

#### WHAT WENT WRONG? 'WE MADE MISTAKES'

All parties in the struggle admitted that there were errors, mistakes and unintended consequences. This is a case of accepting wrong, but not accepting responsibility. For instance, TRC witness George Ndlozi, reporting on the activities of SDUs, said things 'went wrong' because they had to depend on criminals, and people took advantage of the situation.

Former head of National Intelligence, Niel Barnard, said at the TRC hearing on the State Security Council: 'It is true that instructions and mandates were sometimes vague and were communicated poorly.' General Masondo of the ANC admitted that they 'could have made mistakes' as a result of misinformation, or when they had to rely on young, inexperienced people in the Quattro camp. F.W. de Klerk, answering questions on widespread torture during the 1980s, said: 'I'm not saying we were perfect...I'm not saying we didn't make mistakes.' Former MK leader Ronnie Kasrils said in a TRC public debate on the idea of 'just war': 'I'm not saying that there weren't certain aberrations, certain departures.' In a similar vein the UDF leadership stated that the 'activities of the UDF and its allies, while making invaluable contributions to the democratisation of South African society, had many regrettable consequences.' The PAC also admitted to mistakes in that 'internally based operatives often made errors that APLA had earlier avoided'. They also conceded the mistaken killing of Amy Biehl: 'They wrongly targeted and killed Amy Biehl. We express our regret and condolences.'

**LACK OF DISCIPLINE AND RESTRAINT; 'US AND THEM'**

Again, all parties conceded a certain lack of restraint over their supporters. Given that their supporters were part of 'us' rather than 'them', as the UDF said 'as part of our family', the grounds for excesses were that you do not discipline your own too fiercely. Indeed, authorities on various sides were covertly proud of 'their own', as in a UDF statement: 'The young lions were doing a wonderful piece of work.' On the other side, security forces were being presented with awards. Vlakplaas operative Eugene de Kock received a number of medals for his deeds.

We have seen that denial, deflection and evasion of responsibility is, as Cohen (2001) reflected, the standard position adopted by those responsible for violence. There is seldom a full acknowledgement of 'wrong' or of accountability. The TRC couldn't require this; full disclosure for the TRC was a reporting of 'facts'. Given the magnitude gap of perspectives between victims and those responsible, it is not clear that we ever will get sufficient acknowledgement. Some put it differently: Payne (2002), for example, has asked why it is that we want perpetrators to confess. She answers in terms of the long history of the confessional, a particular version of moral philosophy in which we required sinners to disclose, to show remorse and to apologise. In earlier times we tortured people to extract these confessions. Now perhaps we should ask if there are not different ways to deal with these relational positions.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This chapter has provided a tour of wider academic understandings of large-scale political violence. Partially critical of the banality and situationist theses regarding generative factors, particularly when applied to contexts of multi-sided violence, we then proposed a relational model in terms of fourfold factors as a response to some earlier weaknesses. Recognising the disparity between different perspectives of a range of actions in the theatre of violence, particularly that between perpetrator and victim positions, we presented an account which treated those responsible in a more active manner than erstwhile. We outlined and applied this model, operating around the pivotal point of power configurations, incorporating further academic contributions as well as particular emphases and sub-themes along the way. Questions were raised about the apparent exceptional case, that of spontaneous violence, which while showing differing nuances, was arguably not outside the orbit of the proposed relational model. Finally, we outlined some features of the ubiquitous phenomenon of denial, common enough, but with varying emphases, on all sides of the struggle.

Bearing in mind our general multi-perspectival approach, at this stage we have given three different perspectives:

- an archival, forensic or 'factual' account represented by the TRC;

- a view of public or social representations of violence-makers in South Africa viewed through a lens of different time periods.
- The third gaze went wider and in a different voice, considered academic accounts from a wide range of contexts but retained a focus on the problems of the local stage.

We are now poised for a fourth perspective, stories from protagonists in the struggle. But more immediately we air some methodological and moral concerns.

### Notes

- 1 *Mbokodo* is a Xhosa word meaning 'the grinding stone'. The more common Xhosa spelling is *mbokotho*. The *Mbokodo* operated mainly in the former KwaNdebele.
- 2 *Amadoda* is Xhosa for 'men'. This group and the *Witdoeke* operated in the Western Cape.
- 3 The A-team, also called the *Phakathis*, and the Three Million gang operated in the Free State.
- 4 *Inkatha* is a Zulu name for the grass coil used by Zulu women for carrying loads on their heads, the many strands of which provide its strength and cohesion.
- 5 *Amabutho* refers to the Zulu regiments.
- 6 They were operative in Mpumalanga.
- 7 The Toaster gang operated in Gauteng.
- 8 This group was formed in the 1970s to suppress opposition to the late Lennox Sebe's former Ciskei government.
- 9 Quattro was an ANC 'rehabilitation' camp in Angola, where – in Mbeki's words – 'some excesses occurred' at the hands of ANC cadres (Retrieved November 19, 2003 from <http://www.sabctruth.co.za/slicesright.htm>).

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## 4 MORALS AND METHODS

Those with a suspicious bent should be concerned; it is not usual to deal with questions of 'morality' and of 'methodology' in one piece. It is standard procedure for the human and social sciences, or rather for those of a positivistic persuasion, to treat them as two entirely separate realms. Under the positivist sway, researchers should only be concerned with scientific method, with proper procedures, with an appropriately objective stance, towards the aim of discovering the 'facts'; the issue of 'what is' the truth. Moral matters should be dealt with elsewhere – by politicians, clergy or moral philosophers. It is not the task of science to ask questions of what 'might be' the case, or what 'should be' possible. However, the positivistic stance, concerned with distance, rigid objectivity and questing for law-like truths, is only one version of the philosophy of science. Other versions such as interpretative, hermeneutical and social constructionist approaches *are* concerned with morality, arguing that 'what is' and what 'should be' are closely intertwined and cannot be artificially split. Some have gone further, claiming that the social sciences are not natural sciences at all, but are moral sciences; that critique, social change and human betterment are centre-stage plots.

Let us leave aside the arcane debates of metatheories, important as they are. More pressing moral problems are raised by contemplating research on the topic of violence in general, and on those responsible for violence in particular. As we hinted earlier, it could be a tricky business. Anyone who attempts to understand and explain those who do or have done violent deeds is likely to face a moral dilemma. See Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) for some of the moral issues and challenges she faced in her study on Eugene de Kock.

### THE CORE MORAL DILEMMA

The core of the dilemma is as follows: on the one hand, being faced with wicked or evil deeds begs answers to questions, it 'cries out for an explanation, outrages our sense of justice' (Kekes, 1990, p.4); it further calls out for solutions, and the prevention of future similar deeds. This was the formal mandate of the TRC, and similar demands face social scientists. It would seem that one of the most fruitful paths would be to study and understand the agents of harm; the perpetrators. On the other hand, a sole focus on perpetrators is likely to reduce attention to victims, slide over the nature of the deeds, minimise outrage and draw us into the

perpetrators' point of view. A sympathetic reaction is particularly likely if we understand those responsible as victims of circumstance, which as we have seen is to some extent undeniably true. If we theorise perpetrators as victims – of authorities, miserable childhoods, group pressure or as merely cogs in the machine – we are in the midst of this dilemma.

It is usual, almost obligatory at this stage, to render a disclaimer about the relationship between understanding and empathy. It is well put by one of the leading Holocaust scholars in writing on Nazi perpetrators. Browning (1992) writes as follows:

What I do not accept, however, are the old clichés that to explain is to excuse, to understand is to forgive. Explaining is not excusing, understanding is not forgiving. (p.xx)

While we entirely agree with Browning – it is a most sensible stance – the problem does not entirely disappear. There is the matter of different perspectives, experiential positions and versions of victims and perpetrators.

#### THE MAGNITUDE GAP

Reminding ourselves of the 'magnitude gap' (Baumeister, 1997) of sharp discrepancies between the perceptions held by victims and perpetrators, the dilemma is presented slightly differently. The problem now is not so much sympathy, but 'buying into' the relative stories of the two sides. Who should we believe? If we 'buy' the minimalist version of perpetrators, often told in relatively detached, distanced and apparently objective styles, then we are siding, as it were, with this version. We take it up in our 'scientific' narratives. Alternatively, if we 'buy' into the version from victims, the perpetrators are to be regarded as either monstrous, internally driven (it is in their nature to be thus) or as utterly senseless, without reason. Baumeister nicely expresses and then solves the dilemma.

Eventually I concluded that appreciating the victims' perspective is essential for a moral evaluation of such acts – but it is ruinous for a causal understanding of them. (1997, p.20)

He goes on to add that since he is aiming at understanding, not moral analysis, it is necessary to 'tune out' the overwhelmingly powerful victims' perspective (p.20) and to lean towards the detached and minimal style of the perpetrator and, we should add, of mainstream science as well. A neat and tidy solution. Unfortunately it recapitulates the old and problematic dualism of positivism – between science on the one hand and morality on the other. There are alternative positions. On the matter of theories, Rom Harré, a noted epistemologist, argues that 'it is not their truth or falsity that is of importance, but their role as guide for action' (1990, p.303). Harré wants to reconnect science and morality.

### HARD AND SOFT REACTIONS

Here is another version with a different solution. Moral philosopher John Kekes (1990) distinguished between two approaches to 'undeserved harm inflicted on human beings' (p.4). The soft reaction views the violent deed as an aberration; it is not really part of the perpetrator's character. It is an optimistic view, assuming that all humans have potentials for the development of virtues and 'good actions' (p.8). Kekes regards this assumption as questionable. The soft view argues that we should not regard bad events as 'evidence for their agents being evil' (p.6). This is the position taken by situationism and the view of perpetrators as ordinary people.

The hard reaction gives primary attention to bad deeds, proposing that these are due to habitual aspects of the agents' characters or personalities. They are fundamentally bad people. They are bad because certain vices have become habitual and dominant. It holds no optimistic assumptions about positive human development. It argues that we should regard perpetrators as responsible for their actions and keep central focus on the bad deeds. The ideal for the hard reaction is that 'people ought to get what they deserve' (Kekes, 1990, p.9).

While we grasp this argument, and share a concern for sliding into the soft reaction, the contrast is rather too stark, and we cannot share the positivism of Kekes, nor the notion that perpetrators are irredeemable. Along with positivistic psychology, Kekes claims that personality traits are relatively fixed characteristics inside individuals that determine the bad deeds. This is an overly simplistic version of human subjectivity. Despite the superficial appeal of his model, Kekes doesn't solve the dilemma.

### EXCLUSIVE FOCUS ON VICTIMS

Are there alternative ways of proceeding? One alternative would be to abandon the study of perpetrators altogether; to focus attention and care only on victims/survivors. That is indeed the practical and quite sensible solution adopted by numerous human rights-oriented Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and organisations such as Rape Crisis. The academic study of victims' trauma has grown recently, to such an extent that it almost has become a separate field. All these efforts are to be lauded; it is part of the full story. Research work with victims might be easier to undertake both methodologically and morally; after all, these are the people who suffered. But this research route also faces some moral dilemmas. If there is complete silence about perpetrators, it assists in keeping their violence 'out of public record and social consciousness' (Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros & Zimbardo, 2002, p.27). Furthermore, as Cohen (2001) reminds us, those who work on behalf of victims also face moral opprobrium; they are often labelled as anything from 'bleeding heart liberals' and 'voyeurs of suffering' to 'merchants in misery' (p.260). Anyway, a focus on victims is not our purpose here. Some work on behalf of victims was conducted earlier (Foster, Davis & Sandler, 1987).

## THIRD WAYS

There could be yet other strategies to deal with this dilemma. One strategy is to attempt to collect stories from both sides, victim and perpetrator. To its credit, that is what the TRC did, attempting in many instances to match the stories, for example in attempting to locate precisely what occurred, or to find out the final fate of those who had disappeared. While the TRC duly faced criticism, it has also been lauded for its efforts to take on board the two angles. That is not our strategy here.

Another way is to adopt a theoretical position that takes a third route, beyond the standard binaries. That is what we tried to do here in what we have called a relational approach: this is to (i) consider an array of actors of positions beyond that of victim/perpetrator, and (ii) consider the principal binary as relational in form, as positions in a wider field or arena of violence. Informed by constructionist approaches, it also tries to go beyond the standard notions of either internal or external causal process, either active or passive agents, to argue a case that it should be both agency and structure. To claim that young black activists in the township, who often enough were victims of security-force violence, were merely hapless victims, is to do their memory a disservice (see Marks, 2001 for a thoughtful view). A relational approach to theory permits one to hear the stories of those responsible, without simply and wholly 'buying into' those stories. It hopefully allows that a critical angle will not be lost.

Finally, with a central focus on those responsible, our strategy nevertheless promotes a multi-perspectival strategy towards viewing protagonists. It promotes the idea of a range of different 'voices' on the subject matter. Each comes from a slightly different angle. First, the 'voice' of the TRC, an official, archival and forensic (or factual) perspective. Second, the 'voice' of public representations, the silences, the half-conscious and the stereotypical voices of the media and general public. Third, the 'voice' of a wider academic community, the views of scholars and analysts. Fourth, the 'voice' and stories of protagonists from the conflict years. Fifth, there is an analytical 'voice', one that attempts a critical review of protagonists' stories. It is not a case of 'buying into' the voice of any one in isolation. Multi-perspectival also refers here to analysis of violence from various sides of the conflict, as we argued earlier. We trust this will go some way towards a resolution of the core moral dilemma.

It would be both brash and ignorant to hope for a 'final solution' to these moral dilemmas. We know how an earlier 'final solution' turned out. Furthermore, Michael Billig (1996) and John Shotter (1993), in their rhetorical-relational views, keep reminding us that life is inherently dilemmatic; there is always the possibility of yet another counter-argument. In a democratic society that is as it should be. Facing a possibility of interminable dilemmas, all we can do is propose our strategy. It is one in which we listen, with respect and with an open frame of mind, to voices of conflict protagonists, but which does not necessarily privilege those

voices. They are positions or versions or 'performances' (Payne, 2002) in an array of other versions. Perhaps ultimately the dilemmas will prevail.

## ANOTHER MORAL ISSUE: SILENCES AND SECRETS

A research interview is not simply a research tool, a vehicle for gaining information. As Kvale (1996) has reminded us, an interview is a social encounter, a relational process involving two or more persons or parties. Moral matters are always at stake in interview situations, but more so when one party would prefer to maintain silence, to keep secrets. And there is no place in which silence and secrets have greater currency than the arena of violence. Around violence, people in general and perpetrators in particular most frequently prefer to maintain silence. Secrets acquire value. They become like a commodity which gains its 'price' through exchange value; the more one party wants to acquire the information, the greater its value. Because of its value, secret-holders have some power. The interview is the exchange process. It entails moral questions: how does the interviewer proceed ethically in order to break the preferred silence? What are the moral implications of refusal to disclose? It also entails 'performances' by participants on each side. It requires mutual presentation of appropriate 'faces' and subtle unwritten rules and interactional rituals for preservation of face. It involves delicate relational processes of trust. Primarily composed of rituals of conversation, or talk exchanges, the interview requires of participants to present narratives or 'accounts' of themselves and their actions (Lyman & Scott, 1970; Scott & Lyman, 1968). All of these moves entail moral manoeuvres and negotiations.

To illustrate such moral negotiations in interviews which try to wrestle with silences and secrets, Huggins et al. (2002) provide a useful scheme of four elements involved in secrecy exchange:

- Potential interviewees use security measures to negotiate a position of strength. Some refuse outright, others initially agree but withdraw. Most are likely to be wary, assessing the claimed grounds for research and the *bona fides* of interviewers and organisational credentials. It may involve protracted negotiations. Respondents may hold the ultimate right of withdrawal. Marks (2001) reports the scrutiny she underwent before proceeding to interview young black 'comrades' involved in township violence.
- Interviewers have to decide on ethical limits and strategies to facilitate disclosure. It may involve emotional siding with the respondent, acquiescence in the face of respondents' digressions, or processes of 'symbolic adornment'.
- Structured disclosure, in which respondents negotiate the form of disclosure, how it is to be understood and distributed. Huggins et al. (2002) claim that disclosure usually occurs in bits and pieces rather than as an articulated whole. Talk may follow roundabout routes and indirect, generalised or vague language forms. Violence is seldom mentioned directly; it is more often

expressed through metaphorical language, disclosure of lesser and more acceptable forms citing just causes, or shaped into generalisations. Collective rather than personal pronouns may be favoured. These are common rhetorical distancing devices, which serve to deflect attention away from personal involvement and to lay positive moral grounds for interpretation of disclosures.

- *Post hoc* security measures in which respondents attempt to tie the researcher into their interpretations of events, to turn the interviewer into a helper in maintaining face. This serves to reassert a negotiated measure of control over the disclosures already made.

Processes of this sort, probably common to all interview procedures, may be more prevalent when violence is the object of disclosure. The value in a scheme of this sort is to alert us to the notion that interviewing itself is not a morally free technical device. It involves subtle negotiations of moral positionings, as do all conversations. Ordinary rules of 'politeness' constrain interviewers from pushing for disclosures, particularly those relating to violence, which respondents wish to silence. Respondents have powers. Dependent partly on the nature of these interview negotiations, all we have is a particular 'version'. All we are likely to obtain, and what we should expect, are fairly reasoned human stories. That is not nothing. Neither are moral dilemmas ever likely to be cleared away entirely. That should not prevent us from proceeding, imperfect as it may be.

## METHODOLOGICAL MATTERS

The purpose of this component of the study was to generate and present stories of life narratives from protagonists from different sides of the political conflict in South Africa. Guided by an assumption that the TRC could only gain limited narratives from those responsible for violence, due to its quasi-judicial amnesty procedures (see Chapter 1), the aim here was to strive towards more flexible, open and partially self-generated stories from protagonists. In the chapters that follow we present nine such stories, four from people in state security structures, security police and intelligence services, three from those directly involved in liberation movements (MK and APLA) and two from those involved in township struggles.

We aim to present these stories in full, to give voice to the narrators themselves, without too much interference from researchers. Towards this end, the stories are only relatively lightly shaped and edited, differentiating clearly between the protagonists' own voices and our linking statements or contextual frames. The purpose was to retain the integrity of these voices, including the sequencing, tone, rhythm and expressional modalities. Our shaping of the narratives was directed only towards facilitating presentation and readability. The narrators participated in this editorial process and gave feedback regarding how accurately the presentation

of their stories reflected their voices. Our concern in this methodological section is to show how we got to the narratives.

### INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

The project spanned roughly four years, from 2000 to the beginning of 2004. Early in 2000 an interview schedule was drawn up to guide the story-assembling process. The overarching framework was to generate personal life narratives, from the earliest years of participants' lives to the present time, with particular reference (but not limited to) their participation in the conflict. While the schedule contained a series of more specific questions, they were subsidiary to the general approach of generating these broad, self-expressed life narratives.

The interview schedule or guideline covered four main areas:

- A thorough life history, including early years, adolescence, early adulthood, career or significant life-steps, and coverage of post-apartheid years to the present.
- Specific questions that were aimed to cover three broad areas: psychological functioning, organisational dynamics and violence excesses, justifications and silences. Key among the guidelines on psychological functioning were probes on identity salience, influence of others, status and mobility, intergroup dynamics ('race', language groups) and questions about any possible psychological abnormalities. The idea was not necessarily to ask such questions in direct fashion, but to probe further or steer towards missing areas of potential coverage. For example, where there were particular silences in the interview, apparent avoidance, resistance and covering up, the guidelines suggested further probes.
- A third area attended to reconciliation and forgiveness; how these notions were understood, what their own views were on justice, remorse, forgetting, forgiveness, victims and still uncovered silences. The purpose was to facilitate a reflective process, looking back.
- The final area covered the TRC; their own experiences, attitudes towards and responses to the TRC. There were also guideline questions to probe emotional issues such as guilt, shame, resentment and defences pertaining to emotions. Another suggested probe was whether respondents could explain the violence of others in contrast to their own actions.

As mentioned, the overarching aim was to generate a broad, relatively self-expressed life story, with particular attention to turning points or transformational processes. Certain areas, even if posed in the interview schedule, may not necessarily have been probed. The schedule was not a checklist of questions. It worked rather as a guide to probe certain areas (shaped roughly in terms of some theoretical issues) that turned up in the interview, or as a reminder to attend to areas where the interview was silent. Given the conversational dynamics of interviews

(as outlined earlier) it would be difficult to cover all areas equally well. As a consequence, there may well be certain aspects, not least those pertaining to violence itself, which were less fully canvassed.

## SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Since the full process of identifying, approaching and recruiting participants was conducted by Paul Haupt, employed by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) for that purpose, we shift to the personal pronoun 'I'. As Paul also conducted all interviews, reflections on the interview process and in subsequent chapters containing interview material also make use of the agentic personal pronoun.

### IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEES

The process of identifying potential interviewees began by approaching two former members of the NIS, who had advised the TRC research department in the past. These men assisted in identifying people who might be prepared to participate and provide access to former state security organisations. With the names of a handful of key people, the first telephonic contacts were made. In addition to explaining the project, I asked for their advice with regard to contacting people who may be prepared to be interviewed. These conversations would typically end with an agreement that I would phone back in a few days, allowing the contact person time for consultation and discussion of the project with former colleagues.

This set in motion a process of raising awareness about the project within certain 'self-selected' circles within various organisations. Referrals that followed were essentially by word of mouth, snowballing from one person to the next. In this way a snowball sampling method developed. Relying on participants themselves to develop a referral chain, the sample was self-selected, based in part on the participants' understanding of the criteria for inclusion. The common thread for inclusion became individuals who were themselves engaged in South Africa's armed political conflict at various levels within organisations.

At the same time I was making contact with individual amnesty applicants from APLA and MK, whom I had met during the TRC process. In addition, I made contact with lawyers representing applicants from the liberation movement. In this way I began to identify and approach former members of APLA and MK.

### GATEKEEPERS

Within a few months, it became evident that referrals from various contacts were leading to a gatekeeper in each of the various organisations, someone who occupied a position of authority and from whom former colleagues still sought advice

and guidance about various matters. A request for an interview was one such matter. The obvious way to proceed was to meet face to face with these various gatekeepers. In the majority of cases, these initial meetings were fruitful, leading to interviews with these gatekeepers, giving them the opportunity to assess the nature of the interview process and integrity of the project for themselves. Referrals into various organisations trickled down from these gatekeepers. In certain cases where I attempted to contact people directly, I had no success. Gaining access to these gatekeepers for a face-to-face meeting was not always easy. This process typically took months and in the case of the security branch, it took 18 months to secure the first face-to-face meeting.

### SUSPICIONS AND ASSURANCES

In general, suspicions were high. Potential participants across the political spectrum were sensitive about the purpose of the research, the nature of information being sought and how the information was to be used. One of the critical challenges was to convey the central purpose of the interview process to participants in such a way that they clearly understood why we wanted to interview people on all sides of the political conflict. That we sought to interview individuals from across the political divides both assisted and challenged the process. Although most participants felt it was essential to hear from all sides of the conflict, this wide scope posed a major problem with regard to the very definition of a 'perpetrator', as former enemies from each side saw the other as the perpetrator. Standing by their conviction as former combatants, each side had well-formulated reasons for taking up arms. Clearly identifying these reasons and rationales was part of the task of the research; the term 'perpetrator' was used and understood very differently by these opposing positions. The work was further complicated by its perceived association with the TRC. Participants were critical of the language the TRC used, particularly its use of the term 'perpetrator', and its understanding of the causes, motives and perspectives of the violence in general.

Participants across the political spectrum held the view that the TRC's understanding was limiting. They believed the potential value of this research to be the degree to which it could present a critical, more complex understanding of people's participation in South Africa's political conflict, steering away from the linear relation suggested by the TRC's use of the phrase 'causes, motives and perspectives of individuals responsible for the perpetration of gross violations of human rights' (Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No. 34 of 1995).

Every participant, irrespective of his or her political affiliation, sought one crucial reassurance, namely, that their personal stories would be reflected accurately and fairly. Many felt misrepresented by the recent truth-telling process of the TRC and were adamant about not being part of a project intending to repeat this. To ensure fair representation, each participant received a copy of their transcribed interview, and those selected for this publication were given a copy of the final draft.

**THE IMAGE OF THE IJR**

The IJR was not considered to be impartial by participants, though some participants paid more attention to this than others. Since the Chief Executive Officer of the IJR was also the former head of research at the TRC and since this project began in 2000, when many amnesty hearings were still in progress and rulings outstanding, there was mistrust about the exact purpose of the research. Was this a means of obtaining information for the TRC amnesty process under the guise of an independent research project?

This mistrust was widely held and perfectly understandable. Reinforced by the strong reference to the work of the TRC, it offered a starting point for discussion with many participants. Once the purpose of the research was explained and the interview protocol shared, trust began to be built and the *bona fides* of both the research project and the IJR were accepted – with one notable exception. Progress had been made after four months of meetings with a lawyer who had represented many of the senior security branch members and arrangements were being made to set up an interview with a former Commissioner of Police. The agreement made with the lawyer was that I would put the aims and objectives of the research in writing and fax it to him. He would then call a meeting with his clients whom I wished to interview and explain the research to them, advising them to participate. I wrote the letter and printed it out on an IJR fax letterhead containing a footnote of the Institute's board members. Moments after sending the fax, I received a call from the lawyer. He had no knowledge of the board membership prior to receiving the fax. He warned me that there would be a problem presenting this to his clients, not because of the research *per se*, but because of the names of the board members. 'These are some of the very people who gave my clients an unfair hearing at the TRC. My clients will not be comfortable sharing their personal stories with them and I don't feel comfortable trying to convince them.' Although this posed a severe blow to the progress of accessing members of the former Security Branch, in time, and through ongoing discussion with their lawyer, an understanding was reached. A meeting was set up with the former Commissioner of Police and his lawyer and a way forward was negotiated. Again the underlying concern was that of being misrepresented. In their view, the Institute's board members represented only one side of the conflict and their concern was that it would result in this research generating a politically biased account of the history and motives of the conflict, as well as claims of responsibility and accountability for the violence.

**MOTIVATION FOR 'SPEAKING OUT'**

Participants' motivation for granting interviews differed from individual to individual and from organisation to organisation. Two interrelated aspects can be identified as core factors:

- The negative perceptions generated by the TRC of members of the state security forces and liberation movements as perpetrators of gross human rights violations. Believing that their members and organisations had been misrepresented by the TRC process, the ‘gatekeepers’ considered this an opportunity to ‘set the record straight’.
- The need to be seen as human beings, not ‘monsters’ or ‘freaks’, and their desire to be understood as individuals, seemingly influenced their decisions to agree to interviews. Many participants felt let down by military and political leadership and reiterated that they did not act on their own.

## OVERVIEW OF THE SAMPLE

### REASSURANCES

The key concern emanating from all participants was that they would be heard and not judged as individuals, that is, that this process would not be yet another one in which they felt misrepresented. Understandably they therefore wanted to retain a measure of control over the use of their stories. Once the interviews began, many of the pre-emptive concerns evaporated when people realised that our interest was not limited to their role in the conflict, but that we were attempting to capture their larger life stories. A key assumption was that while these people had been engaged in the armed political conflict, they also had personal stories to tell about their lives as ordinary South Africans. To generate a deeper understanding of the individual, social and political factors at play in the violence experienced during apartheid rule, we tried to identify key factors that may have informed their choices.

### THE SAMPLE AND REFUSALS

A total of 50 people were approached. Thirty-four agreed to be interviewed and 16 – approximately one-third – refused. The highest percentage of refusals by organisation was from former members of MK (nine or 56 per cent), followed by the security police (three), the military (two) and National Intelligence (two). There was a 100 per cent success rate among former members of APLA. Two members of the Katlehong community were approached directly, one a former member of an SPU, the other a former member of an SDU. In addition, three former NP government officials were interviewed about South Africa’s political transformation in general. These discussions served as background information.

Two-thirds of the refusals from MK were outright refusals. In a third of these cases individuals initially agreed to be interviewed, showed interest in the research, but ultimately refused. Despite efforts to address reservations held by the latter group, securing interviews proved unsuccessful. The two refusals from former NIS members were both outright refusals. In their opinion the TRC knew all there was to know and had made its record public.

The three refusals from former security policemen were outright refusals. Three others agreed to speak but did not want to be recorded. One of them believed that participating in the research might jeopardise his current job. Although he had applied to the TRC for amnesty, at a personal level he wanted to put it all behind him. Another person who refused to be interviewed and did not want to meet face to face, described his life after his amnesty hearing as 'absolute hell, it's a nightmare. I can't cope with anything more'. There was little of significance to report in the two refusals from Military Intelligence. Although there were no refusals among former members of APLA, one participant stopped in the middle of the first interview and refused to continue, saying that remembering his experiences was extremely difficult.

Of the 34 interviews (32 with men), a further 14 were not used for various reasons. Eight were incomplete interviews, six due to a lack of time, while two refused follow-up interviews. One was the above-mentioned former APLA member who found the process too traumatic. The other was a former security policeman, now in business, who was concerned about the implications for his current work. Three interviews with former security police were not audio-recorded. While willing to be interviewed, they expressed suspicion and concern about being recorded. Of the remaining 20 transcribed interviews, a further five were rather insubstantial. Some others wished to remain anonymous. In this study we present nine full narratives, but for purposes of analysis we also draw on two others. Criteria for selection of the final narratives are given later.

## THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Following a life history approach, efforts were made to provide sufficient time for participants to recount their experiences, follow tangents, explore interrelationships of events and experiences over time and reflect on these experiences. For these reasons interviews are typically lengthy, characterised by the participant speaking freely and the interviewer intervening only intermittently with a question or comment. This interview style allowed interviewees to verbalise their subjective reality and the meanings they attribute to their experiences and perceptions.

In general, interviews were conducted for approximately two hours at a time, varying between four and 12 interviews per participant, amounting to between six and 20 interview hours per participant, with the exception of one-off interviews. Interviews were conducted in various venues, including hotel lobbies, restaurants, people's homes, prison, coffee shops and the interviewer's office.

With the exceptions noted earlier, all interviews were audio-recorded. Audio-recording was introduced to ensure an accurate record of the conversation. The recordings were transcribed and given to participants for their perusal and personal record. Most participants welcomed this method of accurate recording

and felt it added integrity to the research process. As mentioned, participants were invited to comment on the transcriptions of their interviews and to interrogate the accuracy of the record.

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Each interview began with an explanation of the research, that is, to deepen understanding of the motives for political violence under apartheid. This often evoked questions concerning how the information was to be used and how this work would challenge the existing impressions of individual perpetrators.

The interviews began with the opening question, 'Where did it all begin for you?' Although themes of discussion were guided by the interview schedule, interviews were relatively unstructured. Given their perceptions of the purpose of the research, some interviewees were surprised to be given the opportunity to share their life story. Those who had been interviewed in the past (the vast majority by journalists, lawyers) anticipated a more focused process. That they could decide how to present themselves with minimal intervention from myself seemed comforting. This style of interviewing presumably demonstrated a genuine interest in the person and thus helped to build trust. Interviewees gave generously of their time and in most cases the interview process extended over many hours.

Subsequent interviews would begin with raising a theme that had not yet been covered, for example, their views and experiences of the TRC. This would focus the interview and where necessary specific questions were asked to elicit detail.

### IMPRESSIONS

While interviewees easily spoke about their families of origin and their childhood years, they generally did not volunteer information about their own nuclear families (partners, spouses, children). This despite the fact that in time they freely shared other private and seemingly more sensitive information during their interviews. Ostensibly they felt more comfortable disclosing information relating to their jobs, their professions, than information about their families – even though many of them were also spouses, partners and parents at the time of their political involvement. These worlds, trained professionals and intimate human beings, were seemingly kept separate.

Another general impression was the overt change in the tone and atmosphere of the interview when interviewees spoke of their role as violators. Sometimes this change was so pronounced that the interviewee would stop and distract him- or herself with tangential information. In time, the topic would spontaneously recur and there would be one of two responses – a matter-of-fact recounting of the horror (violence experienced or violence perpetrated), devoid of affect, or yet again,

tangential retreat. Speaking about the specifics of the violence was the single most elusive part of each participant's narrative. It was either typified by a murkiness that rendered the storyline confusing and difficult to follow, or a brutal clarity, listing horrific, repulsive detail (ostensibly without empathy for the victims).

A further impression gained through the interviewing process relates to the thorny question of the 'truthfulness' or authenticity of stories. While the interview process and style lent itself to open and personal expression of participants' life experiences, narratives cannot offer any royal road to 'truth'. Stories are versions of events, told from particular points of view. They are more about meanings than facts. Criteria for the evaluation of narratives relate less to truthfulness and more to matters such as coherence, plausibility and 'believability' (McAdams, 1993); criteria which are shaped by culture and situation. Nonetheless, due in part to the open frame of the interviewing process, a surface and general impression was that participants were grappling to be authentic in relating their experiences. On some occasions, strong emotions were evidenced – in one instance a lengthy interview ended with the narrator in tears. Despite such impressions, the question of 'truth' in narratives must remain bracketed.

#### LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY OF INTERVIEWER

As an English-speaking white South African in my late 30s, my identity evidently played a role in the interview process. As a clinical psychologist based at the IJR, with prior experience of the work of the TRC, I was occupying a loaded political and moral position, one associated with a range of stereotypical labels. My challenge was to be aware of these. The range of interviewees, across the political spectrum, assisted in this process, exposing me to a wide array of assumptions. In certain cases I represented the enemy, in others the compatriot, the anomaly, the defiant conscript; the list is endless. These multiple identities were present and drawn upon when considered appropriate to engage the interviewee. For example, during an interview with three former APLA members in a maximum security prison, my identity as a white South African, 'the enemy', was discussed to elicit the attitudes held about the former enemy. Before their arrest, I would have constituted a legitimate target, merely because I am white.

Although English was the first language of only one of the participants (the others were Sepedi, Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Afrikaans), it was the *lingua franca* and was thus used as a matter of convenience. That being said, we are conscious that the issue of language is neither a neutral nor a simple methodological or ethical matter. It remains a fraught problem in South African research.

#### FROM WORDS TO TEXT

All interviews were transcribed in full by a professional transcriber, a white, middle-aged woman. Definite problem areas presented themselves, for example, the

spelling of names in African languages, capturing the subtleties and innuendo of proverbs roughly translated into English by certain interviewees, and the lack of general political knowledge on the part of the transcriber. As a white, middle-class person educated during apartheid, her political education was limited to the perspective of the apartheid government. During the transcribing process, she became aware that her education yielded a very 'narrow perspective' on the history of the country. Transcribing these interviews opened her eyes to a 'whole new world of our history'. She found her task difficult, and often depressing, yet ultimately highly rewarding.

## SELECTING PERSONAL STORIES USED HERE

As the nine personal stories in this volume are presented as self-told narratives, only those interviews that were audio-recorded and completed were considered for selection. The following factors were taken into consideration when selecting the nine stories in this volume (from a possible 20 interviews). These included:

- Language. The first filter used for the purpose of this presentation was language. Not wanting to change the style and language used by participants, interviewees were selected on the basis of their proficiency in English; their ability to express themselves in English for the purpose of presentation in a publication.
- 'Complete' interviews took priority. Incomplete interviews or relatively insubstantial interviews (five) were filtered out of the selection process.
- Once these two filters were applied, the interviews were selected so as to provide the reader with the scope of political perspectives represented in the sample (that is, perspectives from members of the apartheid state apparatus and liberation movement organisations), the range of organisations (Intelligence and operational organisations) as well as the levels of operation (foot soldiers and senior ranking individuals).
- In preparing the interviews for publication, care was taken to respect the integrity of the narratives. Interviews were rearranged to follow a chronological sequence and headings and linking sentences were inserted. As far as possible, we tried to stick to interviewees' own words and language was only corrected in a few instances where it hampered understanding. In two instances, material was added from other sources: in the case of Letlapa Mphahlele (see Chapter 7) we drew on his autobiography to fill in gaps, and in the case of Koevoet member John Deegan (see Chapter 5) we included material from his TRC testimony. The final product was again submitted to participants for their approval.

## ETHICS AND PARTICIPATION

Once the narratives were selected, the participants were informed of the intention to publish their stories. The agreement was that the narratives would be lightly edited to enhance readability and then given back to them to ensure accurate representation of the content of the interview record. Once agreement was reached regarding accuracy, permission was requested to use their names and to publish their stories. The authors chose to refer to participants by their first names, to 'humanise' the stories and to circumvent hierarchies signified by ranks and titles. As the matter of future culpability in terms of legal action is not yet finalised, we opted in some cases to use popular first names only (omitting surnames), to obviate full recognition of participants. Only one person opted for a pseudonym, her rationale being her reluctance to be perceived as speaking on behalf of her former colleagues and the organisation for which she worked.

The result, these nine personal stories, constitutes a fair representation of the range of perspectives, organisations and levels of operation of the overall sample generated over the four-year study. The stories, as seen and agreed upon by participants, are presented over the next four chapters (Chapters 5 to 8).

## 5 POLICE NARRATIVES

### LAW AND ORDER

#### THE STORY OF A FORMER COMMISSIONER OF POLICE

In October 1996 General Johan van der Merwe supplied supporting testimony in the TRC amnesty hearing of a former divisional commander of the Northern Transvaal Security Branch, Brigadier Jan Cronjé, and several of his subordinates. This testimony attempted to straddle two diverse needs: on the one hand, to stand by those who had served under him, while on the other hand, trying to protect command levels of the SAP and political echelons. These potentially conflicting needs were resolved in the following way: according to Johan, except in specific operations for which they had applied for amnesty, neither the command level of the SAP nor the government had authorised human rights abuses or other unlawful actions. However, the boundary between lawful and unlawful actions became increasingly blurred in the context of an escalating and unconventional war waged by the ANC and its allies, and Security Branch operatives had at times acted overzealously in their attempts to restore law and order. The statement containing this position became the standard document attached to most Security Branch applications explaining their motives and perspectives.

Johan personally applied for 12 incidents. The first two were committed in 1977 while he was Divisional Commander of the Orange Free State. They entailed assisting two Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) members to escape from custody in Fouriesburg, as well as placing a vehicle with an explosive device outside the Basutoland National Party (BNP) offices in Maseru, Lesotho. These actions were allegedly committed as part of the South African government's attempt to destabilise Lesotho. The third incident, committed while second in command of the Security Branch, involved an operation, code-named Zero Zero, in which young COSAS' activists on the West Rand were given zero-timed hand grenades by *askaris* purporting to be MK activists, and told to attack collaborators' houses. At midnight on 26 June 1985, the youths launched their attacks. Eight were killed, while at least seven were wounded when the grenades exploded in their hands. Johan testified to having been the conceptual brain behind this operation. He had devised it following widespread attacks on so-called collaborators in the West Rand area. Another incident, also committed while second in command, involved authorising an attack on MK personnel in Maseru in December 1985. »

» Seven people, including three citizens of Lesotho, were killed while at a party arranged by a Security Branch informer, while a further two persons were killed at another house.

With the exception of one incident, the remaining incidents applied for were all committed while Johan was the commanding officer of the Security Branch. Two were cross-border incidents, one in Swaziland in December 1986 in which three MK operatives were killed, and one in Gaborone, Botswana, when a failed operation led to the deaths of three female Botswana citizens. Johan also applied for the bombing of two buildings in downtown Johannesburg, COSATU House (headquarters of South Africa's largest trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions) on 7 May 1987 and Khotso House (headquarters of the South African Council of Churches) on 31 August 1988. He also applied for amnesty for placing explosive devices in several cinemas around the country. The targeted cinemas were due to screen *Cry Freedom*, the story of black consciousness activist, Steve Biko, who died from injuries sustained while in Security Branch custody. In these three incidents, the Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, was a co-applicant. A further application by Johan entailed authorising the cover-up of the death of another detainee, Mamelodi activist Stanza Bopape, who died on 12 June 1988, while electric shocks were being administered during interrogation. Johan testified that while torture was not an authorised practice in the Security Branch, he had considerable sympathy for those who used such methods, given the security threat they were trying to combat.

The last incident for which Johan applied related to finding employment with the Defence Force for two Transkei Security Branch operatives who had escaped custody after being arrested for the extrajudicial killing of MK operative Sithembile Zokwe in Umtata on 12 January 1988. Johan, then Deputy Commissioner of Police, stated that he believed the two had acted lawfully and had been wrongfully arrested.

He was granted amnesty for all of these incidents, except for the 1985 raid in Maseru and the Zokwe matter. With regards to the Maseru raid, amnesty was refused due to lack of full disclosure, while in the Zokwe matter the committee ruled that according to his own version, he had committed no offence and thus amnesty could not be granted.

After months of discussions with his lawyer, a meeting was arranged for me to present the project to Johan in person. I felt excited as this could be the first step towards interviewing former members of the Security Branch. At the same time, I was anxious about how my presentation of the project would be received.

On 19 July 2001 I made my way to the lawyer's offices in Pretoria. Although I had made that particular trip many times, I found myself on a road I did not recognise and I had no idea where I had gone wrong. I phoned the lawyer, explaining that I

was lost. We soon realised that I was far from where I should have been. I was concerned about Johan's time, but was assured that he was willing to wait. When I finally arrived at the lawyer's offices, an hour late, both he and Johan stood up and greeted me with a handshake. I apologised for being late. Johan said he understood, assuring me that one wrong turn could cost one a lot of travelling time. He was soft-spoken and reserved throughout the meeting.

The lawyer commented on the history of our meeting and questioned me about the project's aims and objectives, especially how and by whom the information would be used. He was particularly concerned about the privacy of his clients, explaining the intricacies involved if they participated in such a project before they learned the outcome of their TRC amnesty decision. We discussed ways of reaching a strategy whereby both our needs could be met. It soon became apparent that Johan was willing to participate in the project, but wanted to ensure that he and others would be able to do so without fear of misrepresentation or misuse of the information. After an hour we agreed to draw up a contract to protect the interests of all involved (which we never actually did).

Within a few weeks the first interview was set up. Johan invited me to meet him at his home. I arrived to find him busy with maintenance work around the house. He warmly welcomed me, offered me something to drink and showed me into the lounge where we began the first of three interviews. The man I encountered did not fit my stereotype of a Commissioner of Police under the apartheid regime. Johan was relaxed and friendly and willing to share his story, paradoxes, contradictions and all.

#### HUMBLE ROOTS, IN A SMALL CONSERVATIVE COMMUNITY

General Johan Velde van der Merwe was born in August 1936 in Ermelo in the then Eastern Transvaal. His father was 'a road constructor employed by the Provincial Administration' and his mother 'was a housewife – she did not work'. Johan was the eldest of six children.

He describes Ermelo at that time as a small, conservative Afrikaans community. Most people were relatively poor following the Second World War. In spite of the economic hardship, his recollections of his childhood evoke 'pleasant memories'. Johan is proud of his alma mater; for a small rural community, Ermelo High School had 'quite a good record. For instance...Chris Stals<sup>2</sup> was also a scholar at the Ermelo High School. There were quite a number of persons...Jan van Loggerenberg, the Chief of the Air Force; strangely enough, we all came from Ermelo'.

While Johan was a good scholar, he was not committed to his studies. He was more interested in sport, and played ruby and did athletics and boxing. He excelled in boxing and it became his primary sport.

[Boxing was not only] a very common sport...it was also a very social sport...at that stage. It was one of the main attractions in a small community...the boxing championships. I think quite a lot of the activities of the community actually evolved around boxing as such. I would say that about the community where I grew up.

He was coached by the commander of the SAP in Ermelo, Captain Muller, whom he regarded as a role model. He describes him as a 'strong personality' and 'a person who did not hesitate to take whatever step he thought necessary to achieve his objective'. Since Captain Muller was also a person of 'high standing in the community', he played a role in Johan's decision to join the police. At the age of 16, having completed standard eight, Johan left school.<sup>3</sup> On 3 February 1953 he joined the SAP.

Johan saw himself as 'quite a dangerous guy'.

Throughout my school days I liked anything that borders to danger – danger of any type. I was in my school days quite interested in explosives, chemicals as such and I was hoping to become some kind of engineer at first. But after I came in contact with Brigadier Muller, that changed my way of thinking. And after I had contact with the police – because we normally exercised at the police station – I decided to become a policeman.

#### SERVING THE COMMUNITY

He describes his decision to join the police:

I don't think there was really, at that stage, the visualising of anything special apart from the...mere fact that the police was involved in combating crime, which to a certain aspect held a certain...adventurous side of life... That...was something to look forward [to], and I think further,...the way of serving the community, to become part of a specific community. That was perhaps the main driving factor at that stage.

He enjoyed his training 'immensely', describing it as 'an outstanding period' of his life. After a one-year posting at a small station in Natal, he was transferred to Old Marshall Square in Johannesburg, where he served till the end of 1961.

I enjoyed policing in Johannesburg. That is the one place where I learned more about policing than the rest of my career. I served in the centre of Johannesburg. There were days when circumstances were very difficult, but on the other hand the comradeship and the mere fact that it was very difficult circumstances brought about a loyalty between the members of the police force in Johannesburg, which is...quite special to the Johannesburg environment – something quite unique.

He subsequently became a warrant officer and was transferred to Standerton, where he was in charge of the administration of the new headquarters. After two years he was transferred to Security Headquarters in Pretoria.

That was the days of Hendrik van den Berg<sup>4</sup>... That was also the time when the East/West conflict was at its highest peak... During our training as members of the Security Branch, it was one of the main focuses. I think that was the one aspect on which they concentrated to a large extent – and there was a real communist threat...

## LESOTHO

Johan served at Security Headquarters in an administrative capacity till January 1966, when he was transferred to Ficksburg, where he took command of the South Africa/Lesotho border post.

We were still part of the Security Branch and the objective was to control the border from a security point of view with regard to the preservation of the internal security of the RSA [Republic of South Africa], and also to become acquainted with the circumstances in Lesotho as such... During that period I was more concerned with matters relating to border control, specifically illegal immigration and other matters threatening the maintenance of law and order in the RSA.

He also gained 'quite an intimate knowledge' of the 'political affairs' in Lesotho. I had close contact with my counterparts in Lesotho, especially black counterparts, and we had a very good relationship. That gave me the opportunity to gain inside knowledge of how – if I can put that between brackets – the 'political mind of the African people' work. We also had close contact with the premier, Dr Leabua Jonathan, and one thing which at that stage strike me was...that although the Basutoland National Party was the ruling party, and enjoyed the support of South Africa (and I would say most of the other countries, including America), it was obvious to me through my contact with the normal man in the street – the Lesotho citizen with whom I came in contact in large numbers every day – that the opposition party, the Basutoland Congress Party, enjoyed the majority support of the people. It was also obvious to me that that did not stem from political considerations but merely from tradition. If one looks at the various factors in Lesotho, it was obvious that they supported the BCP as part of their tradition and not for political or other logical considerations. The latter did not play any role, but in any case that was a period that gave me the opportunity to learn something about your African way of thinking.

Johan was astonished about the degree to which the views of his superiors differed from the reality of Lesotho politics:

It was quite surprising, because it was also in contrast with the general opinion of my superiors at Security Headquarters. They were all under the impression that Leabua enjoyed the support of the majority in Lesotho, because he was also well-inclined towards South Africa, and for that reason

the authorities in South Africa gave him all the possible support... We built a headquarters for the Lesotho police and we gave them financial support and we assisted wherever possible. I pointed out, at that stage, that there must be a misunderstanding, because the thousands and thousands of Lesotho people who came into the Republic through [the] Ficksburg border post and [the] Maseru border post on a daily basis most definitely did not support Leabua Jonathan. We had quite close contact with them for various reasons, because they always had some problems with their passports or their permits and so on... They more or less opened up to us, and it was quite clear to us that they were not supporting Leabua.

Johan felt the South African government 'missed the whole point':

My superiors were of the view that financial support and the mere fact that they...improved in a certain sense the living standards of the people in Lesotho, would in one way or other influence their attitude towards the Republic. It did not play any role whatsoever. It did not affect them whatsoever; it did not affect their support for the opposition party, the BCP. It was obvious that their way of thinking and the way that we regard matters in the Republic were so far apart that some way or other we missed the whole point.

Since he was a junior officer at that time, Johan did not feel that his observations were taken seriously. 'I think they noted it – but they had their own ideas; I don't think that changed their way of thinking as far as the Lesotho issue is concerned.'

In March 1970, he was transferred to the Security Branch in Bloemfontein, where he eventually took over the command of all Security Branches in the Orange Free State. 'I was...in charge of the whole Orange Free State as such.' Their primary task was monitoring the activities of the various political parties in Lesotho, as well as those of the ANC refugees in that country.

It was also the time of the Moubaris group;<sup>5</sup> some of them were prominent members of MK. Herbert Mbali,<sup>6</sup> also Chris Hani, were refugees in Lesotho and one of our concerns obviously was to keep track of their activities. We made several attempts to get them to come to the Republic to arrest them, because they were quite busy...quite a threat, because they were organising in Lesotho, trying to establish a terrorist base in Lesotho.

The South African government could also no longer count on the support of their Lesotho counterparts.

During 1970 when the BCP won the elections in Lesotho, Jonathan staged a *coup d'état*, and thereafter decided that the only way he could gain support in Lesotho was to change his attitude towards the government of South Africa. He became more hostile towards the government of South Africa, and rendered more support to the refugees, especially the ANC refugees and

members of MK in Lesotho. That affected the relations between Lesotho and the RSA to such an extent that eventually they withdrew all their financial support. During the 80s we had to use quite strict measures, border control measures and other measures to...curb some of the activities of the Lesotho government.

### 1976 – PREVENTING TROUBLE

The Soweto uprising followed in 1976. 'It affected the whole country' and Johan and his colleagues also had 'serious problems in the Orange Free State'.

At that stage I was in the very fortunate situation that we had very good relations with the various school boards of the black schools in the Orange Free State, especially in Bloemfontein. I had very close contact with the black chairmen and we managed, to a large extent, to curb the uprising of violence in the black schools in the Free State. We went to very extensive lengths to make sure that the unrest did not spread to the Free State. I had various discussions with the parents of scholars, and at one stage there was one school – it was the Ixhoba school, it was a Xhosa school – where we encountered very serious problems. I arranged for a meeting with all the parents, because they started to damage the school. There was also an attempt to set alight the school and the signs were there that some of the activists of Soweto were actually trying to get these students...to take part in the countrywide unrest. I held a meeting with the board and arranged for a meeting with the parents. They, however, requested that I should come alone to the meeting. They don't want the whole police force. For that matter, they did not want the anti-riot unit or all the other units, and I agreed.

He describes the meeting:

I went there that evening and the chairman was quite a big Xhosa, very impressive man, and when I arrived at the school there was a very hostile atmosphere. Some of the scholars were sitting in the windows and others were shouting and toyi-toyiing. I looked at the chairman and I said, 'We're going to have trouble tonight?' And he said, 'No, you leave that to me.' I said, 'I came here by government vehicle without any support, and if they ruin that vehicle tonight I am in big shit, that I must tell you. That is going to be very difficult to explain to my headquarters why I did such a stupid deed.' He said, 'No, just leave that to me...' They were still shouting when he stood up and took the Bible, I remember that very well, and he said to all the scholars, 'Now we are going to read from the Bible...' Strangely enough, for almost quarter of an hour he read from the Bible and they were all quiet. After that he spoke to the parents. He said that I had come to address them with regard to all the problems that we have in that area, and especially in so far as the Ixhoba High School is concerned. I told the parents that they will have to make a choice.

Either they are going to join the rest of the country to get involved in all the unrest, the damage, the problems. [Then] we have to arrest the students and in some cases there may be violence with all the consequences. Or they decide that they...take hold of their children, discipline them. We will do what we can to protect them, but we need their support. They all agreed. I remember very well that one black man got up and he said well, he works for a Van der Merwe; he said they are very hard people to work for, but at least you can believe them.

Johan describes his further involvement with the school:

During the examinations I told my men to go and supervise...because the black teachers were afraid. They won't come and do the supervision and I sent my men to do it. It was obvious that there was such a lack of competent teachers in the black schools... When they received the various examination papers it was obvious that they did not even have a clue what some of the questions meant and my men had to explain it to them – quite contrary to the normal rules. They had to explain to them what certain questions mean to enable them to go on. In any case, we managed to get through without real serious problems.

Despite some incidents of sabotage at a few schools, Johan believes they 'steered clear from the whole unrest period in the Free State'. He is convinced that his close contact with the parents and their trust in him were the determining factor in curbing the unrest.

We had very close contact with them almost on a daily basis. They knew this and I think they trusted us. I think that trust was the main element. But I must also say that these parents were from a different era. One problem that we had was that there were many children without parents... Many of the parents were working in Johannesburg or other places and there was no parental discipline and in these cases we had some problems. But in general, I would say the mere fact that we had close contact with them, that they trusted us and that we were prepared to assist them, was more or less the crux of the matter.

### SOUTH WEST AFRICA

In December 1979, Johan was transferred to the then South West Africa, where he took command of all the Security Branches in the country, including Ovambo, the Kavango, Katimo Mulilo and Walvis Bay. He remained there for three years and describes it as 'perhaps the most interesting period of my life'.

That was also the time when the terrorist war in Namibia was at its peak...

We had the situation where SWAPO was more or less posing a very serious threat in Ovambo, they had infiltrated Ovambo, they were also in a stage where they infiltrated the Kavango and they were on the point of infiltrating

the Kaokoland. That is the Herero domain. That is also the stage when we established Koevoet.<sup>7</sup>

He outlines the purpose of Koevoet:

Originally [its purpose was] to establish an intelligence network. When they arrested members of SWAPO, they had to [be] interrogate[d] and the Defence Forces was not trained to do so... They did not have the capability to sway their way of thinking to persuade them to join the security forces. In the course of time, quite a significant number of SWAPO fighters joined Koevoet and eventually Koevoet mainly consist of previous SWAPO fighters who have been persuaded to work for us. After Namibia became a republic, most of the SWAPO fighters who had joined Koevoet, fled to the RSA for refuge. We had to accommodate large numbers of the previous Koevoet members who left the ranks of SWAPO. I think there were about 70 or 80 former SWAPO members who fled to the RSA. It was also Koevoet's task to win the confidence of the local people and to establish a network of informers all over Ovambo. To make use of informers was something in which we were well trained, and Defence lacked that.

According to Johan, some of the SWAPO fighters who joined Koevoet were expert trackers: 'They have a capability of tracking which is almost inhuman.' They could identify and follow the faintest spoor, and this skill was utilised to track down SWAPO insurgents. Gradually Koevoet's role changed and eventually it became one of the most formidable fighting units, specifically skilled in techniques acquired during the bush war.

At the time Johan assumed his duties in South West Africa, Dirk Mudge and the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) had just won the 1978 elections with a landslide victory. SWAPO did not participate in the elections. P.W. Botha ordered that a task team of five people be set up to determine what support SWAPO enjoyed. Johan was part of this team.

For a whole 40 days we travelled all over the country, especially Ovambo, the Kavango and Katimo Mulilo, where we conducted interviews with SWAPO activists. Also the other parties, but mainly SWAPO activists. At that stage I also became convinced of the difference between the way we are seeing things and the way the black men are seeing things. One thing which actually came to the fore...was...that the majority of them supported SWAPO for traditional reasons. It was their party, they established it, and they therefore supported SWAPO. Most of them agreed with us that there was no way that SWAPO could govern the country in the same competent way as the present government. They all agreed with us... [Nevertheless], they wanted a SWAPO government, [even] if that meant that they will have to accept the outcome and the consequences may be negative – so be it... After the 40 days during which we interviewed many, many persons – I would say hundreds of people – we came to the conclusion that there was no way that the democratic parties stood a chance of winning the elections and we said so.

Towards the end of 1980, a detailed report to this effect was sent to P.W. Botha. We reported that to P.W. Botha during 1980 and that document is still available... The Defence Force was completely against the report. They rejected the complete report. They said that was a lot of nonsense. To put it mildly, a lot of nonsense. But in any case the report was there and eventually the Defence Force persuaded P.W. Botha to disregard the report – put it away – ‘It should not influence you in your thinking as far as the future is concerned’... When they started the elections in Namibia during the beginning of the 90s, we pointed out to the government again...there is no way that the democratic parties can win the elections. Dr Jannie Roux said to them, ‘Here is the report, you can look through it, there is no way the democratic parties can win the election’, but...there was no other option at that stage.

Johan was struck by the relationships between the various groups in South West Africa/Namibia:

One thing which I experienced in Namibia, and that was that your people there, the various groups are very well disposed towards [each other]... The Ovambo people, they are a little bit more difficult I would say, but the Hereros are very easygoing. You have got the Damaras...also...well disposed towards the other groups. You have got the Basters, and they call themselves the Basters, and they are very proud. One should not try to call them anything else. You have the Basters, the Coloureds and Namas and then obviously the white people... There is a substantial German group amongst them and I was surprised to hear how many black people speak German fluently. One thing which struck me immediately...was the general friendly atmosphere of well-being between the various groups in Namibia, quite different to South Africa. No hostility whatsoever. I was quite amazed when I came there and came into contact with the various groups. The kind of aggression one normally finds when one deals with the various groups in South Africa – none of that in Namibia.

Besides the temperament of the people, the nature of the armed struggle also differed radically from the South African conflict and the SAP members had to adapt their training. Besides those involved in Koevoet, other SAP members were sent to the operational areas ‘on a three-month basis’ to support the Defence Force, which ‘lacked the numbers to contain the whole situation’. The training therefore had to include a greater emphasis on anti-terrorist work, how to act in close contact war situations and ‘dealing with the weaponry involved’.

We were engaged in a bloody war in Namibia. There, SWAPO guerrillas came in groups and they engaged in fighting with the security forces. They tackled them and...quite a number of [SWAPO combatants] were killed. Obviously they also conducted sabotage, assassination and other kinds of acts, but there was war for all practical purposes... It was a case of ‘kill or be killed’. It is not a case where you can raid any person as in the normal civil police function...

The normal way of policing of arrest and taking the perpetrator to court is non-existent in operations. This had a great effect on...the minds of policemen who were subjected to these circumstances.

At the time, the security forces had special powers.

We had extensive legal powers to arrest and detain people. We had Proclamation AG 9 of 1977 and AG 26 of 1978 published by the Administrator General and we had the one advantage there that if we need any additional legal powers in terms of these proclamations, we just went to the Administrator General and it was proclaimed. So we had almost unlimited legal powers in South West... That is the one reason why the situation in South West developed in a completely different way than we had in South Africa, because the circumstances were so different.

In addition, they had better relationships with SWAPO leaders and members than they had with opposition parties in South Africa.

In Zambia, Namibia we had very close relations with SWAPO members as well as SWAPO leaders. We were engaged in a bloody war in the normal activities, but we dealt with SWAPO leaders. There was a certain Bishop Dumeni, he was considered to be the chief of the ELOC [Evangelic Lutheran Ovambo Church]...in Ovambo, that is the main, large church group. I had discussions with him on various occasions regarding certain matters, detentions, problems, et cetera. Whenever we had a problem [relating to his congregation] we went to him. At a certain stage Dr Gerrit Viljoen asked if it is possible for us to arrange a meeting with Bishop Dumeni, because Dumeni was regarded by the Defence Force, the government, as one of the main threats, and I agreed. Bishop Dumeni invited us for dinner at his place. We discussed SWAPO; although he was a strong SWAPO supporter...yet a very reasonable person. There was no way anyone would convince him to do anything that is not in the interest of SWAPO, yet a very reasonable person, and we got along very well.

### BACK TO THE REPUBLIC

After three 'most wonderful years', 'an experience I would not miss...for all the money in the world', Johan left Namibia and returned to 'the Republic' in March 1983. He was transferred to Pretoria, where he made his way up the ranks; first as second in charge of the Security Branch, then Head of Security, then Deputy Commissioner and finally, in 1990, Commissioner. He remained in this position until he retired in 1995.

As Head of the Security Branch in 1986 – 'the height of political unrest activities' – they 'had some very serious problems in trying to contain the security situation'.

During 1983 when I came back from Namibia it was obvious to me...that the obsession of the government to maintain the image that we are in a normal

society where we can deal with all the violence and unrest by means of normal legislation, was creating a unbearable situation. In 1983, the United Democratic Front was established and they succeeded to mobilise almost all the black people all over [the] country. They started to use them for civil disobedience which caused widespread unrest, to give effect to the policy of the ANC, to make the country ungovernable. They succeeded to a large extent, and they have also succeeded, more or less, to persuade these people to disobey government structures in black townships. All the various structures were affected and most of them destroyed.

They monitored the situation during 1985 and Johan subsequently had a report compiled to inform the government that they could not deal with the situation without additional legislative powers.

We submitted that report to the Minister of Police, at that stage Louis le Grange, who is deceased now. The report was signed by General Schutte, the head of the Security Branch and countersigned by General Johan Coetzee, the Commissioner of Police. I offered to accompany [them] to the Minister, but General Coetzee said, 'No, you will get us all fired.' Shortly afterwards General Schutte and I were summoned to the office of General Coetzee, who told us that Minister Le Grange was furious and almost blew his top when he received the report.

General Schutte reported back to Johan.

He told me that minister Le Grange spent more than an hour to rebuke them, and on each page where we had criticised the government for not taking steps, he said, 'You don't mean the government, you mean Louis Le Grange.' Minister Le Grange gave the report back to them and ordered them to destroy it. He said there is no way that they are going to give us more powers than we already had, and that there is no way that he is going to give that report to P.W. Botha, that would destroy him. I told Generals Coetzee and Schutte that we are not going to destroy the report. Coetzee was also rather upset, and he said that all of us are going to be in trouble. I said that the country is going down the drain, and there is no way we can leave it as it is.

The situation deteriorated and, during 1985, the government was compelled to declare a state of emergency. It was lifted in 1985, but in 1986 they again had to declare a state of emergency.

In 1986 they declared a complete state of emergency all over the country, and they gave us certain legislative powers which enable[d] us to take certain steps, but at that stage it was rather late in the struggle, because the masses all over the country were already in one way or other engaged in the struggle. The United [Democratic] Front succeeded in mobilising the masses. When we started to apply the emergency regulations we had to detain more than 40 000 persons originally, but it was also obvious that that had a negative influence. If one detains a person who was not really involved, he soon became involved on his release – that we learned from very hard experience.

He describes the problems with the detentions:

So from the outset I said to my members to make sure that whenever they detain a person, they had sufficient information that he was in fact involved. It was a difficult situation, because we had to rely on informers for our information, some of them reliable, and some of them unreliable. If we detain a person, he had the right to go to court, and then we had to disclose in court the reasons for his detention. Most times the informers are so close to the detainee that when we disclose in court our reasons for detention, the detainee would immediately know whom the informer is. This was one of the main problems, and that was also the time they started the necklacing of people, and I think they killed more than 500 of our informers that way. The moment that there was the slightest suspicion that a person was (as they called them) a collaborator, they killed such a person immediately.

A further dilemma was posed by the number of children utilised in the struggle. Subsequent to the Soweto uprising in 1976

children proved to be a most destructive weapon in the hands of the ANC. In later years, especially from 1986, they used children from 11, 12, 13 years, because it was difficult for us to act against these children. If we detain them, we had serious problems locally and internationally, and the mere fact that they were involved in the most gruesome, dreadful murders did not make any difference. In many of these cases we had videos, and we showed that to the TRC as well. We have videos of children of 12, 13, 14 dancing around a person they have set alight, and they were kicking him, and stoning him while he was alive, he was shouting and crying, that person. These were not isolated cases. There were many of these cases, more than 500, so it was difficult for us to get informers to assist us. We detained a person when they were found actively involved in promoting violence, unrest and other activities. The moment we did that, we had problems with his family and with various other matters.

Johan told the then Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, that 'detaining people did not work', because eventually they had to release them. 'So we told him he had to come up with another political solution to assist us.' However, P.W. Botha was 'adamant that we continue, saying there was no other way to deal with these matters'. It became increasingly difficult to 'protect the public'.

Insurgents infiltrated in small groups and although we had informers in the high ranks of the ANC, one could not rely on the instructions given by the commanders to the foot soldiers. They seldom followed those orders and that was quite a problem...and in most of the cases they made their own plans after leaving their base. Contrary to Namibia where SWAPO combatants engaged in skirmishes with security forces, members of MK avoided contact with security forces and made use of assassinations, acts of sabotage, limpet mines, landmines and car bombs. We had serious problems to deal with such situations in the Republic at such a large scale...

The police also did not have the support of civilians, which complicated their task and made it difficult to recruit informers.

We protected people who did not want to be protected by us. The man on the street...the large majority supported the ANC. They did not want violence or unrest; they wanted to go on with their daily lives. Emotional issues, but also intimidation influenced them... There were incidents when the man on the street came forward to assist us and to help us, and ask for our protection. It is not a mere matter that all of them regarded the police as their enemy, but eventually, yes, they were influenced by the situation and the others. We had real problems to get co-operation from the majority of the black people. To get informers to assist us, and to deal with the whole situation in such a way that we can contain the unrest and violence.

#### PROTECTING OUR PEOPLE

Johan saw the role of the police under the previous government as follows:

As far as the previous government is concerned...the police force was there to protect them. To prevent the ANC and other organisations to take over the country by force. Also to enforce law and order and so that the image of the government is promoted, so that they could claim that they have matters under control; that was very important to them. For us it was important to maintain law and order to protect our people. I think that was the main drive for us as a Security Branch, to protect our people.

Although they worked hard to do so, they were hampered by the political situation and were often blamed for not succeeding.

We worked day and night to achieve our aim, and I think most of the incidents that occurred, flowed from that. On the one hand we had to deal with the consequences of a terrorist war – limpet mines, landmines and car bomb explosions in which defenceless people, including women and children, were killed or maimed... The police force as such was blamed by the politicians, media, churches, and by every member of the community. They were blamed because they failed to protect the community. When things like that happened, the media and the churches asked, 'What is the SAP doing to protect the people? To prevent the ANC from taking over the government by force?'

According to Johan, the police did not take a political position; their job was merely to maintain law and order.

As far as the other political issues are concerned, we look at them from a point of how it affects the maintaining of law and order. We did not decide which political option was the best for the country, because that is not our task, and I do not think any of us would venture into something like that...

The main issue was how do we maintain law and order in a society with all these problems, and with all these political issues at stake? How do we ensure that all the matters of society are taken care of?

### FRUSTRATING TIMES

As the commander of the Security Branch of the SAP, the mid-80s was a taxing period for Johan.

The political situation was very tense during 1985. It was becoming more and more clear that we had to implement certain drastic measures. The government, on the other hand, held the opinion that they should relax certain security measures, giving the impression that we are, for all practical purposes, dealing with crime, and not a terrorist war, as it actually was at that stage. It caused quite a lot of tension between the Security Branch and the government. The government was determined to deny all activists and insurgents the status of soldiers, guerrillas or freedom fighters and insisted that as far as possible, ordinary legislation should be used to curb their activities.

This coincided with the ANC's change of target.

It was also during the period that the ANC/SACP alliance and other organisations engaged in the armed struggle realised that they were not making any headway... These organisations were becoming more desperate and at the Kabwe conference,<sup>8</sup> which was held by the ANC/SACP alliance during 1985, they decided that the distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' targets should disappear. This decision had very serious consequences for the general public, and it was obvious to all of us that there was only one solution and that [is] a political solution.

Over 40 000 people were arrested during the 1985 and 1986 states of emergency. Yet, if anything, this simply fuelled the unrest.

The most frustrating of it all was that the government expected the security forces and the police to crush this war, but within the ambit of the law, or otherwise to find ways if they could not do it within the law. They were not prepared to commit themselves in hard reality to certain actions but, on the other hand, in a subtle manner, tell or demand that the police should take certain action to crush the war. The police should either arrest or get rid of all activists. That is where the Defence Force also came into the picture. We were all part of the National Management System, and it was largely dominated by the Defence Force.

During this time there were significant tensions between the police and the military within the National Management System. The military actually lived in a different world, whilst...we had to deal with hard realities from day to day. We had to face certain consequences as a result of certain

actions taken and decisions made by the government... Plans that actually came from the Defence Force were not feasible... And that is why members of the SAP started acting outside the ambit of the law. Plans invented by various committees were of such a nature that it could never be implemented... The demands from the government and from other instances made it almost unbearable for them to deal with the situation. As a result of that many of them decided to take some action, whatever the consequences may be.

They decided that the only way to curb the violence was 'to persuade a number of black persons to co-operate' with them. According to Johan, they 'succeeded to obtain the co-operation of quite a significant number of the black communities'. This led to a 'drastic' reaction from the ANC and the UDF.

They started driving out black policemen from the black townships.

These policemen and their families became hard targets. In some townships they succeeded to drive these policemen out and in many cases we had to accommodate our black policemen at police stations, or otherwise secure the areas where they were staying to protect them. Many of these policemen and even their families were killed. This caused a problem for the police, because we could not afford to protect our policemen. They were also not available for police duties, because to protect them, they had to stay at home.

Informers met with the same fate.

Even when there was only the slightest suspicion [that someone worked with the police], they killed such a person by means of the necklace method or burned or stoned them to death. Many people – even some of our informers – died in such a way. It caused a very serious problem. Obviously it was a vicious circle, so we had to react. In many cases the counteractions taken by the members of the security forces were also of a drastic nature.

The period between 1986 and 1988 was enormously difficult. 'During these years a large number of policemen were killed and a large number of terrorist incidents occurred.' Although P.W. Botha was 'already considering other options', he was 'not prepared to talk to the ANC or Mandela if they were not prepared to end the violence'. When De Klerk took over the presidency in 1989, 'he had to start a new direction in South Africa'. However, 'he did not consult with the security forces and I think he...made up his mind that he is going to make some radical changes as far as the future of South Africa is concerned'.

According to Johan, they 'all supported the new direction' F.W. de Klerk took on 2 February 1990. He realised that the 'new direction' would not succeed if they could not maintain law and order. The process was threatened by 'strong opposition' from the 'right wing supporters' and 'violent clashes' in black communities 'to increase their power bases'. Despite these challenges, he believes the SAP executed their task well.

I have no doubt in my mind that the SAP played a major role where the new dispensation is concerned. If it was not for the...way they dealt with the

situation at the time, there was no way that everything would have been so peaceful as it has been. In the black communities...the various political parties had to establish a power basis. Tensions actually arose, and we had even more violence during that period than we had the previous years. Now I am aware of the fact that in many cases they blamed the so-called 'third force', but I hope...that at this stage they are well aware of the fact that that was a struggle for power that eventually developed between the black political parties. Trying to obtain political power, and not hesitate to obtain their objectives.

### THE 1990s

Johan believes that during the early 1990s there was a change regarding the government's knowledge and handling of security within the country:

I would say that Mr De Klerk was not well informed as to security matters, the matters he normally dealt with were more educational, and of the other departments which he...had to deal with. I think that was the main reason why after Mr De Klerk succeeded Mr Botha, he distanced himself to a certain extent from the previous government. Mr De Klerk's understudies then became his ministers, like Dawie de Villiers and others who were never really part of the National Security Council under the command of Mr Botha.

According to Johan, De Klerk chose his Cabinet carefully, so as to exclude people who were close to P.W. Botha. Consequently Roelf Meyer 'became chairman of the National Management System for a while' and people such as Magnus Malan and Hendrik Schoeman 'did not play a major role' in De Klerk's Cabinet.

Mr Kobie Coetsee was Minister of Defence at that time. According to Johan, he was notorious for complicating matters and confusing people. Johan cites an example of 'security planning' regarding the former Transkei. They discussed four options, three of which entailed taking over the Transkei by force. Johan had to leave the discussions early and asked André Pruis (a brigadier at that time) to inform him of the outcome. The next day Pruis reported that they had decided to keep 'a watchful eye on the situation', but not to take immediate steps.

About nine o'clock that morning I received a telephone call from General Kat Liebenberg [Chief of the Defence Force] who asked anxiously, 'What is going on! Where are your men who were suppose to accompany me to the Transkei?' I asked, 'Why?' He said the meeting had decided on the option to take over the Transkei by force and that his army was on their way there. I told him that [I] had received a completely different report back from André Pruis... I immediately went to look for Minister Coetsee and I found him on his way to Parliament. I told him [what had happened]. He turned pale and said that there must be some misunderstanding and started running back to his office. I followed him. He phoned General Kat Liebenberg and told him to

come to his office immediately. When General Liebenberg entered his office Minister Kobie Coetsee immediately said, 'General, there must be a misunderstanding, the meeting did not decide on this option that you are carrying out.' General Liebenberg responded furiously, saying to Minister Coetsee, 'Minister, there can be no misunderstanding; you told me emphatically that the meeting decided on the option to take over the Transkei by force.'

Minister Coetsee did not pursue this point, but asked General Liebenberg whether it was possible for him to call back his army. General Liebenberg said it was impossible, as they already incurred thousands of rands of expenses. He said that he would change the operation to one of manoeuvres on the Transkei border. This incident is only one of many where Minister Coetsee, albeit with good intentions, confused the whole issue. At many an occasion after a meeting chaired by Minister Coetsee, General Kat Liebenberg used to ask me, 'What the hell did the meeting decide?' with the usual reply, 'Only Minister Coetsee will be able to tell you.' It was very difficult to understand what exactly he was driving at during various meetings.

#### NEGOTIATING AMNESTY

In Johan's view, Kobie Coetsee also 'confused the whole amnesty process'. At the beginning he was seemingly prepared to grant amnesty to all, but he 'started with such a complicated process that it was met with resistance by all parties'.

At a certain stage Mr André Bosch, one of his legal advisors, approached him and said to him, 'Minister, it is never going to work that way, because you are confusing the whole issue. Why don't you just grant general amnesty, and agree with the ANC in this respect?' Minister Coetsee, however, refused and said to Mr Bosch that he does not know what he was talking about.

That was more or less his attitude, although I must concede that it was a very complicated situation. At that stage also there were still a large number [of] arms caches belonging to the ANC in South Africa, which they were unwilling to expose to us, and there was the danger that the ANC may engage in violent action again. Operation Vula,<sup>9</sup> that was eventually exposed by the security police, confirmed this danger. However, the ambitions of Minister Coetsee to secure his own position wrecked the whole amnesty process.

He believes Coetsee 'lacked the capability of making decisions':

I don't know whether he had ever taken any clear-cut decision in my presence... A decision of his was always of such a nature that it could be interpreted in various ways, not in one clear way... I believe that this also had an impact on the issue of collective responsibility. Mr De Klerk was never unwilling to accept collective responsibility for what occurred during the governing of the National Party government. But once again it was Mr Kobie

Coetsee and some of his colleagues that were strongly opposed to this, arguing that they are only prepared to take responsibility for actions they were involved in and they had approved. Now obviously, in our complex situation, there are no such actions, obviously not.

Johan explains how he understands the previous government's lack of accountability:

The whole concept was always that something that is being done outside the ambit of the law, should be done in such a way that it could never rebound to the government of the day... This is not only so in our country, but in all the countries of the world where any of their security forces engage in activities which are outside the law. They always did it in such a way that it could never be related to the government of the day. I think that was general policy. [This is] why it was possible for the members of the previous government to deny involvement in these incidents. These matters were dealt with in such a subtle manner, that it was impossible to relay accountability to any member of the Cabinet, with the exception of Mr Adriaan Vlok. Mr Wessels said in his evidence to the TRC that they preferred to be ignorant, because it was not in their interest to know what was really happening. There was a war to crush and an enemy to eliminate and the less they knew about the means utilised, the better for them.

While members of the security forces 'were prepared to expose themselves to the consequences of certain actions in the interest of the government of the day', they expected to be protected in some way.

I also assume that the security forces cannot expect that government should come forward in a case where they have acted outside the law, and do so openly. To expect that would be very stupid of any government, but in their minds they would think that the government would use its influence to protect them. In our case, what we never considered, is the day may come that the government was no longer in charge, and it was no longer there, one way or the other, to exercise that influence, and that is where our problems started. It is very difficult now to distinguish who should be blamed, because there was never a clear understanding that if a new government should be in control of this country, we, as a previous government, would come forward and assist or support you, and try to protect you.

Johan believes the rapid changes and some degree of mismanagement led to the confusion and mutual blame witnessed during the amnesty process:

When things changed quite rapidly, I don't think anybody was really ready for the change. I don't think even today, if one should talk to Mr De Klerk or even the other ministers, they in their own minds are not clear what they really should have done. I think Mr De Klerk admitted that some way or other they failed the security forces. Also, I don't think they can explain what they could have done to assist the security forces. Yes, I think it is a situation

unique in itself, and for that reason no one prepared himself for this situation, and at the time when we were dealing with various matters, no one considered consequences in a new dispensation, and for that reason we eventually ended up with a confused situation. The one blaming the other, and maybe not always in fairness.

#### INDEPENDENCE, LAW AND ORDER

Johan continues to believe that the police's primary role is to maintain law and order:

Only one thing, there is only one objective, and that is to maintain law and order. Act strictly according to the law. No other objectives, no other considerations... The task of the police service is to protect the community, but you can only do so if one maintains law and order. I think that is one thing, which at this stage perhaps is a problem in our present society, and that is the lack of proper control as far as law and order is concerned.

He also believes the police should be 'as independent as possible':

[Their role] is sometimes confused or depressed by some government actions, pressure and influences... A policeman should never be used in any other capacity; it is not up to any human being to adapt in one way to be a soldier, and within a very short period to fulfil the role of a person quite contrary to what is expected of a soldier, which is to maintain law and order, to use minimum force. One must immediately realise when it comes to war, the duty of a soldier is to use maximum force. To kill or be killed, to shoot whenever the enemy is in sight. Whilst in the case of the policeman, it is quite the opposite, a matter of minimum force to protect, and to use only where there is no other choice. I don't think the human mind can absorb that contrast... Especially where certain emotive issues are involved, especially where from time to time they are subjected to certain emotional speeches, and where it is actually required of such a person to protect his country.

He feels that it is very difficult to accept that the same enemy, who could 'be killed on sight' in Namibia or Zimbabwe, must now be arrested and brought before the court. 'That kind of thing is impossible for the human mind to accept.' Even today, policemen find it difficult to defend themselves in circumstances of extreme violence (murder, bank robberies, hijackings) and still 'uphold the concept of minimum violence'.

#### A DECADE AFTER THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

Since his retirement Johan has participated extensively in the work of the TRC's Amnesty Committee, providing contextual information as a former Police Commissioner and Head of the Security Branch. He has also been engaged with

the TRC as an amnesty applicant. Furthermore, Johan has been instrumental in setting up a trust for ex-SAP members, particularly former members of the Security Branch.

The aim of the trust is to render financial assistance or aid to these former members, but also to morally support them. The trust is not only for former members of the Security Branch, but for every policeman. For black policemen as well. At the moment we are assisting black members who have serious problems. We also have a 'League for ex-Police Officials' to assist our average policeman.

Johan firmly believes that the former security police structures are morally responsible for the plight of the many ex-members who committed themselves to the task of maintaining law and order under the apartheid regime:

Some people are completely disorientated, unable to deal with the present circumstances in a rational way. In many cases they are unable to arrange their affairs in a responsible way. There are some of them that are so disorientated that they are more or less bankrupt at this stage. We support them as far as we can, and they are receiving attention, but I cannot say at this stage that this is the solution yet. There are also the cases where amnesty has been refused and the former members must now approach the Supreme Court for revision. The financial implications in all these cases are substantial and we have limited resources at our disposal. Nonetheless, we have thus far succeeded to support them and we are determined to do so in future.

**'LIVING WITH DEATH'****THE STORY OF A FORMER KOEVOET OPERATIVE**

As a conscript John Deegan opted to join the SAP and was enlisted in the Security Branch. He later became a member of Koevoet. On 23 July 1997 he testified at the TRC's Conscription Hearings, one of a number of special hearings they held. His statement focused on his activities as a Koevoet commander. In his testimony he expressed remorse for all that he had done. He also voiced the wish to return to the communities in Namibia where he once operated to seek their forgiveness. John never applied for amnesty, believing that he does not deserve it: 'I do not wish to apply for amnesty until a court of law has decided my fate and I feel I must for the remainder of my life make amends and reparation in a real and meaningful way.'

It was a typical day at the TRC's offices in Cape Town. The conscription hearings, in which security force conscripts testified, were about to commence. As a briefer, I was assigned to a former Koevoet commander. It was my task to explain the proceedings to him and to ensure that he felt supported during the hearing and satisfied with the information he presented in his testimony.

Waiting in my office, I began to wonder what John would be like, a former commander of the notorious Koevoet. Before I had time to ruminate, a tall man with long curly hair, wearing a colourful home-knitted jersey, entered. I could not link the man in front of me to the story I had read of him the previous day. I explained the procedures and my role as his briefer. He was clearly relieved that he was not going to be left alone to tell his story to the Commission. While he had reservations about giving testimony, he believed it was an important step forward for him to say publicly what up to then had remained a secret.

Three years later – after months of trying to make contact with him – I discovered John was living on a friend's farm in the southern Cape. I phoned him, asking if he would be willing to be interviewed. He agreed and I made arrangements to visit him. John had been feeling extremely depressed, finding it difficult to get out of bed and 'thinking a lot about killing' himself. In consultation with him and his friend, we made arrangements for John to be admitted to a psychiatric hospital in Cape Town. He was hospitalised for three months and treated for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and depression.

**A 'VERY UNEVENTFUL' CHILDHOOD?**

John was born in 1961 in Johannesburg, the youngest of four children. His father was a transport manager and his mother a secretary. They 'moved around a bit' in his earlier years, and when he was seven they settled in Edenville. Although John describes his childhood as 'very uneventful', he had to deal with major losses:

Some of my earliest memories are of losing my grandfather first and then, not long after that, my grandmother and then my aunt, and then, at the age of 11, my mother passed away. That was a major turning point in my life. I felt quite cheated and it was quite a shattering experience. I missed her a great deal.

About six months after his mother died, his father remarried.

My stepmother was a very quiet, introverted kind of person, very unlike my mother. My mother was very outgoing, artistic and always busy with her hands, sewing or drawing or painting or doing something artistic. So I missed that aspect of her. I was also quite drawn to art and found quite a lot of pleasure in studying nature and small things in the garden, and after she passed away I still had an interest, but there was a huge lack of it.

When John was about 12 or 13, the family moved to Pietermaritzburg. John and his older brother were the only two children still at school. John struggled to adapt to the new environment.

I found [it] quite traumatic, because it was an all boys school with heavy tradition and based along the lines of an English public school, and I had quite a lot of problems fitting in... Because I did not have any friends at the time, I concentrated quite a lot on my studies and found I was getting firsts and seconds in the class.

John's father had been in the police in Kenya and there were always guns around the house. On special occasions he would let them clean his guns. John had his first shotgun when he was 14. It was licensed in his brother's name, but he bought it.

I was brought up almost with a gun in my hand... I was vice-captain of the shooting team, so shooting seemed like it was second nature to me. It was something I enjoyed and something that sort of focused me, and it was something that I could do well.

By standard nine he had made more friends and his schoolwork started suffering, as he was going to parties on weekends and getting drunk. At one stage John wanted to go to the art and ballet school in Johannesburg, but 'that was for moffies and gays' and his father strongly disapproved. By matric he was considering becoming a commercial artist, but his father still did not approve.

He didn't see any future in it for me and his ambition...for his sons was to follow in his interest in the police force. He had been a policeman from 1947 to 1951 when he married my mother and then he resigned from the police force. But he has always been a police reservist. So he wanted us to follow in his footsteps. My older brother did that and when my next oldest brother left the school, he joined the police force for his national service and the same was expected of me. I was going through quite a rebellious stage as teenagers do and I was determined not to go to the police.

John finished matric in 1977, but since he was only 16 years old, he was too young to join the Army. He went to Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) with his brother, where he worked on a farm for three months. Since it was the time of the bush war, he was very isolated on the farm and had no young people with whom to socialise. He felt homesick and decided to return home.

### JOINING THE POLICE

He went to stay with his parents, who had in the meantime moved back to Johannesburg. Given that his matric results were not very good, 'there was no question of going to study... It was going to be the police force, or, if I could get my own way, go to the Army'. His family started putting pressure on him to join the police force. Since he was living off pocket money from his father, they eventually convinced John that four years in the police force, instead of two years of conscription in the Army, would be the better option, as he could simultaneously be earning a salary. 'By the time I was 20 I would be out and I could be whatever it is that I decided I would be.' He 'finally relented' and with the help of his father, he joined the Security Branch at John Vorster Square as a Student Constable in April 1978. His eldest brother, also a security policeman, worked there too, on the infamous tenth floor.<sup>10</sup>

John initially worked in the Records Department of the Security Branch. He had 'no real interest in becoming a policeman', and thought he could hold on to 'the real person...the sensitive idealist' in him and 'still work through this national service thing'. In June 1978, he underwent six months of training at the Police College in Pretoria. Despite a few 'personality clashes' with the officers and sergeants, his training was 'basically' an 'uneventful' experience. In December of that year he was posted back to the Security Branch at John Vorster Square. He worked in the investigation squad, the '*Blanke Seksie*' or 'White Section',

where we investigated white suspects, so-called enemies of the state. It was explained to me that what we were doing was combating terrorism and communism. That was the role of the Security Branch. We had to do this through recruiting informers, using other methods like telephone tapping, intercepting mail, observing people's movements, doing surveillance, following people, taking note of registration numbers and the comings and goings of the various people who we suspected were working against the government. I was a junior member of the whole set-up, so I was based under the wing of Paul Erasmus, who in later years, post-apartheid...testified before the Goldstone or Harms Commissions about alleged hit squad activities. So Paul Erasmus was basically a mentor and showed me the ropes, but the bulk of my work consisted of doing security clearances for key positions and job applications. I had to investigate job applicants, people who were vying for key...or sensitive positions in the government or parastatal organisations.

In his TRC confession, John describes the 'dirty tricks' of his unit:

I, along with others, would phone suspects' houses and pretend to be salesmen, insurance adjusters, post office technicians and the like in order to gain updated information. We could also order goods like truckloads of sand or coal to be delivered to their addresses. This would be out of a sense of having fun, but this form of harassment and intimidation often would take its toll on suspects, particularly those served with banning orders or under house arrest. I also heard that suspects' pets had been maimed or killed – this sickened me, as I had always loved animals and I really couldn't see the sense in this. Suspects' cars or houses were also attacked by shooting or by having paint remover smeared on them. I cannot say who was responsible for these acts or if these were just urban legends of the SB variety... Whether these techniques were officially sanctioned or not, they were certainly condoned on the basis that we did not get caught out.

Although the 'so-called enemy, the left' knew that this 'cloak and dagger stuff' was happening, 'the press was so controlled' that rumours were always squashed and officially denied.

At the end of 1979, John decided to apply for a transfer to Pietermaritzburg because of a girl he had kept in touch with since matric. In Pietermaritzburg he was based in 'a similar kind of section – white suspects'. While he had initially decided to study, he did not 'really fancy the idea of recruiting informers on the campus', since many of his schoolmates were studying there.

Anyway, I was on this section where we investigated activities of white suspects, and occasionally I helped out with the local bomb expert. We would go to bomb scares or bomb threats or suspicious parcels and that sort of thing... I was really just biding my time. It wasn't exciting and I always imagined that I could always keep myself separate from that culture. It was a culture that I did not enjoy. My father had a lot of his friends from his days back in 1947... He was at Police College, plus the fact that he was a reservist all those years, and I did not enjoy the people that they were.

While John felt uncomfortable in the 'very closed culture' of 'braaivleis [and] rugby', he made a few friends in the Security Branch and was invited to 'some parties and braaivleis' and slowly started becoming 'part of that'.

A year later John decided to go back to John Vorster Square, partly to get away from his girlfriend's father, whom he believed to be 'quite jealous' of their relationship. This time he was stationed in the Anti-Terrorist Squad.

We would have this big walk-in safe full of docket and these documents were opened every time somebody left the country, supposedly for military training, but it could have been for anything. It was basically docket opened for people leaving the country illegally... We had to...take these docket and then go into Soweto or Alexandra townships and to these people's addresses

and keep following up and see if we could catch them and find them once they had come back, supposedly as trained terrorists or communists. I was on that section for about six months. I found it quite heavy going. We would work from about midnight until sun up the next day and it was quite seedy.

He describes their task:

There were teams of us who would go out in these cars and in plain clothes, armed with shotguns or machine guns, and we would go in about three or four vehicles, surround a house in the middle of the night and invariably we would knock on the door... In the early hours of the morning people were frightened to open their doors, and then the doors would be kicked in and the windows smashed in... [We] went into the house and searched and found out who everybody was and...I did not enjoy it at all. We used to frighten children, women and small kids. It was pretty scary for them to see these strangers with guns in their house in the middle of the night. But...I was slowly becoming a part of that culture and I think I was becoming hardened to that kind of thing.

#### 'A BIT OF AN ADVENTURE'

Towards the end of 1980 a telex came from Pretoria asking for volunteers to go to South West Africa.

We could volunteer for a three-month stint on the border for the Security Branch up there... It sounded like a bit of an adventure and [a] nice getting away kind of ploy, because my girlfriend and I were having hassles, probably because we were staying at my parents' place. I'd always been interested in doing something unconventional anyway, and I thought, well, this is it. This is my chance to get out of this and get into the bush. I'd always been into the outdoors, nature...and I put my name down on the list.

Although the applicants were supposed to have done counter-insurgency training at the Groblersdal base before they were allowed into the operational area, John's father again 'pulled a few strings' and he was sent to Ondangwa. Arriving in Ondangwa 'was quite a shock'.

It was quite a desert-like place – extremely hot, temperatures always in the 30s. In November it was summer and very hot and it was like stepping out into a war zone. There were helicopters that escorted the aeroplane in, gun placements all around and towers around the airfield and just a lot of military activity, vehicles and people up and down and things were really busy. We were collected in bakkies and taken up to Oshakati to the Security Branch offices. We were met by the branch commander there, a colonel and his staff, the Security Branch officers... They were all dressed in bush gear and they looked quite gung-ho, quite impressive. Anyway, after a welcoming speech they said we must go and unpack and settle ourselves in and we would start

the next day. That night we were introduced to the social life of Oshakati, which I got to know quite intimately in later years or actually, almost from the beginning and that...consisted of getting completely drunk in the local police canteen.

Due to his lack of 'bush training', John was kept in town, 'which was quite disappointing' because he wanted to be 'out in the bush with the other gung-ho types'. On his second day, he was introduced to 'the realities of the Ovamboland and being on the border'.

I was sitting there on the veranda with some of the younger Security Branch guys and this truck pulled in. I had heard stories of basically what was expected of us and what our duties were and our duties were to investigate the terrorist kind of activity, to gather information on SWAPO or ANC activities and also investigate murders that were committed by so-called terrorists. While we were sitting on the stoep, this huge Bedford arrived and these policemen called us and we went to see what the excitement was... I looked down the tailgate of the truck and there was this huge pile of bodies in the back. Black. I couldn't believe the unbelievable stench. Flies. I think there were 13 bodies piled in on top of each other. I was told that they had been shot in contact from the operational area and what we had to do was to take these bodies off the truck and fingerprint these corpses, fingerprint them, take photos of their faces (those who were shot away you would not recognise them and there was nothing you could do about that). But I still remember the old hands taking great delight in showing off how callous they were in the way they dealt with these bodies. Complete lack of respect... We had to load these bodies back onto the truck and...once we had finished fingerprinting and photographing, take them to a burial ground outside of the town, outside of Oshakati.<sup>11</sup>

They took the bodies to the Oshakati cemetery, where they found two empty graves.

The guys who were with me...a couple of them jumped on and started sort of throwing these bodies out again. Virtually throwing them out. One of them hit the ground and his head had been quite badly shot up and his brains splattered all over me. I even got some in my mouth. It splattered on the side of my face and I remember my stomach just turned over, just barely being able to keep my nausea...and of course the stench was very, very bad. I just followed what the others were doing. Took these bodies – six into one grave and seven into the other. We almost filled these graves up to the top and these guys were actually laughing every time they threw one in. Some were landing upside down, or on their heads, landing in all sorts of grotesque positions and that really, really flipped my mind. I was quite shattered, but of course being amongst that kind of group and the peer pressure, you can't let your guard slip or show squeamishness. You just had to grin and bear it.

**BLANKING OUT THE HORROR**

For the next three months John worked at the Security Branch offices in Oshakati. His job 'mainly involved...interrogating suspects who were brought in from the field by the field workers'. Although he had 'no direct hand in it', he was 'certainly part of, and witness to, interrogation where torture was used'. Since he had been in the Security Branch since 1978, the torture of suspects was not 'unknown' to him. 'I had seen interrogation techniques used both at John Vorster and Pietermaritzburg and it always left me feeling nauseated. I was also becoming hardened to that sort of thing and it became easier and easier to watch that kind of thing happen.'

The basic technique was to keep the person awake for as long as possible, sometimes days on end. We would work in shifts in order to achieve that... Keep the prisoner standing and then write down anything that was said by him. Obviously we were told what information...was needed from him and based on that...we would ask the relevant questions... [There were] usually two of us involved, sometimes only one of us at a time. If the prisoner had nothing to say or wasn't co-operating, we would just sit there and carry on with work while the prisoner would just stand in one spot.

He describes the various torture methods:

I saw them being beaten – physically beaten by the flat hand or fists – and kicked, all over their bodies. And I saw them having to stand in cold water and then in hot water and then in cold water and they would become disorientated and confused and obviously in pain as well from the beatings. I also witnessed the use of electric shocks, called the 'Luanda telephone' or 'phoning Luanda'... It is one of those old hand crank telephones which generates an electrical impulse when the handle was turned. Electrodes are placed on genitals, ear lobes or some part of the body with crocodile clips and then cranked up sometimes for quite a while and the prisoner just screams and carries on screaming in pain.

It was not unusual to hear the most terrible cries and screams coming from other offices down the passage.

I used to try and blank out some of the horror of what was happening around me, although at the time I wouldn't have admitted it. The culture of drinking was quite prevalent and it seemed to be the only sort of recreation available to us. There was a swimming pool in Oshakati and occasionally we saw a movie, but generally it was just drink, get drunk and carry on with work the next day.

Apart from escaping with alcohol, they could justify the horror as an inevitable part of their fight against 'communism and terrorism'.

That was why we were up there. We were protecting our families, our friends, our country from terrorism and so that was what sort of held us together. That was basically it. We were right in what we were doing. There was no

question about that. It was keeping the *swart gevaar* at bay. And the drinking and the *braaivleis* part of it was all part of the sort of male macho bravado kind of thing. That was the kind of culture...

According to John, this 'culture' propelled the process, despite the inner conflict many of them were experiencing. It was like being part of a family, 'and like in any family, certain things are expected of you, so we just acted accordingly'.

It was a very finely balanced thing of peer pressure, looking up to your elders and authority figures, and following in the traditions of what went before you, so it was all kind of difficult to question any of that. You were just part of that... We just went ahead and just did what we believed was right and although it did disturb me, it did not make me feel good to see people tortured, a part of me said, 'No, they deserved it and it was the right thing to do.' I can't ever say that I actually got to enjoy any of that.

#### 'I LIKED BEING ON THE BORDER'

Gradually John got to like being in the bush.

In my three months up there I decided that I liked being on the border. I liked the idea of being in the bush...although I didn't go out all that much. My plan was to put in for a transfer when I got back to John Vorster. I had already lined it up with the branch commander at Oshakati. I had spoken to him about coming back permanently on the basis that I would be sent out to a field base.

John got back to John Vorster Square in 1980, but returned to the border in 1981. He was based at Ombalantu. His fiancée, who had accompanied him, found an administrative job at the hospital. Although he generally spent the week at his base and only came to town for weekends, he still did not have 'much contact with the enemy', as 'that wasn't really the role of the Security Branch'.

#### MORE TORTURE

He describes one of the incidents during his time in the Security Branch:

At the beginning of 1981...my colleagues and I...spent about a week interrogating a teacher and a few other suspects. They were two brothers, in fact. One night...we were at the police canteen and some of the other guys were at the office. It was their shift on to interrogate these prisoners and we decided to pay them a visit. We were very drunk. We piled into this bakkie from the police canteen and we went back to the offices and we sat in on this interrogation. We went down to the end office and the two policemen who were interrogating this prisoner... It was evident that they had been beating him, because his face and his head was swollen up and he was in a lot of pain and I don't think at that point he could stand. He had been going for almost a

week now with interrogation. While we were sitting there, an explosion went off outside and the ceiling panels fell in and the lights fell in and more explosions. It was obvious that we were being rocketed. What transpired later was that it was actually 122 millimetre rockets that had been fired from about six kilometres away... When these bombs started going off, the guys just seemed to lose it completely and the one policeman started shouting, 'Now you see what your friends are trying to do? They are trying to kill us!' And he started kicking and punching at this man and we all joined in and I remember kicking this man once or twice. The others were sort of going for it more than I was. Then I am not quite sure how it stopped... We went outside after the bombardment had stopped and drove around a bit. The next morning a lieutenant said to us at the office, '*Julle het kak gemaak*' ('You guys caused shit'). We said, 'Why, what happened?' and he said he and another policeman and some others had to go out and bury this guy. He had actually died during the night as a result of his beating. I just remember my stomach flipping over and I just felt absolutely horrible. I felt very, very bad about what had happened... I had heard about people disappearing after interrogations before, but this was the first time I had ever been involved directly in something like that.

The prisoner's brother was defeated by his death.

I knew his brother was involved in the interrogation but I had never interrogated him, but I had seen him brought into the offices from the cells. About a week later he was sort of, what they call 'tamed', basically just completely finished and unable to resist or fight back or anything. He was allowed to walk around without being handcuffed. I remember seeing him as I passed him on the veranda. His face was swollen around the eyes and I could not bring myself to look into his eyes, as I felt responsible for his brother's death... Since then, even to this day, I have vivid nightmares about this man... It was the first time that I had really physically climbed in and got involved in that kind of mad, senseless sort of beating that sometimes happens in interrogations.

The incident did not evoke any official response.

As far as I know no charges were brought against us and no official inquiry was ever held... When I was told about his death, I was scared and realised that I was a murderer now, but the official lack of response to the incident made me realise that this had happened in reality before. I had gathered that deaths in detention had happened before, but had seen no evidence in this regard, and made the conclusion that the system had covered up the deaths.

He recalls 'other things' that happened on the base where they stayed:

Every now and then people were brought in for interrogation. Mainly people who...did not have what was called a *kopkaart* – an identity card – and who couldn't account for why they were at a certain place at a certain time. Again I

witnessed interrogations and I was part of interrogations, but never actually actively... To me it wasn't part of my nature I think to actually get into hitting or torturing people. I couldn't do it. There were certain people...it was apparent that they could do it and so it was left to them to do that part of the interrogations.

His other tasks included investigating a few landmine explosions and incidents where SWAPO had allegedly killed members of the local population.

It was fairly grizzly kind of work, going to kraals out in the bush and finding these bodies and having these bodies pointed out to us. They had usually been in the sun for a few days so the decomposition had set in and it was our job to go to the scene of the crime for investigations and then to take the body back to Oshakati...to the mortuary for burial. I never got used to the smell, especially the smell of the bodies. It was quite bad.

#### KOEVOET

Occasionally John had social contact with members of Koevoet. They looked up to the Koevoet members as the 'most effective people up there'. Although a few of them wanted to join Koevoet, they were not allowed to transfer from the Security Branch 'straight over' to Koevoet.

According to John, Koevoet started as a police operation (Operation Koevoet) in 1979.

The idea was to have white operators with black troops and something along the lines of the Selous Scouts or the Grey Scouts in Rhodesia... It evolved over a period of time. It was decided to extend the operation until eventually it just became known as Ops K or Koevoet and it became a fully-fledged unit, rather than just an operation. It was staffed by ex-members of the task force and some were also Recce-trained officers, like Eugene de Kock, Frans Conradie, the Du Plessis brothers, a few others like that. Mainly lieutenants and captains. So it was quite a prestigious thing to get into Koevoet. It was like this elite unit and I became interested in joining them, but my national service was coming to an end in 1982, so I decided I would just stay with the Security Branch and then leave as I had planned after completing my four years.

Although John 'managed to find some kind of satisfaction' in his work, he was determined to leave the police force.

Just being out in the bush was nice and not being under such heavy supervision by officers or anything. There was quite a sense of camaraderie between the other guys, Security Branch operatives and ourselves, but there was nothing that was going to hold me in the police force. My four years were coming to an end and I decided that I was going to try and get into the Parks Board.

As planned, John returned to the 'states' and joined the Natal Parks Board in the beginning of 1982. He and his fiancée were sent to St Lucia, where they spent almost eight months. According to John, it was 'probably one of the nicest jobs' he ever had. They had a lovely house and enjoyed being 'out in the bush'. Besides camp duty, they took tours up the estuary into Lake St Lucia, 'crocs and hippos, the whole trip'. However, John's interest was in conservation, not tourism, and he struggled with the tourists asking him 'stupid questions'. In general, he had difficulty relating to people, as he felt they were either too horrified to listen to what he had to say, or were apathetic about what was happening on the border. In addition, his relationship was going through a difficult patch. They were supposed to get married in August 1982, but John got cold feet. He was restless. A part of him wanted to be back in Ovamboland.

I kept on thinking about the guys that were still fighting up there and I knew what was going on and that it was really full out war, and I felt like a bit of a cheat being back in civilian life when all this was going on up on the border.

Not only did the border feel 'familiar and safe and...real', he also wanted to go back and prove himself.

Somehow I had this feeling that I had to go back...to the border and prove myself in some way. I had never been actually involved in an active contact with the enemy... My job was about information gathering and investigations. But I started thinking about going back there more and more... I wanted to go through that baptism of fire, to live the glory and that whole cliché of going up and fighting for your country.

'Just on impulse' he one day went to the Matubatuba police station and rejoined the police. He resigned from the Parks Board and in September 1982 he was on his way to join Koevoet. He joined a group called Zulu Yanky ('that was the call sign'). In November he 'organised to get a few days leave' and got married. He came 'straight back up' with his wife. 'No problems from their side. They actually preferred it... You were more stable if you had your wife up there.' She worked at the police station in Oshakati for the South West African Police 'doing typing and general clerical type work'. At the time John was 21 and his wife 20.

A few months later, John joined Zulu India, filling a vacancy left by the death of an operator during a contact. These groups consisted of 44 people: four group leaders, each with their own Caspir and a team of 10 Ovambos in each vehicle. In 1983 the groups totalled approximately 600 Ovambo troops and about 100 white policemen.

In John's view the primary objective of Koevoet was to

go out into the field and gather fresh information, not history. Anything a week old was just history, but fresh information, recent activity of SWAPO operatives in that area. To find them, through that information or following tracks and follow up and eliminate or capture them... We would capture

them for interrogation purposes, to obviously try and follow up and find out about arms caches or rendezvous points or infiltration routes or that kind of information.

Effectiveness in Koevoet was judged by the unit's kill rate. People like Eugene de Kock were seen as role models.

[He] was...the most popular, the most looked-up-to person. He had been there right from Koevoet's inception. As Operation Koevoet started, he was there. There was Frans Conradie, who was a lieutenant and ex-Recce. A very hard soldier, very professional person, very neat and a perfectionist. A very hard man, but his unit and De Kock's unit, their teams were the most effective out of all the teams. They had the highest kill rate, which was how your effectiveness was judged in Koevoet. They had the most contacts in their history and also when they actually actively deployed and went out into the bush, they always seemed to come back with a lot of kills under their belt. So it was Eugene de Kock, Frans Conradie...Piet Stassen, and a few of the other older hands who had been there for a few years. They were generally our role models and we looked up to them.

During his time in Koevoet, John was involved in two operations, both combined operations with the Army, both in Angola.

In that time, I think I found what I had been looking for. I came into contact with the enemy and it was what I expected and it was more than that. It was madness, actually, and at no time can I say that I wasn't scared. I think it is true for anyone who was up there. I don't think you ever get used to being shot at or being in a battle-like situation, although you become experienced and you become possibly better at what you do... If we weren't in a contact situation every time we went into the bush, there was always that expectation that you might be ambushed and might be shot at or go over a landmine or something. So there was that constant living with death. After a while, we kind of switched off to that and became almost fatalistic about it. If it happened, it happened and if we died, so be it.

Living with danger and death became addictive.

The amount of adrenaline that we were producing on a daily level, constantly aware that we could die or be wounded at any moment... Having that adrenaline pumping, we became adrenaline junkies... It became like a drug to me, to go out there and follow up on those tracks... [It is] almost a sexual kind of stimulation. Not physical sexual, but a mental sexual. I don't know if that makes sense, but the analogy of this is that you find the tracks, which is like foreplay, start getting excited, you know the dangers ahead, you follow up on the tracks. It might take hours and hours and eventually it starts building up to a climax. And then the contact being the actual climax and it is this complete exhilaration, complete exhilaration during that contact. You feel incredibly powerful at that time. It's really difficult to describe that moment.

They have tried to portray it in movies and books and that, but I think you actually have to be involved in something like that before you will understand it. It is completely exhilarating knowing that you are facing death and at the same time you are dealing out death. At the same time you are shooting back and you are being shot at and you don't know what is going to happen at that time. So that's where everything climaxes and your adrenaline levels are so high, that you are actually high as a kite... Immediately after the contact it would be very quiet and like a definite end to it and then ever so slowly would start coming down off that high, down into almost a depression. So we would drink ourselves back into a state of semi-euphoria and celebrate every contact that we had. We might stay drunk for days or hours and then the next day carry on again with the whole thing over again – try and get that high again... You need that daily fix and as soon as you don't get that fix, then sometimes weeks would drag by and you wouldn't have a contact and it starts building up and your frustration and your rage levels are building and building...

#### GRADUAL DISENCHANTMENT

Besides it being a difficult job, 'hot, dirty, dangerous', John also gradually started becoming disillusioned about the war. Although he found the excitement he had been looking for, he came to realise that the 'politicians were really manipulating the whole scenario up there'. He is convinced that the security forces could have won the war far sooner, but that it was being kept alive for political and economic reasons.

We could have finished that Namibian war a long time ago... We had the military superiority... It seemed that it was just being dragged out and...it seemed that war is good for money and there was a lot of money being spent up there on that Namibian conflict.

Although they were getting 'tangible results in terms of kills and captures', it just seemed like the war would last indefinitely. When he raised the issue of the future of Koevoet after the war, an officer asked him, 'What makes you think we are going to leave?' or 'What makes you think this war is going to end? It is just going to carry on.' John replied that it surely has to end some time, but the officer 'just laughed it off'.

One particular conversation 'blew' him 'away'.

In 1983 somebody mentioned the fact that South West African beef was being exported from Walvis Bay by ship up to Luanda and then that same beef was finding its way down south and being eaten by the people that we were shooting at. Now...whether it was true or not...that really blew me away. I thought, 'Well, that is incredible. Here we are protecting the very beef, the farms and the infrastructure against the enemy, but we are feeding them at

the same time.’ That’s when it became clear that there is this whole political game on the go... It was about making money and actually perpetuating the wars just so that certain people could make money out of it. Also it was like a testing ground for the South African military – testing weapons and testing troops and different tactics. That became very obvious... I wouldn’t say that we lost interest after that, but possibly our motivation changed. Where before, if we volunteered, it might have been because of patriotism and the fact that we were going off to fight communists and terrorists and save our country from the total onslaught and all that. Now the focus had changed just down onto a ground level where you shoot him or he shoots you. There were no other issues really besides one of survival and see who got to kill the most and that is what we did. We just went out and perfected our technique of going out and collecting kills and captures. That was really what we concentrated on; so the whole thing about dying for the flag and country, that was kind of scoffed at and I believe we just became very mercenary in what we did.

Many combatants also remained on the border since they were being paid almost double what they would have earned on normal duty. In addition, combatants were being paid for every kill and capture.

Every time we had a contact and there was a kill or capture of a person or persons or armaments, we would radio that in, report it in and then that would go through to a certain officer who would put in a claim to Pretoria for that amount. Then at least once a month each team within the group, within Koevoet, would be paid out in cash. So, for example, in the team of 40 people, I think it was R1 000 for a capture and R800 for a dead SWAPO guerrilla, so it would be R800 divided by 40. So obviously the more effective we became, the more money we could make.

Although the money was not the ‘overriding factor’, it contributed to keeping people engaged in the war. In addition, there was the power and status that went with being a member of Koevoet.

I think the main thing was just that whole *esprit de corps*, that we were an elite unit, a special force unit and that we were good at what we did. People were scared of us, they were in awe of us and we felt like we were hotshots. We felt we were something special.

John spent about two years and three months on the border – one year with the Security Branch and 14 months with Koevoet. This is a relatively short time, compared to others who stayed there for seven to eight years.

## MURDER

In November 1983, John and his unit were following the tracks of two SWAPO operatives. John was frustrated, as they had not had a ‘contact’ for some time. At

the time, he was also having marital problems. Some days later, they come across a village where one of the operatives was hiding. When the aged kraal headman did not want to tell them where the person was, John ordered the armed vehicles to 'flatten a few huts'. The headman walked towards one hut and John ordered the vehicle to drive into the hut, after which they opened fire.

We ceased fire and we ripped what was left of the roof of this hut and there this guy was lying... And I knew that he was a veteran and that he would have been an excellent source of info. Sean, the Army medic, started patching him up while I was busy interrogating him... Even at that stage he was denying everything and I just started to go into this uncontrollable fucking rage and I remember thinking, 'How dare you?' And then – this is what I was told afterwards – I started ripping. I ripped all the bandages, the drip that Sean had put into this guy...pulled out my 9mm, put the barrel between his eyes and...I executed him. They told me afterwards I was just screaming, I was raging. When I walked back to the vehicle I was conscious of me walking back, but it was like an out-of-body experience. I was up above the whole scene. I could see Ovambos standing all around and they were all sort of... like post-contact...they were just standing around not talking... I got onto the radio and said to Colonel X, 'We floored one. We are all tired and I want to come in.' And he said, 'No, you follow up.'

John describes his feelings:

I had a lot of rage and a lot of frustration and it all seemed to just blow in that one instant... It was kind of a release for me, but once it had happened, then I realised exactly what I did and how wrong it was... I can only describe it as being a huge shock to my system, to myself... I was...looking down at myself and the team...and feeling detached from it and saying, 'This is you, this is who you are, this is what you have done, and this is what you have become now. You are a murderer. You are a killer.'

#### LEAVING 'THE FAMILY'

This incident was the catalyst for John's return to South Africa.

That just changed my whole mind completely. I became aware, for the first time in years, how far I had gone and exactly what I was doing. It was a moment of complete clarity for me and I was filled with...self-loathing and disgust at myself and this feeling inside of me that I was a murderer. I actually murdered somebody. I felt very bad about that and I just wanted to run away. I wanted to get out as soon as possible, so when I got back from the bush (the week after this incident happened) I requested a transfer back to Pietermaritzburg and it was granted. A few weeks later I was back in Pietermaritzburg... I wouldn't say that I had any rousing farewells or things like that... It was understood that I had had enough and I just quietly slipped away.

The whole experience just became ‘too much’.

I think it was a cumulative effect that just seemed too much. I think I saw far too much for me personally. I keep comparing myself to others...thinking maybe I am a coward... But I can't blame anyone. I volunteered for Koevoet, but it came as a progression of being part of the police force and slowly being part of that culture. In a way they were like a family because it was a closed, special, elite unit, it was like a family.

Although the policy of Koevoet was that one could leave at any time, and although ‘leaving that family at the time’ did not ‘worry’ him ‘at all’, he did not ‘realise how strong the ties were’. While no one ever contacted him, he ‘lived with a lot of paranoia’: ‘I had no idea why they would want to kill me or take me out, but I still had a lot of fear about that – about becoming a victim of these hit squads, basically because I turned my back on them and walked away from them.’

Back in Pietermaritzburg, John was ‘not very well received’.

The branch commander said that he knew all about ex-Koevoet, or Koevoet guys, and that we were a bunch of killers and we were wild and untamed and undisciplined and he didn't want me on his branch. But he had no choice, because I had been sent to him. So he stuck me in this little back office and I was very unhappy for a few months. I got into a fight with another policeman, off duty, and I was transferred to the Reaction Unit, and out of the Security Branch for the first time. It was quite a disgrace in my eyes, anyway. I was basically sent away from this elite Security Branch to the uniform branch, and I think it was my saving grace, because I probably would have stayed with them if this hadn't happened. As it turned out I spent a month or two with the Reaction Unit and then I decided to...resign from the police force...in 1984.

According to John, he had not planned to leave the police force so soon, and his decision was an impulsive one. He was not really prepared for civilian life. His marriage was ‘going through a bad time as well’. He was feeling trapped, both in Pietermaritzburg and in his marriage. Both he and his wife had had affairs, and there seemed to be little trust left in the marriage. According to John, ‘that kind of thing’ was also ‘part of the police culture’. ‘There is a lot of screwing around going on and that wasn't really accepted, but it was certainly going on all the time.’ In addition, he had come to associate his wife with the police. ‘She had been through my whole police career with me and we had the same friends and colleagues, we mixed in the same circles and she certainly became very close. She had a lot of friends in the police...’

He could not settle down. His father-in-law organised him a job as a car salesman. ‘It was probably one of the most unfulfilling things I have ever done, but I realised that it was out of necessity. I had to have money.’ After three months he left the job, got divorced (in June 1984) and left to stay with his sister and her husband in Kempton Park.

**KEEP MOVING**

The period following his resignation from the police and his divorce was gruelling. Even though they had mutually agreed to the divorce, it was difficult to part with his wife and he missed her.

I just had real problems after that. I had a lot of nightmares and flashbacks, problems in concentrating and a real problem with settling down. I haven't since then been able to settle into one career, or settle into one house, or one job or any kind of pattern. It just seems like there is this restlessness that I must keep moving, and moving all the time. It could be a kind of running away.

John joined the same pharmaceutical company where his sister was employed. He worked as a specialist market representative in the agricultural division. It took him a year to realise he was not happy in this job either.

I was becoming increasingly lonely. I was travelling long distances during the week and then weekends I would come home and usually just lock myself in. By that time I had a cottage out near Kyalami. I was renting a cottage and I would just lock the door and stay in bed the whole weekend. Looking back now, I think it was basically the beginning of my depression. That was in 1985. Also I was having flashbacks, morbid thoughts and flashbacks to border experiences and a lot of nightmares.

He would wake up 'screaming from vivid nightmares'. His flashbacks included 'a multitude of different things and also very obscure things'. He would look at a bunch of flowers and

then the thought association would go flowers, funerals, graves, grave, contacts, deaths and then I would start thinking about all that, about death and dying. I had this feeling that death was always just around the corner from me and this feeling that I was going to die. I would have these panic attacks as well – palpitations and sweaty palms and tightening in the chest and I would just start feeling panicky. Although I was diagnosed as having a hiatus hernia and that was what supposedly caused these panic attacks, I knew as well that it was a psychological thing as well. I knew that I was having problems in my mind and I really feared for my sanity.

John also felt 'persecuted and almost paranoid'.

I felt like I was being followed. I could not really justify it or rationalise it to myself why I would be followed, other than the fact that I knew a lot of state secrets having been in the Security Branch for five years, but I was a low level operator. I didn't have this vast amount of knowledge or anything, but I certainly knew enough secrets, but that did not seem...to affect the reality of what I was thinking. To me it just felt very real. I felt that I was in danger all the time. I have since learned that it is called hyper-vigilance...but I only learned about that in 1993 after it had been pointed out to me that I possibly

had Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and hyper-vigilance being one of the symptoms.

John felt cut off from everybody, from society, from the world. He just wanted to hide away. He justified it by telling himself that he was just tired from 'doing all the mileage during the week' and that he needed rest. During this time, in 1985, he went to see an ex-group leader at a farm near Prieska in the Northern Cape. This led to a reunion of ex-Koevoet members on the East Rand.

We got really drunk at one of the police canteens. I think it was Benoni police canteen and we went on to Germiston and then on to another canteen there. We were really roaring drunk and we bought some chickens at a shop somewhere and ended up at my place... These guys were making such a noise and behaving in the usual kind of rough, macho way and threatening to burn the thatch on the cottage and really just carrying on like hooligans. Anyway, that was the last time that I actually actively made contact with any of them on a social or any other level. I decided, no way, that they were actually a threat to my way of life and to my reputation and I didn't want that in my life any more. So I made a conscious decision then not to contact them and just basically drifted away from them after that.

#### A NEW START?

In August 1985, he met the woman who was to become his second wife. During one of his trips through Venda,<sup>12</sup> he met her at the Venda Sun Hotel, where she was dancing in a cabaret group. As he got to know the theatre dance troupe, he 'began to feel his creative side coming back'. In October 1985, he resigned from the pharmaceutical company and joined her dance group as a 'theatre technician/general dog's body doing lighting and sound'. He remained in this career, 'going from ThabaNchu Sun<sup>13</sup> down to Natal Play House where I was the stage manager...and then I went to the Wild Coast Sun<sup>14</sup> and a short time at Sun City and back to ThabaNchu. I even think in 1990 I had my own little production company.' Their moves depended on his wife's contracts and John had to fit in with that.

Every time I would go to a new place I would really just feel fine for a while and...be absorbed into the surroundings and get into the new job and learn the ropes and do all that. And then once I got to know how everything worked...I would be bored and not only bored, but unsettled. I would feel restless, like I couldn't settle down. There was something missing and I thought about the bush a lot and I think I missed it quite a lot, being out there. I started questioning a lot of things in society as well, like the fact that people just carried on with life down here without really knowing what was happening on the border, because of the press blackouts and the fact that we weren't allowed to speak about it... I just felt that there was a general apathy in terms of the South African public about that whole border war and that

they did not really understand or care about what was happening to the guys up there. I felt that the time that I spent up there really hadn't been worth it at all and it was a waste of time and that the politicians were corrupt and they were undoing basically whatever was won on a military side of things. They were undoing it on the political side, so it was a lost cause basically.

After three 'stormy years,' John married his second wife in 1988. In 1989, four years after he had left the police, they 'caught up with him' in Port Edward.

I was staying in Port Edward and working at the Wild Coast Sun, and when I say they caught up with me, it was to do with the elections at that time and doing police duties. In terms of regulations at that time, I had to report to my nearest police station whenever I moved or wherever I moved to, I had to give them my change of address so that they could notify me in terms of call ups and so on. Then I hit on a system that I would inform them of my change of address, but only when I got to the next town. For example, in 1986, I was called up to Kempton Park, so in 1986, without telling them, I went down to Durban and when it came around the time for my call up, which was at the local police station for a month, then I went to my nearest police station in Durban and said I had just moved down there and they would redo it and by doing that it was deferred for another year. So each time my call up came I would just move so they would have to transfer my file. That was my way of getting around call up.

John was 'totally against the idea...of having anything to do with the police force ever again.'

It was almost a physical... Like a nausea, thinking about even putting on a gun or a uniform or having anything to do with the police force. At the same time, it was made doubly difficult because my father was a police reservist and so every time I visited him in Johannesburg it would constantly be there. He would talk police and have police friends around and so it was always difficult for me to get away from this whole police culture thing. Eventually I started visiting home less and less and I started burying myself in my work – working long hours, unnecessarily long hours, much to my wife's disappointment... That effectively, I think, altered our relationship, where she felt that I was married to my job rather than to her.

When he eventually spoke to his wife about his feelings, she advised him to go. She believed there was no point in being a martyr and that he would be sent to prison if he did not do his duty.

So she urged me to not to be impulsive or rash and to actually just go through with it. So I did that, and to me it was like a big step backwards in terms of my convictions... I just felt that I compromised my own convictions and my own principles by doing this month of so-called 'border duty' – this month of looking after a polling station.

In 1990, John left the Wild Coast Sun for Johannesburg where he, his wife and his sister started a small production company doing industrial theatre, promotions and small productions.

It was fairly successful, although thinking back as well, I think I was very naive. It was hopelessly under-financed and I think I was very lucky to have the support of my sister and my wife at that time. We didn't make a great deal of money out of it. In fact, we lost more than we made, but it was something that I felt I could do with some feeling of autonomy. I was working for myself. I worked for clients, but I didn't have a boss as such. It was good for me and I felt that I was on the road to living a completely different life.

However, John got into financial difficulty. 'I...lent the money that I had saved...to somebody who was in trouble, and he couldn't pay me back. Basically I had to close shop and go and look for work and I moved to ThabaNchu. That was in 1990, after my daughter was born.' The family went to the ThabaNchu Sun Hotel, where he was theatre manager for a year. He subsequently accepted a job as head of theatre at the Mabana Cultural Centre. He ran the theatre for a year. At the end of 1991, he got divorced for the second time.

My wife and I just basically became almost estranged. It is hard to explain, but I was becoming more and more withdrawn and...depressed. My wife is essentially quite a motivated, positive thinking, outgoing person, so we were having a lot of difficulties coming to terms with that; and as it transpired, she met someone else and she left me.

Having to let his 18-month-old daughter go was the hardest thing he has ever had to do.

They moved away. They went to Durban initially and then up to the East Rand. My life was shattered basically after that. The wheels just fell off after that. When my daughter was born...for the first time in my life, first time ever, I felt like there was a real purpose to life, that there is a real meaning to life and that meaning was basically looking after this child. Watching her grow and nurturing her and possibly teaching her things that I thought were good to know. I looked forward to that and when they left me, it just left a huge void, a huge vacuum in my life which I tried to fill by smoking grass. I didn't drink a lot. I knew that was a trap, because of all the drinking I had done in the police force... I would drink socially, but that was when I really started using marijuana and using it quite heavily.

### **A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN**

In 1992, John resigned from his job as theatre manager and started managing a jazz band. He thought he could raise funds with the band and donate a portion of the funds to the street children in Bloemfontein.

I saw these street children in Bloemfontein and it struck me that that possibly

could be something meaningful and worthwhile doing with my life – raising money for these children and helping somebody else. It had a lot to do with the guilt that I felt about the things that I had done when I was in the police force. I still thought about those things and felt very guilty about all that... I think I was a bit delusional and naive and I had no real plan on how to do it, other than just go out and see.

He felt like he was living a double life: there was ‘the secret John – the John that was a policeman in those years’ and the John who lived in ThabaNchu and only had black friends. At the time the ANC was ‘not tolerated at all’ in Bophuthatswana and ‘there was a lot of police repression going on’. Because of his friends, people asked him if he was a member of the ANC. John started feeling ‘paranoid’ and felt that he was being watched and monitored.

John ‘held it all together’ until September 1992. Then he left for Johannesburg where he ‘basically had...a psychotic experience – a nervous breakdown’.

I just lived out of reality, out of the consensus reality for about six weeks in my father’s house. He was overseas and I just really had a very, very bad time in my head. I broke up with my girlfriend, broke contact with the band, pushed everyone out of my life and I had no real plans for the future. I was just completely psychotic. I really felt like I was in danger. At that time there was a lot about hit squads and ‘third force’ and that kind of thing, and I started really feeling very paranoid about that... I started feeling that my life was in danger.

He wished he could just tell someone about ‘the secret John Deegan’ who was a Security Branch policeman.

More and more I just felt that... I felt that if I could just unload... If I could get all this off my chest and tell somebody about my experiences, that it would certainly make me feel a lot better. That didn’t happen until I think six years later – in 1997, when I gave a full confession to the Truth Commission. So you could say six years after I really felt in need to come out with all of this stuff that had been kept inside me all these years, six years later only was the first realisation of that dream.

By the end of 1992, John had few possessions, he had no income and his car was repossessed. He was doing ‘the odd freelance job’ in industrial theatre. His life was ‘pretty shattered’. He felt

very confused, very cut off from the world, very alienated from society and from contemporary South African society. I was feeling cut off and alienated from my family, from what friends I had, from everything, in fact. There seemed to be no safe ground. If I went home, there was my father and the police force and the reminder of my childhood and my upbringing and all that... Nelson Mandela had been released, CODESA was on the go, we were going towards a new dispensation. There was a lot of uncertainty in the air

and a lot of violence in the townships, which was upsetting me a great deal and had been upsetting me throughout the 80s. As the levels of violence increased – the necklacings and the burnings and the killings – it was sending me quietly mad. It was really driving me to despair... I didn't fear for my own life, because I think long before that I had come to terms with death and the inevitability of it and the feeling that if I died, it would actually be better than living, but I feared for my family and for the country and for the world, basically.

In April 1993, his family intervened and arranged for him to go and stay with his sister who was working in Sweden. They thought it would be good for him to get out of South Africa and away from the drug scene and the people with whom he was mixing. He stayed there for six months and met Marius van Niekerk of SAVA.<sup>15</sup>

He approached me and said that he was doing a documentary on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and was interviewing six combatants from the 70s and 80s border and township conflict in South Africa and would I take part in his project. I agreed to do that. I thought it would be a good way of getting some guilt and some of the stuff off my chest and in fact, I gave him quite a full revelation for his documentary. It made me feel a bit better, but the fact that I have now opened up a can of worms...that Koevoet thing [is] once again in my life after...I shoved all that stuff to the back of my head and imagined myself to be this kind of free spirit, hippy, carefree individual kind of thing. I was living that kind of dream, but in reality, inside I felt very disturbed and very distraught and very hung up about my past and the things that I did.

#### TRUTH, RECONCILIATION AND REPARATION

In July 1997, John testified before the TRC's Conscript Hearings, a special hearing to include the experiences of security force conscripts. His testimony was partially motivated by the murder of his father by bank robbers in May 1996.

I feel that the time has come to break the spiral of fear, dishonesty and lack of respect for life that is seemingly spinning way out of control in the world. If my confession can in any way bring light to the minds of other criminals and make them understand that they are killing their own souls through their actions, then perhaps it will justify the repercussions that such confessing will cause.

Having been heard, having been given the chance to tell the truth, lifted an enormous burden and gave John a feeling of 'euphoria, of release and relief'. It also gave him the courage to consent to going with a South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) camera crew to Namibia to face the families of his former victims. Unfortunately the project never materialised.

The sense of relief was, however, a temporary one.

It must be because of the aspect of forgiveness. Really, who is out there that can forgive me? Do you get it in writing? Who do you ask for forgiveness? I think the only thing that one could do is take it to a spiritual level... and ask God to forgive me, because I don't think there is anyone else that can. And also the victims themselves, the people who have died, ask them for forgiveness, because I believe there are spirits. They are not gone. They have left their bodies but they are still there... But I really don't know how to forgive myself... I don't know how to forgive myself. I don't know how to live without guilt or remorse or self-recrimination and all the other things – the negative things that seem to be a part of my make-up now as a result of my experiences – lack of confidence, lack of self-esteem, self-hate, self-destruction. I really don't know. I really don't know the answer to that. I don't know who could forgive me and I think that is the hell that all of us are living through – all of us who have been involved in this kind of thing.

In his view, the country's healing process requires a 'full disclosure of the truth'.

We have had the Truth Commission as a forum for that and I don't think nearly enough people have used it, although apparently there were several thousand people who submitted their applications for amnesty. But I am sure there is a lot more out there that could still come forward and speak their truth. I think the truth is necessary, particularly for the families of victims and for the nation as a whole, just to have transparency about that period, because so much happened in those days that was kept secret... Only a few people were aware really of the big picture and most of us were just pawns. Most of us were just involved in small sections of the whole security force/ government set-up.

Apart from full disclosure, John believes reconciliation requires 'bridge building' between the 'previous perpetrators' and their 'former enemies who are now in government and other positions of authority'.

I think we should be building bridges towards each other and closing the gap up and meeting around tables and discussing things of mutual interest and mutual concern and get the country back on the road. I think there are a lot of traumatised people in this nation. I think coming out with the truth and just talking about things will go a long way to healing some of the wounds.

In terms of reparation, John feels that something more tangible needs to be done.

Something perhaps more hands-on than just speaking about it. I am thinking in terms of perhaps a veterans group getting together and building schools, for example, or getting involved in community centres and education, adult literacy or one of any amount of things that could help the previously disadvantaged people.

### A DECADE AFTER THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

At the time of the interviews, John was unemployed and had been homeless for four years. He felt despondent about living a meaningful life again.

[I am] just wandering and drifting around the country and I really don't feel like I am going anywhere. I am trying at the moment to find a place to stay and find employment, but I just can't seem to get out of this rut... I am taking practical steps towards getting out of it, but it is very difficult having basically destroyed my credibility, destroyed my standing in society and now to get back in is very difficult... I had quite a major nervous breakdown at the end of 1992 and since then it has just been a question of running away, drifting...taking drugs and try and numb myself from reality. I can't carry on like that any more. I am really tired of that lifestyle and I feel like I need something in my life, something to replace all the things that I have lost.

He has not been successful in replacing the person he had been.

[I'm] trying to destroy that John Deegan who was a policeman and become another John Deegan, another John. It has left me being nothing, being nowhere and being nobody. I can't seem to find a replacement for that person.

John is pessimistic about his future and feels his life has 'ended a long time ago'. 'I really am just going through the motions.' He has often contemplated suicide.

For a long time I thought of taking my own life. I know there have been a lot of suicides from guys who were in the security forces and it certainly seemed like an option at one point, but I just could not bring myself to do it for various reasons. I have a daughter and I don't really have contact with her any more and I have a sister down here in Cape Town and the two of them are the only real family that I have and that I count as family. But basically I don't have anything to live for. There is nothing that really interests me any more or gets me motivated enough to get me up in the morning and go and do things. I really have to force myself to make it through each day, you know.

His enemy is now no longer an external one, but himself.

Since leaving the police force my target has changed, or my anger and rage and my frustration has been directed inward. I have become the new target. I have actively tried to destroy myself and very nearly succeeded. Ja, very nearly succeeded in that. I have absolutely no feeling of hate or rage or bitterness towards my former enemies at all. In fact, that stopped a long time ago on the border when I realised that we were pawns in a political game and that the guy that was shooting at me was just a mirror image of myself. He believed in what he was doing and he was fighting for the right cause and I thought that I was doing the same thing, but it became apparent in the bush that really it was just a political game that we were in.

John currently does piecework as a menial labourer in a small coastal town on the Garden Route.

**Notes**

- 1 COSAS stands for Congress of South African Students, an ANC-affiliated student organisation.
- 2 Dr Chris Stals was the head of the Reserve Bank from 1989 to 1999.
- 3 Through further studies, he eventually obtained the law degree BA Iuris.
- 4 Hendrik van den Berg was the head of BOSS.
- 5 In the early 1970s, the Moumbaris group attempted to land a trained group of combatants by ship on the Transkei coast. They were arrested and convicted on charges of taking part in terrorist activities (Stadler, 1997).
- 6 Herbert Mbali, a member of the ANC's armed wing, was abducted from Lesotho in 1973 by the SAP. Mbali was returned to Lesotho after its government intervened, but has since disappeared.
- 7 Koevoet (an Afrikaans word meaning 'crowbar') was the name of a specialised anti-terrorist, mercenary unit within the Security Branch of the SAP. Consisting predominantly of *askaris* (former SWAPO operatives), this unit operated primarily on the border of Namibia, tracking, arresting, interrogating and killing suspected terrorists.
- 8 The second National Consultative Conference held in the town of Kabwe, north of Lusaka, from the 16th to the 22nd of June 1985.
- 9 Operation Vula (*vula* is an Nguni word meaning 'to open'). Following the Kabwe conference of 1985, the ANC decided to enhance their internal underground structures to enable leadership figures to be sent back into South Africa. In the latter part of 1988, Mac Maharaj and Siphwe Nyanda entered South Africa to set up structures and facilitate the infiltration of arms and operatives. After the unbanning of the ANC in 1990, Operation Vula continued as the ANC's 'insurance policy' against possible failure of the negotiation process (Jenkin, 1995).
- 10 Many people arrested under the Internal Security Act were detained at John Vorster Square, since it was the headquarters of the Security Branch. The tenth floor where interrogations took place was nicknamed the 'parachute school', as a few detainees met their death by 'supposedly' jumping or 'slipping and falling' out of the windows.
- 11 In his TRC testimony, John recalls how he had heard stories of a policeman who cut off the corpses' fingernails with pliers to make for easier fingerprinting. The fingers were not disposed of, but thrown onto the roof of the barracks to be sun-dried and used as souvenirs. Similarly, a skull and a leg bone were removed and treated in the same way, apparently to make a standing ashtray. He also testified that many stories circulated about ears and testicle sacks being removed for souvenirs.
- 12 Venda was one of the former black homelands. The Southern Sun hotel group owned hotels and casinos in all the homelands, as gambling was illegal in South Africa.
- 13 ThabaNchu is in Bophuthatswana, also one of the former black homelands.
- 14 The Wild Coast is in the Transkei, another former homeland.
- 15 The South African Veterans' Association is a non-governmental, non-profit-making veteran service for survivors of the 1970–1990 conflicts.

## 6 INTELLIGENCE NARRATIVES

### 'THINGS WEREN'T AS SIMPLE'

#### THE STORY OF A FORMER GENERAL IN MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

In 1992 General Chris Thirion was forced to terminate a 30-year career in the SADF in what came to be known as the 'night of the generals'. At the time, he was second in command of the SADF intelligence services. His termination followed an investigation by the Steyn Commission<sup>1</sup> into allegations of 'third force' activities (allegations that security force members were implicated in the wave of violence that threatened to foil the negotiation process).

Due to the Steyn report, Chris was approached by the TRC's investigation unit. While he co-operated with them, he did not apply for amnesty for any incidences during his career. The TRC's investigative and research staff interviewed Chris extensively, but did not find any evidence to support De Klerk's dismissal of him.

Chris spent much time in Namibia as part of the extensive counter-insurgency war conducted by the SADF in Namibia and southern Angola. Despite widespread human rights violations during this war, the SADF decided not to apply for amnesty for offences committed outside the borders of South Africa. In the mid-1980s Chris was instrumental in authorising structures tasked with the collection of intelligence relating to enemy targets. These target workgroups, staffed by Military Intelligence personnel, operated in association with SADF Special Forces. Three Military Intelligence members applied for amnesty for collecting target-related intelligence; two specified assassinations of at least two groups. In addition, sections of Military Intelligence such as the DCC were widely implicated in a range of operations resulting in gross violations of human rights. However, the TRC legislation did not adequately cater for those responsible for the gathering of intelligence for the state security forces, tending rather to focus directly on those involved in authorising specific acts and those implementing such commands, the so-called 'trigger-pullers'.

I was referred to Chris by a former member of National Intelligence, who thought he had a good understanding of 'the role of the military in all of this'. Chris agreed to an interview and an appointment was set up.

When I left my hotel for the meeting, I was unsure what to expect. It sounded like we were to meet in a restaurant. The last kilometre of the journey took me down a

dirt road to a rustic-looking building. It was a restaurant. In the reception area, a gentleman was sitting behind a desk in a cosy-looking living room. He explained that Chris was expecting me, but he had gone to the hardware store and was due to return soon. I walked across a deck overlooking a clump of trees and an open field of grassland. It could have been a game lodge in some remote location. I was offered coffee and invited to make myself comfortable.

About an hour passed. Through the window I noticed a man moving from table to table. He looked jovial as he greeted patrons with a nod and shallow bow. He wore a pair of faded jeans, a checked shirt and a white apron. He looked up in my direction, smiled and made his way towards me. He introduced himself as Chris and apologised for being late, saying he had to fetch building material and on his return had to help out in the kitchen. It was a busy day for the restaurant. After enquiring about the rationale of the project, he arranged the use of a large dining room where we began the first of seven interviews.

#### ON A FARM IN NAMIBIA

Chris, the youngest of five children, was born in 1939 on a farm in Namibia (then South West Africa). He grew up 'in a house where there was no mother' as she died of malaria when Chris was five. His father, whom he describes as an Afrikaans Zorba the Greek, never remarried.

He was a tough guy and he was a hard man. He didn't have much schooling. He knew about farming and for some or other reason, the things that I remember about him is that he was a very staunch United Party supporter. Now he was a Smuts man, to the extent that when Smuts called people to go to war, he went. Off he went to the war...for four years.

During the school term, the children stayed in boarding school in Tsumeb. 'But the best part, of course, was being on holiday. I thought this is the world, this is the best of the world.' Although Chris initially considered becoming a farmer, his brother paved the way for him to finish high school and go to university. Most young boys of his brother's age would finish standard six in Tsumeb and as there was no high school, they would leave school to farm or to work in the mines. 'There was a very prosperous mine there. You could easily find jobs and then they were trained as artisans of some kind – boilermakers, welders, electricians, builders, or whatever.' His brother was a 'big strong guy', a good athlete, a good rugby player and Chris envisioned him 'leaving school then and going to work in the mines and become a good artisan and play rugby for the north and so on'. However, his brother wanted to go to high school.

He had hard talks and fights with my dad... He wanted to go to high school and then to university to study and he wanted to become a geologist. It was really out of the ordinary and he was so sad, because then our ways parted... Then he left and he was basically then gone forever, because he went to high

school. For that he went to a town further to the south, Otjiwarongo. He spent some time at school there and when he came back, he would go and do holiday work...in the mines and he wouldn't come home. So we drifted apart.

When his sisters also left home, Chris and his father were alone on the farm. My sisters finished school and they started working... Two of the three made matric and started working and then they got married and they had their homes and children and stuff. We drifted apart. In a sense I was on my own and it was me and my dad... He was just a hardworking man and not with serious inspirations to a young guy or whatever. I respect him for a hell of a lot of things – among others for how hard he could work...and how strong he was physically.

However, sometimes his father was an embarrassment to him.

He would go into town and spend a weekend in town [and] more or less the whole of the town would know he was around, because there might have been a fight... The chances of a fight in a bar was about 80 per cent...and even higher... As a young chap you find your dad somewhat of an embarrassment. Honestly.

#### FARMING, BULLDOZERS AND BACK TO SCHOOL

After standard seven Chris decided to leave school and help his father with the farming.

We had the farm and I said to my dad, after Standard 7 of all things, I said I want to leave school. And he said, 'No that's fine, no problem.' And well, off I went. I spent some time with him on the farm and then I asked him one day, you know, there weren't much money or talks of a salary or anything. And I just realised, shit, I'm on an island here and its three months later and I haven't had a salary or even a gesture of something. But during that time I also realised that...my sisters, their husbands, their families they would come and...in winter time an ox is slaughtered and they get...all kinds of nice types of meat and so on. And every month they would come and they would have something slaughtered for them and chickens and pigs and goats and stuff like that... And my brother was then at university and I knew my father had difficulties in paying for all that. And whenever I referred to money, he said, *ja* and so much money is going to my brother, and this and that and the other.

Since Chris was not earning any money, he became concerned that he might spend his life on the farm and not inherit it.

So I said to [my dad], 'Listen, what would happen one day? Do I get the farm? If I spend my life here, do I get the farm? Because everybody is getting something out of you, except me, and I'm working here.' And he said, 'Listen, you've been here for so long, for some months, and now you want the farm.'

And he said, 'No, the five children...get the farm and you can pay off the others if you want the farm.'

His father's response prompted him to leave. 'I just heard from other guys that there was lots of work in Northern Rhodesia [Zambia], so I went there and there I was trained as bulldozer driver at the age of 15.' It was a lucrative job and at the end of that year he had saved enough money to go back to school. 'But for sure I wasn't going to go back to Tsumeb where I came from, because then by that time I was a standard behind the other guys. So I...ended up in Windhoek. I paid [for] myself for the three school years.'

#### FROM THE MINES TO AN HONOURS DEGREE

After finishing matric in Windhoek, Chris went to work on the mines in Okiep and Nababep for a year. He then enrolled at Stellenbosch University for a degree in geography. For the first three years he worked in the mines during the holidays and never went home. He got a scholarship which enabled him to do his honours. Towards the end of his honours year, he applied to the departments of Foreign Affairs and Nature Conservation for jobs. He subsequently saw an advertisement for the military and read in the newspapers that a parachute battalion had been established. He applied, thinking he might become an officer and leave after a few years to continue with nature conservation.

Of the three departments, the military responded first... I got a letter from them, a telegram to say I must go and report to the magistrate and I'll get a train ticket to come from Cape Town to Pretoria. I was interviewed and I got an appointment. And the two to four years became...it became a career.

Chris describes what made it attractive enough for him to stay:

What hooked me was the outdoor life, training and working with young people and having started in the Parachute Battalion, I could truly say the professionalism of that unit. And then what hooked me was how we were trained. Moving on to captain, you were really trained to be really able to do that job. And before you would move onto major, you were trained to be able to do that job. And you know you could do it or you know that you couldn't do it. I mean, there was no beating about the bush... You knew where you...stood. And I sort of liked that.

#### CHANGING PARTIES

His entrance into the Army followed on from a swing to the NP.

During my university days I became sort of Nationalist orientated and I voted for the Nats, whereas...in the beginning I voted for the United Party. And then I made that switch and I started to become, not a party member, but I voted for the Nationalists, so to speak.

This shift caused a lasting rift between Chris and his father.

And in that process of having gone to university, becoming a Nat and then joining the military, my father's perception and reaction to that was that I've joined the army of the Nats... And, you know, this is all about the apartheid thing and supporting apartheid and that... We really drifted apart, very sadly so, to the extent that...he didn't even consult with either me or my brother as to whether he would sell the farm or not. I just one day heard the farm was sold. And I just heard that my father was coming to stay with my younger sister in the Rustenburg area on their farm.

Years later, in 1976, Chris was leaving for a military operation in Angola. Since he was to leave the day after Christmas, he and his family spent Christmas with his father and his sister.

When I stopped there...my sister came out of the house and she greeted us and she said, 'Please, can I ask you a favour, don't get into any political argument with our father or the military thing or just nothing. Just let us have a good Christmas day and ignore whatever's been said.' And she said to me he is not in a good mood and he's been agitated for days about me... He was told that we are not staying for the...night, because the next day I am leaving for Angola... And this thing went on for the whole day. He was needling me all of the time, saying, 'What do you want to achieve in Angola? What do you want to prove? This bloody Nationalist government, they are useless. Why are they sending you to Angola, just to call you back again? You won't achieve anything. They'll send you there, but you won't stay.' And he said if it was General Smuts, he wouldn't stop until the northern borders of Angola. He said, 'But this pussyfooting in and out is typical of the Nats, they can't take a decision and then stand to it.' So he wasn't understanding what the hell was going on. And there is no reason why he should be understanding... But he was pushing, pushing, pushing...all day and I wasn't too happy... I mean, the idea that tomorrow I say goodbye to my family and I'm not off on a picnic. So by later that afternoon I said, 'I don't come here to be told that the government is worth nothing and that the military is worth nothing and that I'm bloody stupid' and this and that and the other. And I left without [us] saying goodbye to one another. I left, he didn't come out of the house and that was the last time I saw him alive. That is...that's whatever, you know. That's it.

#### MARRIAGE AND THE MILITARY ACADEMY

Chris met his wife in 1962 while doing his honours degree at Stellenbosch. She was a first-year student studying geography and psychology and he was her tutor. (She eventually did an honours degree in librarianship and became a librarian.) He did not date her at the time. When he completed his studies he joined the Parachute Battalion and was subsequently posted to the Military Academy in Saldanha Bay.

From here he made contact with her, and ‘that is where it all started’. Eventually they got married in 1966 and spent seven years in Saldanha at the Military Academy, where he lectured in military geography.

We had a good time in the sense that we lived in a fairly good military house on the base... Saldanha was a one-horse town and there was no chance of her getting work there and we decided to have a family rather sooner than later. And our first attempt didn’t work out, because we had twin sons born prematurely. They lived for some hours and then didn’t survive. Then the next four attempts went well and out of that were born three daughters and then a son.

The death of the twins was ‘heavy’ and ‘a terrible disappointment’.

We were basically shattered, you know, but we knew we had to go on with our lives quickly. And, *ja*... But we were really fortunate, you know... Life treated us well at the time. We didn’t have a lot of money, but we had a relatively cheap house and life was relatively cheap and I could study and I did a master’s degree in military geography and I started with a doctorate which I never finished, you know... But then we had our children young in Saldanha.

However, they felt that Saldanha was rather incestuous.

Saldanha became too small for us in the sense that it’s a military community. It is a small community. Everybody knows everything about everybody. And we felt we were not private enough and also, to a very large extent, my wife, she is a sort of a reserved, private kind of person.

While in Saldanha, Chris was recruited to join Military Intelligence. He started to work in the ‘intelligence environment for combined forces operating in the north’.

Things like terrain analysis and related intelligence work and so on. And I enjoyed that, but, you know, I would have been posted there for three months, get a break in between, you go home for the weekend and then another six weeks’ span and then I go home and then I’m finished for the year. And then I concentrated on the academic side of things... But by having done that and I think the way I came out on my military courses had attracted some attention from senior people and so on. And they started talking to me... General Heinrich du Toit... He...made a real career of intelligence. He was by training a lawyer, a historian... He really recruited me... He even called me to come and see him in Cape Town when he was down there. And he said I’ve got the right profile... I said to him I wasn’t ready for a desk job at the time, I’d rather stay at the Academy. But he convinced me and, as I was saying, Saldanha was really getting too small for us. It was time to move on.

#### PRETORIA: BETTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FAMILY

With their son a mere three weeks old, they left for Pretoria, the headquarters of 1 Reconnaissance Commando (also known as the ‘Recces’). It was the first Special

Forces unit ('an abnormal form of gathering information behind the enemy lines'). It also had smaller units elsewhere and an intensive training unit in Oudtshoorn. Jan Breytenbach<sup>2</sup> was the commanding officer of the unit and Chris was promised he could become his second in command.

His children were afforded more opportunities in Pretoria.

We were quite fortunate that they were small in Saldanha, it was nice. Then we moved to Pretoria and they also got more opportunities... And I believed in giving them opportunities. It was our philosophy of bringing up the children. Like all children, they were not easy, they were difficult and when they became teenagers they all went through very difficult stages. And they are strong children, they are strong-minded children.

Growing up without a mother, spending much of his early life in boarding school and being the only child at home from standard seven, Chris never had the experience of a close-knit family.

Being a family without a mother, we were...not too close... I loved my family. It was fine. It was always nice to see them and so on, but there wasn't a sort of close relationship, you know, or constant attempts to make contact or to see one another or to talk about what you are doing.

He was intent on not letting his own family repeat the pattern.

My family, my immediate family is very, very close to me. I can almost say that is what life is about for me, but it's an overstatement, it is not true. But it is very important to have what I lacked in my family life when I was young, when I left them. I don't want my family to experience the way I experienced that... We are a close-knit family and, you know, that is one thing I will easily kill for is for my family, if anything or anybody comes too close to my family.

#### 'HELPING AND DEVELOPING PEOPLE'

During their stay in Pretoria, his son became interested in computers and in his matric year he took extra classes. On weekends he would teach his new-found skills to learners in Mamelodi. Two of Chris's daughters became missionaries, one in Israel and one in North Africa. Chris feels that he and his children are 'relatively speaking strongly orientated towards helping people, developing people'.

There were always a number of black people around...that I had very good relationships with. From boyhood, from my childhood days...I couldn't say I was running after the darkies trying to pretend not to have voted for the Nats at all or being this very good white guy understanding the blacks. And understanding everything about them and all their problems and running around and saying, 'Hell guys, we are so sorry.' I mean, that is not me, but I find it very easy to stand up for my black people in the businesses. Not my people, but being in the business with me, making a contribution, working

hard. I'll go really long distances to help and especially to help their children become better educated and I make a good contribution as far as that is concerned. One can always argue that you can do better, but I respond positive to all the requests that I get. And I make sure that it is not just another bullshit, you know. I want to see the results, I want to see the children, they must come here, they must meet me. I sit down at the table with them... I talk with them and I...explain to them to what...lengths their parents are going in order to help them. And that they can rely on me, that I will support them as long as the results are positive.

#### INTELLIGENCE: 'THE TRUTH TIMELY TOLD'

Chris spent 20 years in Military Intelligence, and held a variety of posts, including Chief Director of Military Intelligence and eventually Deputy Chief of Staff of Military Intelligence, responsible for the gathering of intelligence for defence purposes. He defines intelligence as 'the truth timely told'.

If you take that simple sentence, 'Intelligence is the truth timely well-told', that is...where the ethics of intelligence comes into play. That is that the truth must be the truth based on facts. 'Timely': intelligence can't afford to sit down and write history and tell you what happened yesterday. They must be as good to tell you what is going to happen in the next two, three, five years. And 'well-told': we live in the explosion of intelligence... Intelligence well-told means that you don't crowd the top structures of strategic decision-making... If you crowd the top structures of the government and the politicians with too much detail, the general response is, 'Don't confuse me with the details.' Now this is where professionalism comes into play again, in the sense that it must clearly be determined what decisions are being taken at what level. So if it is strategic decision-making, then the strategic intelligence picture...must be clear and must be on that level; and the lower you go down towards the tactical level, where the departments must do their thing to create a better life for everybody in South Africa – to quote the government – then all departments must be seen to function at top gear, fifth gear. Now there each department and the top structure in that department need the right intelligence, the right information... But the right information and not the cluttered [information], but to know to be seen to take the right decisions.

#### A PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER IN AN APOLITICAL ARMY

Chris considered himself a professional soldier:

I considered myself as being a professional and a very good soldier and I had international respect. I was also decorated by two other countries. I was well trained...There were things with which you differed, but I was proud of the

Defence Force that I served...in its professionalism, its command and control structures and the fact that it was, except for individuals...it was really apolitical as an organisation.

He saw the role of the military as ensuring a 'climate of stability' which would facilitate the negotiation of a political solution.

I served in the Defence Force for the purpose of creating or being involved in making a contribution to the overall security situation, which would allow for all the politicians in this country to come up with a political solution to the problem, and that is what I told subordinates wherever I went. I said, 'This is our function, to do our job in such a way that the overall climate of stability – and that stability may be in inverted commas – is such that it is possible for the politicians in this country to sit down and find a political solution...

An insurgency war, guerrilla warfare, political warfare, whatever it was called, there is no military solution for that. There is only a political solution.

Despite his personal support for the NP, Chris maintains that his professional role was not to defend apartheid.

I never thought of myself as defending apartheid, although I voted Nationalist Party, which meant that I voted in favour of apartheid for quite a time...

I never thought of myself as being a saviour in defence of apartheid.

According to Chris, he knew a black government would be inevitable.

I did say to people that we are not fighting for apartheid and I did say to people we are not fighting against a black government. I said to people, irrespective [of] the outcome of this war, there is going to be a black government in South Africa. South Africa is an African country. It is part of the continent of Africa. Don't ask me when and how and where there is going to be a black government. This is not what we are fighting. We are fighting to make sure that the political solution to the problem is going to create a democratic outcome, and whether that government is going to be white or black or pink – as long as it is democratic.

Rationally, Chris could identify with the cause of black people.

As a matter of fact, I said on a number of occasions that the situation is unfair in the sense that if I were black, I know exactly where I would have been...

I would have been in the MK. I would have been part of the struggle, you know. I know a lot of guys who, when we sit and in all honesty we discuss the situation, that would have been the...general feeling.

While he could relate to the unfair treatment of blacks under apartheid, he could not accept 'terrorism'.

As soldiers we understood the situation, but...in heart and soul I was against terrorism. That is something different to me... A guerrilla war, planting bombs in private places, in businesses, in whatever, you know, killing and maiming indiscriminately is something I will fight for this government, I will

fight for the ANC if someone, irrespective of race and colour were to do the same thing. That to me is the enemy.

Chris thus draws a sharp distinction between the role of the military and that of politicians. He sees MK in the same way as he sees the SADF – a military force, not to be equated with the ANC as a political party. This position is core to his understanding of the purpose of the military.

From my personal military perspective, the MK was the enemy, and wherever I went and whenever I spoke to my subordinates, I said to the guys, 'It is not the ANC, it is the MK you are fighting. The MK is our business. Don't get involved in the politics.' The ANC is the responsibility of the government, of the Nationalist Party. They must deal with that, but we fight the MK... When I was in the command position, responsible for covert operations and covert collections, I always said to them, 'Our business is the MK. Don't come and talk to me about political leaders or political individuals within the ANC. That is not our job. That is not our problem. Our aim is to fight and to restrict the MK.' I had no doubts in my mind ever doing just that. I had the idea, and I was convinced that we can use unconventional tactics and operations to have a blow at the MK outside of the country.

#### PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

According to Chris, it was important to act professionally and ethically, despite the conditions of war. He relates the following illustrative example:

Way back I was posted in Namibia and, strangely enough, the police came to me and they said they had a source inside Katatura (that is the Soweto of Windhoek)... They said they are young Ovambo males, people staying in the hostels there, and they have discovered a trunk (a steel trunk) with limpet mines in it, and explosives in it, hand grenades in it and ammunition and so on, and it is being stored under one of the beds. They even showed me the photographs... So we sat down and we discussed the thing.

Chris considered exploding this arms cache. Since enough people knew about the cache in the hostel, and it contained limpet mines which were already 'sweating', it was unlikely that military involvement would be suspected.

That was a dangerous cache of arms and I said, 'Well maybe one could actually add something to it and then set it off from a distance. Nobody will know.' Some of the policemen said this is what we should do. This is the plan. We must not remove the thing.

As General Constand Viljoen, Chief of the Defence Force, was visiting Windhoek on his way to the north, Chris requested an urgent meeting with him.

I explained the situation to him about this arms cache in Katatura in the Ovambo hostel and that we can really do a secret operation on this...

We would have achieved a situation, I thought, whereby, should Ovambos come in with arms, should they try to hide it in the hostel for internal operations, then we will more easily get people to report on that. Because once you have had an explosion, they would say, 'Hey, hey, not that stuff around here, around us. It is too dangerous.' That was my line of thinking. So I said to General Viljoen, we have the ability, we can beef that cache up a bit with more explosives and we can set it off from a distance. There was other things that one could do to make it very credible that it is a cache that went off.

General Viljoen's reaction was:

'Chris, I hope you are not going to be disappointed in me, but if we do that then we degrade ourselves to the level of terrorists... My instructions to you is give the information to the police. It is their duty to handle that sort of thing. It is an internal thing, it is about trespassing the laws of the country at the time. It is a police thing, let them handle it.' By telling you this incident, it illustrates to you the ethics of soldiering. And I always said that General Viljoen was, in a sense, to use this phrase, a 'Boer General' because it was war, but he still maintained certain ethics. I think that is the duty of professional military people.

### THREE KINDS OF SOLDIERS

Chris identifies three categories of soldiers in terms of their political affiliation. He positions himself in the first category, which he calls the 'military realists'.

There were definitely quite a number of soldiers who truly felt that they themselves had an apolitical approach to the whole situation; that they are first and foremost soldiers, and they are going to deal with the whole situation from a military perspective. Now that again is probably easier said than done, knowing that war, armed conflict, armed struggle is a continuation of politics by other means... But there were a great number of people who were not necessarily Nationalist Party members, who were not necessarily part of the government, but they felt that insurgency warfare, revolutionary warfare, the armed struggle is unacceptable. That would give everything to deal with that in a purely military capacity... And there was a strong feeling among a lot of people...who believed that the final...solution to this conflict...must be a political solution.

The second group was motivated by a need to *influence* the political process.

The second group then is people who said, 'Fine, let there be a political solution in the long run, but we are going...to try and influence that political solution outcome of the conflict...' There was this approach of, 'Okay, I am a soldier, I am going to play my military role here, but in doing so, we are going to...influence the final political solution.'

The third group believed they could *determine* the political outcome.

The third category...is the most politicised group. There you will find people who had membership cards of the National Party and who belonged to the cultural and other organisations of the party, like being members of the *Broederbond*,<sup>3</sup> being members of the *Ruiterwag*<sup>4</sup>... Within the military they saw themselves as playing a vital role for the party... Their angle of approach to the whole thing definitely tied in with the belief – and they were made to believe by political leaders and even by some military leaders – that the military...can determine the outcome, contrary to how we were trained.

The third position was also the one held by the nationalist government.

The government of the day...truly believed that they can use the military to influence the final outcome, or to postpone a political solution, sort of *ad infinitum*. Some politicians believed that in the long run, apartheid might work. Some politicians believed in the long run...you can convince the international community that apartheid is not a bad thing. It is a philosophy, a political philosophy with which people can live, and that that is truly the only solution for South Africa. As much as they believed that, they believed that the military could solve the problem. When I say solve the problem, I mean...postpone a final political outcome, a final political solution.

#### ‘THINGS WEREN’T AS SIMPLE’

Although Chris saw MK and the ANC as separate entities, not all his colleagues did likewise. Since they conflated the ANC, MK and communism, they were not adequately prepared for the transition of power. This left people feeling they were not only fighting for the wrong reasons, but they had lost the war. Instead, they should have been prepared that their role was to ensure a democratic political solution.

In certain circles (not all) it was a very easy and straightforward thing to say the ANC is a communist party, it is a communist organisation; we are fighting communism, therefore we are fighting the ANC. That thing led to a situation that we have now, where people say that the ANC is governing and we have lost the war and after all, there don’t seem to be a lot of communists. They are in bed with the SACP, they are in bed with COSATU, and so on, but really we don’t sit here with a communist government as such. So in the first place, we have lost the war and secondly, we fought for the wrong reasons. There is not a right perspective to this thing.

While Chris could see why people argued this way, he did not subscribe to the same views, and therefore he did not form part of the mainstream thinking.

I couldn’t just go with the mainstream and say, ‘Yes, the ANC is a communist organisation, therefore we have to fight it, and there is a communist threat...’

From that perspective everything else falls right into place. In so doing we are fighting a ‘communist onslaught’. Things weren’t as simple, as far as I am

concerned, and I was in an advantageous situation where you did more reading and more studying of 'the enemy'... It was wrong and it will always be wrong to make things so simple. It is true that a lot of people, leaders within...the ANC, were – and still are – communist-minded, pro-communist and so on. And it is possible for them to be a member of the South African Communist Party and be a member of the ANC. I could never go with the mainstream and say, 'We are fighting communism, we are fighting a communist organisation.' Surely by definition, one must have admitted that the ANC...is also a nationalist organisation.

This conviction caused Chris to be regarded as a maverick and led to embarrassment.

It is easy to be an insider when you are serving in Operations, or in Logistics, or Personnel or Finance or whatever. But it is difficult unless you are prepared to bend the truth. Then you can be an insider... When I was promoted to general and I was told by another general afterwards, this story. Kat Liebenberg discussed the promotions and he asked the other generals present what are my political affiliations. One of the generals said he thinks I am a right-winger within the Nationalist Party. Another one said – and I am talking about lieutenant generals, the top structures – the other one said, 'No, I can't agree with that. I think he is a Democratic Party supporter.' Then General Liebenberg said to them, 'Guys, do you realise that we are discussing a man who has just been appointed general and none of us even know what his political affiliations are?' Then he said, 'I will tell you what he is. He is a fucking maverick.' Oh well, you know, you hear these things. They come back to you. I would rather be a maverick. And the reason why he said that is that one day in a meeting Georg Meiring (Chief of the Army, about to become the Chief of the Defence Force)...said that the ANC is a communist organisation. The ANC is a communist party. What we were discussing was an overall intelligence briefing. He was going overseas to Israel at the time, and we were talking about his briefing overseas, to his colleagues in Israel... I said, 'You can't go there and say that the ANC is a communist organisation.' Everybody sat up, you know... I said, 'No, it is a nationalist organisation...' And then he said to me, 'Don't you know your intelligence?' He started naming people and he said that they are members of the Communist Party, but they are also serving on the Executive Council of the ANC, so therefore it must be a communist organisation. I said, 'No, it does not work like that.' Then we realised that we are...from different sides of the line... From then onwards... whenever he referred to the ANC...he would look at me and say, 'And General Thirion doesn't agree with me, but...' and then he goes on and on and makes his point. And I sit there, and I don't have a chance to talk, and everybody knew what my standpoint was.

## 'I SAID IT WAS WRONG'

Although Chris believed in doing what was necessary to combat insurgency warfare, he was 'intensely against military involvement inside the country'. He divides the war into three dimensions:

Politically speaking and strategically speaking [there were] three dimensions of the war. The overall Cold War situation which was a result of a bipolar big power constellation manipulating what was happening elsewhere in the globe. That was the international dimension of our war. Then there was the regional dimension of our war and that was happening in Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland and to a very large extent, Namibia... Then there was the internal dimension of the same conflict... You could not deal with it in three totally separate entities. It was a complicated integrated reality for me, a three-dimensional war situation.

According to Chris, it was the government's task – specifically Foreign Affairs – to deal with the international dimension. The military should have been responsible for the regional dimension and the police should have been restricted to the internal dimension.

In so doing you separate the functions, but if you do not operate like that, and if the military becomes involved internally, first of all you send out the wrong signals to the international community. Your credibility as the government of the people goes for a ball of chalk and the fact that it has all the characteristics of a potential civil war... The military, as far as I am concerned, was never the armed wing of the Nationalist Party, as some propagandists would try and say. Because in the military we had serving supporters of the full spectrum of political parties in this country. So if you bring the military and involve them inside the country, then who is the enemy? Is the enemy the people who do not side with government or what? A military force is a force out of the people, so how do you start acting inside the country?

To be involved in internal unrest was also contrary to their training.

In the military you are trying to annihilate, to wipe out the enemy and you are playing with the enemy mindset... So if you now take soldiers coming from, let's say Angola, Namibia, from the border areas, they are trained to handle an R1 rifle;<sup>5</sup> they are trained to man an armoured vehicle. They are trained as soldiers. Now you are bringing them back and now you take them into Soweto and what they see is not...the military definition of 'the enemy'. They see mobs, they see crowds, they see mass action, but they don't see a lot of military equipment. And that's how you make guys schizophrenic. He is trained as this, but now you tell him, 'Listen, in mass control the bottom line is minimum force...' Now who determines minimum force? If the streets become...part of the battlefield, what is minimum force? The military is not...trained for it, it is not equipped for that...and it is not a principle of warfare.

He is adamant that he had always maintained it was wrong to fight the political struggle with violence.

I am of the opinion that the very existence and the very creation of the CCB-type of organisation to act within the country and to act against the political opponents of the government, was wrong. I said it was wrong, and I say it from any platform, and I was not involved in it. I was not part of it. I never sanctioned it, and I can even call heads of the Defence Force like Jannie Geldenhuys, like Georg Meiring, and they will testify that I was against it, and that I spoke out against it.

This viewpoint was not well received.

It was received...from an opinion that, 'Ja, okay, we have heard you now.' On one occasion down in the Cape I specifically addressed this point eye-to-eye in a meeting with Jannie Geldenhuys, and his remark was, 'We have heard you, Mr Thirion,' and then when they had feedback, General van Loggerenberg, then Chief of the Defence Force, came to me and he said, 'You realise you are playing with the lion's balls.'

Chris believes that when the government realised that the real threat was internal instability, they should have restructured the military and the police force.

It is wrong of this government to deploy military people inside this country to maintain law and order. If you do it, you must do it short and sweet under command of the police. But rather than having to repeat this all the time, the government must sit down and realise and say, 'What is the real threat to South Africa?' Is it the lawlessness, the fact that you have so much armed violence and things like that, and what do you need to cope with that? If the threat now is not a real military threat...a true conventional military threat posed from outside the country...then cut down on the Defence Force...but make sure that you have a credible, a lean and mean and a credible Defence Force that can deal with the threats from within the region. Not to deal with the United States or England or Germany or India, or whatever, or the Russians. We are part of the region and there must be a balance of power within the region. Make sure that you have enough of a deterrent, a military deterrent, so that whatever can come from the region you can deal with. But then what you cut on that budget you must [use to] build a new police force. The real threat is the internal instability – that is the real threat. One can avoid making the same mistakes by analysing scientifically the whole process of the conflict as it was, and what went wrong.

#### TENSIONS BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND THE GOVERNMENT

Chris is critical of the way the government focused only on fighting the ANC, but neglected to address the social conditions that fuelled the opposition to the government.

There were a lot of complaints from the side of the military saying, we are fighting a war out there, but in doing so we also find a situation down on the ground where 6 000 people has to get water from one tap that is not running all day... You can't win a war like that. So from the security forces' point of view we would come up with a lot of criticisms. Saying, the guys at the top, do they know what is happening in terms of school facilities here, there or there?... You will be fighting a war for the rest of your life, but there are so many unhappy people in the lower layers of the community... So there will always be war unless one addressed those problems as well. So the military started complaining like hell, saying, what about a national strategy? Why don't we have a national strategy? Which means certain actions need to be taken to better the lives of people in a rural area, and even a squatter camp, and even elsewhere.

Chris maintains that by neglecting social conditions, other government departments did not adequately support the military. They therefore needed to put pressure on these departments.

We were saying to ourselves, we don't mind working 12 hours a day.

We don't mind working 14 hours a day, but the rest of the government have an eight to five job and what they don't cope with in eight to five can wait until tomorrow... The government, the top structure, really does not know what the hell is going on on the ground. That was the general thinking.

This eventually led to the formation of the SSC in 1978.<sup>6</sup> But the SSC was not without its problems either.

So the idea was a good idea, but then to create this thing, this infrastructure called the State Security Council, most of the other departments responded to it as the brainchild of the security forces, mainly the military. That was their reaction. And they say this is now part of a military takeover... They were instructed to second people to the...Secretariat of the State Security Council...and in many, many cases, they sent the guys...that they wanted to get rid of. So with that in mind, the military came over stronger and stronger and stronger within the Secretariat of the State Security Council and I say this without fear of contradiction, that the military, even in terms of overall or general managerial skills and the urgency to get things done, were the better equipped and more committed people in the Secretariat.

Furthermore, Chris believes the government did too little too late.

I am seriously very critical of the politicians of my time, as a soldier. The government...did not match the military achievement in terms of political achievement. Political achievements in the sense of getting together with the opposition, not the white opposition, and say at the time, 'Guys, where are we going?' And at a much earlier stage start to look at a political solution. I mean there was the move by John Vorster, there was the move by P.W. Botha, and so on, and then we escalated to what De Klerk did, but apart from that, I surely

feel that the politicians did not do enough – the party that I voted for, the government that I supported as a soldier, did not do enough to solve the problem.

#### FURTHER TENSIONS: THE MILITARY AND THE POLICE

Tensions between the military and the politicians were exacerbated by tensions between the military and the police.

Irrespective of the bad news about the military, there was much more formal command and control, much more discipline and so on than you had in the police. You see, the difference is training... I was astounded at times to realise what amount of time was spent on the training of policemen. Even when they got to the point where they become senior policemen...they don't spend a lot of time in training, really. I hope it is different now. I hope it is changing.

Not only was Chris against using the military inside the country to quell unrest, he was also against the involvement of the police outside the country.

The police, they again tried to do the military job better than the military. They created units like Koevoet which was... to say semi-military is even wrong; it became more military than anything else... I can say this categorically, and I have so many ways to prove this... Again that caused frustration between the military and the police, because the police – and I am now referring specifically to the Koevoet-type unit – they operated with much less restrictions than the military. Much less command and control 'problems'...than the military would operate on... There is cultural differences between the military and the police... In the military you have this very strong hierarchical command and control structure... A policeman develops the mindset, the mentality of operating on his own...on the ground wherever he functions within the country... Depending on how serious the case is, they might operate in twos or a threesome or whatever... The...strict command and control, which is a prerequisite for successful military operations, is not part of their culture.

#### FRUITS OF A PROTRACTED WAR

Despite all the problems, Chris maintains that the very protractedness of the war enabled political solutions to be reached at a favourable time when the international climate had changed dramatically. By the time the government decided to negotiate with the ANC, the Cold War was over and communism was no longer a real threat.

People would say we have been at war on and off on a lower profile over the span of 16 or 18 years, and what have we achieved? We have achieved nothing, because there is an ANC government. That argument is utter nonsense. The

fact that we have a democratic Constitution is partly because of the war... If you go back to 20 years before '94, and you look at the political programme of the ANC (and you know I am not one of those saying the total onslaught was a communist onslaught)...but...at the time when you take what was written as the constitutional objectives...then I was convinced, yes, we are fighting...the spread of Marxism, the spread of communism. And today I honestly believe the fact that we went through this political change at the time when it happened and not 15, 16, 18 years earlier...is a positive thing... We fought a protracted war over so many years... During...the last two or three years of that period we saw the collapse of the Berlin wall, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and that brought about a different international climate against which SA went through this serious change of government.

#### THE 'NIGHT OF THE GENERALS'

In December 1992, Chris and other generals serving in the military were dismissed, after being accused of attempting to organise a coup against the NP government.

That was when my career was ended, during the so-called 'night of the generals'.<sup>7</sup> I was then, along with another 22 members...told that the State President decided that we must go. That is it. At the time, I asked for the reasons and I was told that I will in due course be informed about the reason. We were told early in the morning of the Saturday...that this is the end of the road for us and at 1pm that same day I heard over the radio that we were accused of 'third force' activities, of planning a military coup and having been involved in other military coups, and that we acted outside of our mandate, and that we had misled the political leaders and that we had misled the Auditor General (whatever that might have meant), and that we were responsible for the death of people. And that is it... That is what was said.

Chris wrote to President De Klerk and asked to be court-martialled or to have his case dealt with in formal legal procedures. He struggled to obtain answers or reasons for his dismissal, suggesting that he and the others were randomly selected by NIS at De Klerk's instruction – that they were accused and fired to send a strong signal to the ANC that the government was committed to peaceful negotiations. His letter only generated an acknowledgement of receipt.

Eventually Chris managed to secure a meeting with De Klerk.

Just before the start of the Truth Commission, I had a personal talk with F.W. de Klerk in his office. By then he was deputy president. So again I said, 'You have acted in your capacity as Supreme Commander of the Defence Force and that gives you the right to end one's career like that, and as a soldier I must accept it, but as an individual I can't make peace with it.' He then said to me, 'Okay, the Truth Commission is now a fact.' It is going to be implemented and he would see to it that my case would be dealt with in the Truth Commission.

That never happened. The Truth Commission did ask me about what happened and, 'Why were you kicked out?' From a perspective of, 'You must have been a naughty boy, if you were kicked out as a general by the State President.' They were really digging into that. Anyway, F.W. promised that it would be dealt with, and he would arrange it, or see to it, or whatever. That never really happened...

Chris was upset, because many accusations were left hanging in the air and it affected his family.

Every now and then you would hear that there is a lot of enquiries about me having been involved in arms trafficking across the border of neighbouring countries or...referring also to me about ivory and diamonds and stuff like that... There is one thing I will hate De Klerk for as long as I live, [and that] is what he did to my family in the process of handling my situation... I think it was not easy for them. It really wasn't easy for them... They knew that I was a dedicated soldier. And I think that they knew and they realised that I wouldn't have gone off the rails just like that and do my own thing and go for my own mandate... They knew me well enough, although they didn't know much, if anything, about my career in Military Intelligence. But they would see now and then, I'm in uniform and, at the odd occasion, they would have been at a very private parade where I was decorated... They were very proud. I said, 'It's nice to see that you are proud of this whole thing, but remember, one thing in the job in which I am, the game in which I am, the difference between praise and shame is a hair's width.' And when all this happened, they came to me and said, 'That day we didn't understand what you were saying, now we know.' And my son was anxious. He wanted to know from me, 'Are you okay? Are you clean?' That's the word he used. And the only answer I could give him was, 'We'll see.'

In 1998, he wrote to the chief of the Defence Force, Georg Meiring, requesting that things must get 'sorted out'. In his reply, Meiring stated that there had been an investigation, but as far as Chris was concerned there was 'nothing to act against', 'no grounds for action'. Meiring apologised for the way he had been treated. Chris again got legal advice, but the case had become superannuated.

In the same year, F.W. de Klerk published *The last trek: A new beginning*. In it he maintained that the dismissal of the generals proved to be justified in the light of the amnesty applications. This prompted Chris to sue De Klerk for defamation.

They asked me whether we could settle it outside of court and that he was prepared to make a public statement about me and my career... They gave me certain options for such a statement, which to my mind was nothing but a lot of polite political jargon. I want him to state categorically that he acted on unconfirmed information, that I asked him to be court-martialled, that it was not done; that after my dismissal there was three investigations by the military, by the police and by the office of the Attorney-General and that

in all three different investigations he was told that it is nonsense, there is nothing... I wanted that to be said on paper. I wanted his signature. It was a tough situation, but that is what I got and then I said, as far as that is concerned, this is the end of the saga.

### THE TRC

Chris is disappointed with the TRC, as he believes it did not provide a true reflection of the nature of the conflict:

I am disappointed at the TRC. Disappointed in a sense that I mean even a foreign military attaché said to me, 'This is a one-sided show.' I know it was hell of a one-sided... Even Bishop Tutu fairly early in the process...said, 'Yes, we are going to deal with two standards or double standards. I don't think he used it in a negative context, but he said, 'Yes, of course, because on the one hand we are dealing with freedom fighters and on the other hand we had no choice, on the other hand we are dealing with an illegal...a bad government and bad security forces.' So he said, 'Yes, you can't handle the two things in the same manner...' But I don't agree with that. It was two parties at war... As far as I am concerned it must be dealt with from one point of view and that is, in this whole process, to what extent are both parties guilty of human rights violations... But they say it is the people who win the war who write the history and in a sense it is the writing of the history, but I don't think it is all being done in all fairness.

Although disillusioned by the TRC, Chris acknowledges its strengths, particularly in providing an opportunity for disclosure and reflection:

I do believe that the Truth Commission was a good thing. It was good because people had the opportunity to go and say this was my involvement, I am sorry about it. It was like we would say in Afrikaans, a '*uitlaatklep*' (a release valve, an opportunity for expression) for a lot of people, because you must also remember there was a situation where people felt that...there was not time for a proper demobilisation period. People were geared for conflict, geared to fight the enemy and then all of a sudden things changed, and all of a sudden the enemy became something else or...difficult to define... For a lot of people...there was not a demobilisation first. They were still getting ready for a long protracted war, and then all of a sudden things changed. People feared, 'Hell, ok, what now?' And then they start thinking by themselves – like I had to do for myself – what was my involvement? What am I guilty of? What is the positive things about my career? What is the contribution...? And the good thing about the Truth Commission is that a lot of bad things came out, and...one would...say to yourself, '*Ja*, you know, I was a good soldier, I was a professional soldier, that is how I feel about myself.' But then I must also say to myself I was not only a member of the SADF at the time, but I was a senior

member and, in that capacity, I must take responsibility for what happened in the Defence Force at the time. So in a sense, I must also take responsibility for what happened at the hands of the Wouter Bassons and members of the CCB. Was it not for the Truth Commission, one would have easily fell into the trap of not thinking along the total spectrum of your career of the past... What is it that you can feel good about, what are the things that you cannot feel so good about, and what are things that you should feel bad about? So although I never got involved directly, the Truth Commission served that purpose for me, in the sense that things happened that I did not know... The fact that I did not know, I was a general in that Defence Force and it is not good enough to say I did not know about it or the wheeling and dealing of Wouter Basson... I know there is a court case going on and I know one must wait and see what comes out at the end... [but] I think there is a lot of things that came out, and we must say to ourselves we can't be proud of that.

Chris did not apply for amnesty and never appeared before the TRC.

On...three or four occasions people came to me. The first group that came to me, they wanted to know from me why was I kicked out of the Defence Force at the time... It was in the early days of the TRC... They were motivated from the point of view that I must have done terrible things for the State President to have done this, and what is it that I had done. They wanted to know that. They know the job that I was in and so on. They got contradicting information and so on, and they wanted to clear things out with me. I think that in the back of their minds, there might still be people who believe that the so-called 'night of the generals', when myself and 22 people altogether were just kicked out of the Defence Force, and the State President said that we were involved in 'third force' activities...and we acted outside of our mandate...and we were also planning a military coup. And at the end when I confronted [De Klerk] with it, he said I was sympathetic towards a military coup, which is total bullshit. It is total bullshit.

He believes the TRC lost interest when they could not find any proof of his guilt:

I said to them, 'What about my human rights? Where does that come in?' 'No,' they said, 'that is not' – I can't remember their exact words – but they said, 'This is nothing of our problem.' Well, it left me with a situation where I felt all the time that the Truth Commission would address my situation as well, and I tried to create that situation by saying to them, 'Where do I stand now? What about my human rights?' So they left it at that. So my feeling afterwards was when they could not find things of which I was guilty, and... I did not stand accused of definite things, they lost interest. They could not care about what happened to me... I said to myself, probably they have other more important things to do.

## RECONCILIATION AND FORGIVENESS

For Chris reconciliation requires an acknowledgement of the past and of the multiple differences between groups, rather than an artificial and premature unity.

I would say that reconciliation to me means in the simplest sense, to create an atmosphere, a climate of respect for the differences in culture, the differences in religions, the differences in language and whatever you want to put the accent on. But don't try and wish it away. Don't think that we can become a rainbow nation overnight. Reconciliation to me means that we really have to make some investments in the younger generations now, and especially the younger generations of people who came out of the war. If one could go... say to people...even if you understand that apartheid was wrong at the time, you supported it. It is no use running around and saying, 'Hell, I'm sorry I supported apartheid. At the time I thought it was the right thing.' But to get people to form a better understanding of the whole conflict situation. And I mean it is easy to say and maybe it is right to say that okay, it was all about apartheid, but I think the whole conflict pattern at the time became predominantly black and white. Like you had these conflict patterns in countries where you never had apartheid. Zimbabwe, where you never had apartheid, didn't become a nice rainbow nation after independence... They are going through another process of conflict, and although the pattern of that conflict is dominantly between haves and have-nots, those who have land and those who haven't got land, and so on, but you have these conflict patterns and there would have been conflict in South Africa. Apartheid enhanced the whole thing, overemphasised the differences.

While differences need to be respected, they should not be overemphasised.

Now reconciliation to me would mean to refrain from political philosophy and things that over-accentuate the differences. On the other hand it would be stupid to wish it away and to say that there is no place for it...

Reconciliation would mean to create an awareness of it, but alongside with awareness, mutual respect. Reconciliation to me would mean that people really go all the way to say, 'Let's develop this nation.' True charity begins at home. True, you look at your own people, but it would be stupid...if I only invest in my own people – in the Afrikaner – and then think by doing this I can make a big contribution to this country... There is room for that approach or that attitude...but there should be more room, and that is reconciliation, where we say, 'Let's invest in all our people.' To come to that point where you can say to yourself that old phrase, 'Not what my country do for me...and my children and my children's children, but rather what can we do for this country?' And reconciliation must start there. What can we do to make this country a success? I truly believe...that we will get there.

Chris believes that everyone can contribute to the process of reconciliation in their own environment:

I reduce the problem for myself to *Die Werf*<sup>8</sup> and I claim that I have a workforce here, black and white, with very good racial harmony, and this is where you take hands...on shop floor level and you work up from there. This is a small business. I have been exposed to black people all my life. They are not a threat to me because they are black, and they are not murderers or thieves because they are black. I have a clear conscience when I say to you they are my fellow countrymen and I have a responsibility to share their joys, their fears, their sadness, like I want them to share mine... We have had occasions here when things went very bad. One night we had a hell of a fire with wind blowing directly towards the *Werf* and you could see the red sparks coming over the trees for the thatch roof. Without having said a word, the people who were off duty came out... They came out running with everything that was hollow full of water and they start putting in on the deck. They just thought of it themselves. They had this feeling to protect *Die Werf*.

He is also passionate about investing in the youth:

I still have this dream of a leadership academy – a multiracial leadership academy which is a post-matric year and one should probably have a number of those. That is a year where these guys can get extra studying time. If he wants to improve certain matric results, he can do it during that year. He can be exposed to study methods and all such things, but he can get to know himself better and [he] can get to know more about the other people of other races and other cultures. To know that first of all I am a South African, and then I am an Afrikaner, I am Afrikaans speaking, I am proud about it. I know who I am, but when it comes to what is good for South Africa, I also know who I am and I also know where I stand.

On the issue of forgiveness, Chris has ambivalent feelings:

I have a hell of a problem, and a hell of a struggle with this whole thing of forgiveness, because when you use the...word and you start talking about it, then I have difficulty to say, 'Yes, we must forgive and forget and so on.' I don't think I will ever be able in my life to forgive what happened to me because of the decisions taken by F.W. de Klerk, in terms of my career and what I truly believed the role I could have played in the new South Africa and the new Defence Force. But that is it, so I am the wrong person to ask about what do I feel, and what do I believe in terms of forgiveness. In a broad national sense...if we don't get to the point where we would say, unless the rest of the people can forgive the whites and dominance of the Afrikaner for apartheid, then all this that we have discussed has got a long way to go and to get to the point of good and objective nation-building.

#### 'DON'T JUST WRITE THE COUNTRY OFF'

Although Chris recognises that the new South Africa has many problems, he remains optimistic.

I did not think we came out with a bad solution, provided the government of the day truly govern by the Constitution, and that they are governed by the Constitution and that they themselves are governed and inspired by objective intellectual interpretation in terms of the Constitution, and not by a personal individual interpretation of what is written... Last night I read a letter that I got from two Americans, two ex-retired CIA guys. And I wrote to them at the beginning of the year and I gave them my perspective of South Africa, because I got a letter from the one guy saying it is such a pity that the country is going for a ball of chalk, you know, after what happened. And I wrote to them and I said no, this is not the case. It is tough times, it is difficult times and, you know, everything changed for everybody. It changed for the black people to a great extent and now the black people are having difficulties. And when I say the black people, I mean the masses. They say it has gone, it is over this apartheid, we have a black government, we have a government we have voted for, but what has happened? Less and less jobs, the economy has done this, the rand has done this, the petrol price has gone up. It is difficult for everybody and everybody is seeking answers. And there is a hell of a challenge to leadership in this country, be that leadership in the church, be it among the black people or among the white people, whatever. And I wrote to these guys in the United States and I say, 'Listen, don't just write the country off. But be aware of the fact that we are going through a hell of a difficult time.'

Chris believes the military can play a role in the reconstruction process:

Historically the *Spesiale Diens Battalion* (the Special Service Battalion) took guys off the streets. Guys who would end up in jail. So instead of going to jail, we transfer you to the Army...where the guy lives a decent life, he is taught about...bodily hygiene factors and everything... The military even today has the best equipment and instructors to teach guys to become heavy-duty truck drivers and things like that and the military play, even now, play a vital role... The military can take a lot of guys from the streets and they can put them back on the streets again as semi-skilled labourers, where they can go to firms, start working and then improve themselves.

#### APARTHEID IN REVERSE GEAR

Despite his optimism, Chris feels that we have not learned from our mistakes:

To have to cope now with apartheid in reverse gear is a sad situation. It is very sad. No matter what explanations for it or the reasons for it or whatever, but what I see people have to cope with, is apartheid in reverse gear. And although it is a very good thing to try and do everything possible to uplift the people who have been left behind in the past, I truly believe that it is done at the expense of the country as a whole. Even at the expense of those in whose main favour this should work.

He cites an example of people who are appointed in positions with which they cannot cope:

In the University of UNISA [University of South Africa] there is not a chance of anybody being a pale face can be appointed in the library in any way, in any post. So all the appointments are black people, people of colour, but predominantly black people. In most of these cases these people have been trained at second-class universities inside this country. In most of the cases they can't do their job... The more this is being done, the greater the workload on a diminishing white minority... Students from foreign countries, but more so students inside this country, they just have to wait and to cope with the backlog of services that the library must render.

He also cites the state of the Oshoek border post between South Africa and Swaziland. The queues for people entering and leaving are separated by dustbins and corrugated iron. 'That is their first impression of South Africa. I was so sad... It is much better on the Swaziland side than on the South African side. I was very sad.'

However depressing this is, he refuses to become depressed:

I refuse to become depressed. I will become sad at times, but I am not going to become depressed. Because we have to fight back. When I say we have to fight back, it is not the Afrikaner or the whites or whatever. It is the people in this country that has to work our way back to a better country and to a better life for everybody... But then the government and everybody else must be seen to be doing that.

#### A DECADE AFTER THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

Chris runs a small business which he built up from scratch after leaving the Defence Force. He employs approximately 15 staff members and believes that by providing employment, he can impact positively on the lives of other South Africans. He proudly pronounces that he has had to be a jack of all trades to manage his business. When he is not repairing and renovating the building, he is cooking in the restaurant kitchen. He specialises in the dishes he learned to cook as a young boy in Namibia.

**'I NEVER FITTED'****THE STORY OF A NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICES AGENT**

Ann<sup>9</sup> was recruited to work for the NIS as a university student in the early 1970s. Her task was to inform NIS about student activities on the campus. In 1975 she joined NIS as a permanent staff member and besides an eight-year break, she remained with them till 1999. She did not apply for amnesty, or approach the TRC in any capacity. Consistent with the leadership of NIS, Ann holds that as her activities were confined to intelligence she did not contribute to the commission of gross human rights violations. Furthermore, the leadership of NIS claimed that as an organisation they advocated a political solution to South Africa's conflict. No former members of NIS applied to the TRC for amnesty.

Ann raised concerns about attaching her name to her story. She does not want to be seen as speaking on behalf of her former colleagues, nor does she want her story to be regarded as representing the NIS. To respect this, we have used a pseudonym.

I was referred to Ann by a former colleague of hers. He thought Ann would be a good person to talk to, as she had not only spent more than 20 years in NIS, but had always been an independent thinker and was known for 'calling a spade a spade'. I set up an appointment, arranging to meet Ann at the hotel where I was staying.

While waiting in the foyer for Ann to arrive, she phoned to say she was running late. About 20 minutes later a tall, slender, smartly dressed woman entered the foyer. The receptionist pointed her in my direction. She walked purposefully across the foyer, smilingly extended her hand in greeting and apologised for being late. After introducing ourselves, Ann enquired about the overall objective of the project and how the information was to be used. She agreed to be interviewed and we began the first of three interviews.

**'DETERMINED NOT TO MARRY THE PIG FARMER'**

Ann grew up on a farm 'in the middle of nowhere' in the Natal Midlands. Her parents were 'very unacademic working-class people'. Although her grandfather was a United Party<sup>10</sup> supporter, her own family were conservative Afrikaners. Her father was a 'very strong Nationalist'. They belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church and went to church twice every Sunday.

It was a strict upbringing. We were beaten as kids, strong discipline, hard work. My parents just worked their fingers to the bone. Three brothers and myself, the only daughter, but I never fitted. It is like a family discussion about where I went wrong, because they were all quite happy and content...stuck in the farming environment, while all I wanted to do was go to school and learn to read and discover the world.

From the outset, Ann characterises herself as someone who holds alternative views to her counterparts. This representation permeates her narrative.

I then decided from the day that I was born that I wanted to study and I didn't want to marry the pig farmer in the town. I was determined not to marry the pig farmer, so I broke away from the family in a sense that I loved reading. I could read by the time I went to school. I wanted to study. None of my brothers studied.

#### 'A VERY RACIST BACKGROUND'

Ann attended primary school in a small rural Natal town, which she describes as 'probably the most racist town in the whole of the country'.

Regularly there were court cases of farmers who beat up their workers and they were never guilty, of course, but everybody knew that everything wasn't kosher. [A] very, very racist background. Strong vindictive racism... People used to complain if [blacks] dared to walk on the sidewalk, if they wore glasses, which is like the biggest sin, because it meant that they could actually read. Everybody knew that they couldn't read anyway... With this very staunch Christian upbringing, especially my mother being strongly convinced until today (and she is in her late seventies), that black people do not have a soul. It is just a fact. They don't have a soul. You get white people and you get animals and somewhere outside of that you get black people. They are not the same as white people. They are a different breed of people... It was common wisdom. Everybody felt that way... Often with my family I used to have discussions about the good Samaritan where Christ says, 'Who is your neighbour?' and my mom would say, 'My neighbour is not a kaffir. It is just a fact.'

Her family continue to hold these racist views. Although Ann gets along well with them, she feels they live in 'totally different worlds'.

The rest of the family spend hours still today cursing black people. And we always joke, if we have been together for half an hour and we say, 'You haven't cursed a black person yet, what is wrong with you? We have been together for half an hour.'

#### ESCAPING: AN ENGLISH SCHOOL, AMERICA, VARSITY

The animosities between the Afrikaners and the English were so pronounced, it made the racism pale in comparison. 'We were so preoccupied with that, that the blacks did not even feature.' While staunch Afrikaners sent their children to Afrikaans high schools, Ann went to a high school in a nearby town that was 'very much an English school, very strong British tradition'. Here she became anglicised. 'That was a sin in the town.'

Her hometown was run by Afrikaans people. English people were 'like outcasts' and did not occupy positions in the city council or in the church. Although he was Afrikaans, her father mixed with the English, due to their shared Second World War experiences.

Ann enjoyed being at the high school and feels it broadened her perspective. At the age of 18 she went to America as a Rotary exchange student. 'And then I was lost.'

I was lost in the [eyes of the] community. I think it was quite a shock for my parents, because I did not come back the same. In a sense I came back very much the same. Although I was not very conservative, I was a very obedient good scholar and I liked discipline and I was very opposed to kids that smoked at school or bunked class. I mean, I was this real goody-goody person in class... I could quite easily have gone to the teacher to say that so and so was smoking in the bathroom... For me, discipline and doing the right thing was right. In America...one thing that struck me was the lack of discipline in schools, which I didn't particularly like. I didn't, at that stage, think that it had an influence on me, but I think eventually it was like...yeast, I think it was a process.

While in America, she still defended her conservative and racist views.

I spent a lot of time explaining why I felt it was a good thing. I thought it was a very good thing. I thought it was right, because whites and blacks were different species, almost. They did not really belong together. I remember spending a lot of time explaining why I believed it and I really did believe it was right. I thought it was the way of good order.

Upon her return, Ann went to a Natal university, which provided another escape from her upbringing.

It was also unusual for people from my town, especially for girls from my town, to...go to America and go to university... If you did anything, you would maybe do a household course or how to be a good farm wife course at some little technical college or something. But I never felt myself belonging where I grew up, because I was always trying to get somewhere else.

She studied Afrikaans, drama and political science.

I started studying teaching subjects, because I wanted to be a teacher. All my life I wanted to be a teacher. I did political science as an extra. I needed an extra subject; I liked the look of the guy and did political science for two days and realised this is what I wanted to do. So I threw all my energy into political science. I couldn't major and I couldn't carry on, because I had an Education Department loan and that restricted you.<sup>11</sup>

#### RECRUITMENT: SPYING FOR R20 A MONTH

In the early 70s, in her first year at university, Ann was recruited to work for the NIS.

My parents were friendly with somebody who was a spotter at the university. So what they did was they would actually look around campus and see people

that had potential and I probably stood out. They also knew I was there because my parents... They probably found out from them. I had no idea what it actually meant at that stage, you don't really know what is going on... I grew up in a National Party home, but I did not know what I was getting into. I had no clue... I remember it being a very frightening experience, because I didn't know what to do and I knew that I couldn't talk to anybody.

Not only was the money a temptation, but since Ann knew the people who had recruited her, she believed their innocuous explanation.

They sort of presented it [that] they wanted to be able to understand what was going on on campus. They don't recruit you because they want you to spy against people that you are working with and that type of thing. It is to get an understanding of what was happening. In addition, I was quite poor. We didn't have much money, so that paid me enough. It was initially about R20 a month. Eventually...I was quite a highly paid agent. I used to get about R100 a month. Wow, which gave me the luxury of buying a little scooter. I used to drive around campus on my little scooter, but the morals and things, I haven't thought so much about that...

Her job compelled her to get involved in student politics.

You eventually get involved in student politics. I stood for the SRC [Student Representative Council] and was elected immediately, which really shocked me, because I was spying on the SRC and then I would report on what was happening on campus.

Ann rationalised her role within the NIS, maintaining that she was not a spy, but an informant. In addition, the particular university was hardly a hotbed of political activity.

Nothing much was happening on the campus. It wasn't a big revolutionary campus. I used to go to NUSAS<sup>12</sup> conferences. It was just ordinary student politics... Also, the whole approach was that they needed to be able to tell the government what was going on on campuses, so the approach wasn't to spy against your friends for the government. It was to give the government the total picture... This is really the way I saw the role of NIS and the way that NIS saw the role that they played. It was not the social engineering type of role, but really informing the government objectively.

### 'A SERIOUS RETHINK'?

By the third year, Ann 'went through a serious rethink'; she started realising that the 'people in the struggle are actually on the right side and the government is on the wrong side'.

I just thought no, this is wrong. I can understand why students protest, I can understand the oppression and I was not particularly in favour of what the government was doing, but the students were not a threat.

Although her political science studies contributed, she is not sure what precipitated the change of heart.

I don't really know. I think it was just being at an English-language university, doing political science, being confronted by political theory and alternative real democracy learning. I thoroughly enjoyed political science. I enjoyed it more than any other subject – really getting into what makes a state function. I think that was probably the most important impact and then looking at the way the state was functioning and saying something is wrong here. It is not working.

She decided to quit.

I remember distinctly by the third year that I was on campus, I wrote a long report to my handler, who was a very nice guy. He was a nice, decent human being, which makes it easier to say that I don't want to be in this job any more, because I believe the students are doing the right thing. I did not want to make a big spiel of it, but I don't think it is right... I can't remember exactly what I wrote, but I can remember...it was a very serious statement that I made.<sup>13</sup>

However, her handler convinced her to stay.

I can't remember, but they probably convinced me that it wasn't a bad idea. I was also a poor student, because my folks had no money. We lived on the breadline. I had a bursary. I had no money to go to university. I had a bursary from the Educational Department and then I used to get extra money from NIS. At that stage it was like R25 a month and then it was R50, but at least I could buy soap and toothbrushes and shampoo, which my parents did not have to give me. It was also an important thing. It may sound immoral, but it is a fact that you actually do need money and I never ended up being a rich student, but I bought myself a little second-hand scooter... We weren't paid a lot of money. I think they also realised that if they paid too much money, you would probably be a big embarrassment. Anyway, they helped me pay my way through university.

#### NO REAL HARM

Ann did not perceive herself as overtly causing any harm and could therefore justify her decision to continue.

I was not this big lefty-bashing type of agent. I was giving them reports on what was happening on campus, this and this and this. I didn't put anybody in jail, because there wasn't anything and that university was very quiet...

I never really felt a moral dilemma, maybe...because nothing really threatening to the security of the state was happening there, except the odd protest in front of the Catholic Church.

In addition, she was not too sympathetically disposed to the NUSAS members. I must say that the NUSAS sort of crowd weren't people that anybody really liked. It was a common perception at university that both the guys and the women who were social misfits and...couldn't get a boyfriend or a girlfriend, they always gravitated towards politics. They weren't particularly nice people... This is not true of all the people in NUSAS, but they were real scumbag types there. Sort of real dirty...just troublemaking people. They weren't actually very good students or anything.

She also did not perceive them to be especially committed or industrious. I don't know whether they had a cause. I think they just sort of belonged... they felt they belonged somewhere... They weren't sort of committed to the struggle type thing... Whenever some work had to be done on the part of the struggle – we laughed afterwards – but the only people who actually worked for NUSAS in the struggle were the agents, because there were a lot... I know there is one picture of Wits SRC where all but one of the SRC members...worked for somebody – whether NIS or Military Intelligence or the security police – somewhere. It was just totally ridiculous. There was this lone figure there who was not an agent... It meant that the whole NUSAS at one stage was kept going by the agents.

Her decision to stay was also made easier since her handlers were ostensibly ordinary, decent people who treated her well.

I had a very strong, trusting relationship with two handlers...both of them passed away already. They were good old policemen. They weren't the brightest people in the world... They were very ordinary, nice, absolutely Afrikaner guys, but very decent human beings. What kept me going for them was also the way they treated me, because they really treated me like a human being. They were always very concerned. If I had to go to a meeting until 2am at night, they were really concerned about my safety and things like that. They were also always extremely concerned that I was being screwed in the process. When you are at university you are completely alone, you don't have any money, you have these two people who really look after you... They made you feel that you were more important than the job that you were doing.

Due to her good relationship with them, she started attending conferences and helping out at the regional office.

Because I had a very strong relationship with them, I was at the stage where I used to go off to big conferences. I used to go to the regional office and I used to help them with photocopying. I used to help them with office administration, which was unheard of and highly unprofessional. I know that.

## STUDENT POLITICS

They only once pressed her for information on her fellow students – ‘the only really serious time when I sort of felt that this is coming to the heavy stuff’. However, she did not share their perspective that the students were dangerous.

I know I didn’t send anybody to jail or to detention or anything. I remember my handler coming to me one night and asking me...who in the whole of NUSAS I considered to be a real threat to the security of the state. Who I really thought was a dangerous person? And I said I didn’t think there was anybody on campus who was dangerous. I didn’t think any of them were a danger to society, because they were busy with student politics. The handlers and the people at the office didn’t understand student politics. None of them had ever been to university; they were policemen that had been trained in the police force. They didn’t understand the politics of what happened on campus. I think that is when I began to understand that this is normal student politics – the politics that happened on campus... I mean...they say if you are not a communist by the time you are 20, you don’t have a heart. It is part of that process that you have to go through and I didn’t think that anybody that I knew were a threat in any way.

Only afterwards did she realise what motivated their question, and that she had power to influence people’s lives.

The next day I realised why, because then at NUSAS eight people were banned and mine was probably the only campus where nobody was banned. It made me feel very good... I got quite a shock, because I realised that if I had said yes, they would have banned them. But I didn’t think there was a need for that... Most of them were opposed to the system; they were just young people against the injustices that we now all admit and they were doing something about it.

Ironically, not fingering people cast aspersions on their struggle credentials.

The president of the SRC was furious. He was mad, because now the eight NUSAS leaders were martyrs and he wasn’t banned. I think he was the only student president that wasn’t banned, because I didn’t think they were a threat... Then people were saying but maybe he is a spy, because why isn’t he banned... He was totally devastated by the fact that he wasn’t banned, which made me giggle a bit, because he lost all credibility.

With a few exceptions, Ann saw the whole of campus politics as a game.

I think I saw through it. Campus politics was a joke at that stage. It wasn’t really revolutionary... At that stage it was when the blacks moved away from NUSAS, because they also realised it wasn’t relevant and that was when Steve Biko started and the black consciousness movement started. Although campus politics at the time when I was on campus and working for NIS was very lively and active, it wasn’t really revolutionary and this is precisely why

the blacks broke away from NUSAS, because they say, 'You stand here in the streets and protest and then you go to Houghton to your nice little house in the evening and you eat your sushi and drink your champagne and then you come here and you say "I support the struggle."' <sup>214</sup>

#### TEACHING, MARRIAGE, OR SEEING THE WIDE WORLD?

Having completed her teaching diploma, Ann got a teaching post in a Natal city. Again, NIS approached her to stay. 'Then this handler of mine said to me don't I want to work for the NIS.' She declined. 'I said no. I had my job there, I had a boyfriend...and I was going to get married in six months... I thought it was all going to work out nicely.' Yet NIS did not give up.

Then he said to me somebody was coming to see me from Head Office and then I said, 'Okay let's go along.' I remember I still bought a skirt for the occasion. I went and chatted to this guy and later found out that this was the final recruitment, the final interview, which I didn't know. I remember going there thinking very casually and then I thought, 'What the hell, why not? Move to Pretoria and see the wide world.' I went for no ideological reason. All I can remember is thinking it was a challenge and I thought I would move out of the town. The first time I would break out. It was sort of part of doing something else with my life, which was always very strong for me.

With R80 to her name, she moved to Pretoria and started working for NIS in the mid-1970s. At least in part, it *did* turn out to be a wider world.

In a sense it was a wide world, because it was the most incredible experience to be an analyst in an Intelligence Service, because you have access to the most phenomenal information not only from agents, but you have...masses of information. And until today, there are a few things that give me greater excitement than to have a table full of papers and trying to integrate that into a whole. So I really enjoyed the job from that perspective. It was intellectually stimulating.

#### A SMALLER WORLD?

Yet, in some sense Pretoria proved to be the contrary; 'it was a small little world'.

The bureaucracy was stifling and I think I only gradually started to realise how stifling the bureaucracy was, because I had this idea that everybody was eagerly searching the truth, but many of them were just civil servants. They could have been working in the post office. They had a job like any other. There wasn't any particular motivation or anything. And then, of course, the whole culture was very staunchly Afrikaner Nationalist, which was foreign to me, because I hadn't come from that environment... I think I was the first person in the organisation recruited specifically from an English campus,

because there was a decision made to recruit people from the English-speaking campuses and they had luck with me, because at least I was Afrikaans. I was totally foreign... There were a few odd English-speaking [people] in the organisation. It was an Afrikaner organisation. Because English people tended to vote for Progs<sup>15</sup> and that was almost on the border of the revolution for some people.

With a few exceptions, the organisation consisted of ex-policemen.

If you look at the general culture of the organisation...most of the people were ex-policemen. If they had been to university, they had been to Potch [Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education] or Bloemfontein – very strong in Bloemfontein. So it was narrow in the sense that the people came from a specific perspective.

As one of the first English university recruits, Ann felt like an outsider.

I did not really fit into the culture of the organisation. I never did. I don't think there will be anybody who will ever think that I fitted into the culture. I was always odd. I was...one of the first university recruits that they had. All the people came from mostly the military and I was definitely the first one from an English university. So you had all these guys from the Afrikaans universities with the same frame of mind and I remember...[we] had endless hours of discussions about these worlds coming together... One reason why the government establishment hammered the people who were on the left, is because they did not understand their minds. They...did not understand that people stood up and spoke if they disagreed, which brought me into a lot of trouble, because the culture of BOSS at that stage was if you were sitting in a meeting and you are young and junior you just shut up, because you don't have an opinion. You don't have the right to stand up and say how you feel. There was a lot of misunderstandings and I only picked that up when I spoke with Johan,<sup>16</sup> because he would speak to me about how the Afrikaner establishment read people, the socialisation and the culturalisation process, which at English universities is completely different.

### MORE RACISM

Ann describes the racist ideology adhered to by the majority of employees in state structures.

I think for many civil servants the statement 'Apartheid is right' was the same statement as 'God is good'. It just *is*. Most of the people in government services at that stage – and I think this applies to the whole of the government – never encountered the bad side of apartheid. They never went to NUSAS lectures and heard people talk about it. They just saw the one perception of it, and even if they did get a glimpse of the other side, I think their understanding would be, 'But they are black people anyway, so it is different.'

I remember being with my mother in Portugal and we were at the train station late, like 12 o'clock at night or something, and there was a Portuguese woman scrubbing the floors in the toilets. And my mother said, 'Shame, poor woman, who is looking after her kids?' And I said, 'Mom, what about the black women scrubbing the Johannesburg station?' And she said, 'Don't be stupid, that is different, because she is a black woman,' which just confirmed to me she saw them as a different breed of people... She couldn't actually bring the two together, because [they] are not supposed to be living like us and the fact that they are suffering, is all right, because they are used to suffering. That is what my mom always said, '*Maar die kaffers is gewoond om so te leef?*' [The kaffirs are used to living this way.] That is the way that they are supposed to be living.

Ann maintains it was not primarily the organisation, but the insularity of people's views that prevented them from questioning their beliefs and entertaining an alternative position.

The organisation didn't keep people from the truth. People's own perspectives kept them from seeing the truth, because they were so safe in knowing that what they knew was the truth and especially because they grew up in homes where they were taught that there is a truth – a single truth. It was very strong. I think this was a very serious culture shock for me within the organisation, because I didn't grow up like that, or I lost it somewhere. I think my father was probably more like that, but it did not rub off on me. So it wasn't deliberate... This is the truth that is coming to me now. It is not as if the whites in government refused to see what was happening, they couldn't see what was happening. The old paradigm thing. It is a pure paradigm thing. So it is not that they were insensitive or evil. There were very few people that I worked with that I thought were very evil people. There were a few that I thought would perhaps in the middle of the night knock on somebody's door and put a bullet through his head, but they were wackos, they weren't the norm. Everybody in NIS thought they were wackos. There was one guy that always used to walk around with knives in his socks and things and he always had some sort of karate poles...

In terms of the general population, she believes that media restrictions and continuous distortions of the truth contributed to people's ignorance.

When...three policemen beat up 10 guys or when somebody was killed in John Vorster Square, they said he jumped out the window... And people really believed that. That he really did jump. I think increasingly people started thinking...too many people jumping here, you know.

Others just did not want to know, and silently condoned what was happening.

Maybe there was a part of the nation that says, 'Well, we don't mind them doing it, we don't want to know about it.' I think maybe there are people who say, 'We don't want to know about it, but we hope there is somebody out there

who's actually doing these things, *om die kaffers bietjie op hulle plek sit* [to put the kaffirs in their place]...keeping us safe, and if that is what it costs, because there are all these communists...then maybe it is not such a bad thing.'

Some NIS employees were also members of the *Broederbond* and, as such, information would be fed to the latter. However, Ann does not believe that it generally happened on purpose.

I think there were people in NIS probably who had other agendas and maybe, for example, there were also members of the *Broederbond* who would run to the *Broederbond* and tell them what they were reading, which is happening now as well. It is a natural thing... It is difficult, because you are reading all these reports and you might go to *Broederbond* meetings and they say, 'What is happening in Soweto?' It is almost impossible to distinguish in your mind between what is the information that is open to all, and what is covertly obtained. It was always a problem for us, because when you sit with your friend and you start talking about what is happening in the country, one often would keep quiet, because you do not know what information is classified and what is not classified. So I don't think deliberately they ran to the *Broederbond* and told them what was happening, but I think it happened.

#### PROVIDING OBJECTIVE INFORMATION OR KEEPING THE NATS IN POWER?

Since Ann distinguished the greater role of the NIS from the convictions and agendas of her colleagues, she coped with this environment. According to her, the purpose of National Intelligence was to provide objective, reliable intelligence to policy-makers, not to tell the government what it wants to hear – to the point of allowing for 'unpopular opinion towards government'.

I never within NIS, even from my earliest entrance, never got the impression that the role of the NIS was to keep the government in place. Maybe I am lying, but that's how I remember it. I think maybe I didn't feel that, because I had at that stage already seriously started thinking of voting for the Democratic Party, the old Progressive Party, which was unthinkable in NIS. I think what I am doing now is I am saying that was the way that I thought of it, because I never saw my role as keeping the government in place.

However, she does concede that many of her colleagues differed from her in this regard, perceiving their role to be one of ensuring that the NP remained in power.

I think there were many people who saw their role in that way, but that was never the primary function of the Intelligence Service. Although it was never stated and in courses, the opposite was always said. We talk about the role of the Intelligence Service in a state and then that was always to objectively provide the policy-maker with reliable, trusted, whatever, intelligence. But I think most people in the organisation probably saw their role primarily as keeping the white government in power.

These people saw their task as protecting their own.

They would say that *ons doen dit vir volk en vaderland* [we're doing it for our people and our country] and *volk en vaderland* would mean the Afrikaner *volk* and South Africa – that is the 'white people's country'. I mean that is what people worked for. We used to joke about it, especially the people who did not believe in this... But it was very strong for many who were working there for the Afrikaner *volk* and to keep the fatherland safe from the invasion via the 'hostile tribes'. And with that to maintain a certain way of life and values. So the Calvinism was very, very strong. Not that people were so religious, in a sense of being deeply Christian people... For many NIS members it was about protection of the Afrikaner, not the white people, the Afrikaner way of life and values and so on...because it was mainly an Afrikaner organisation. I mean, you never spoke English there. There were maybe three English people and for the rest everybody spoke Afrikaans. But I am talking about, if I may say, the riff-raff. I am just talking about the ordinary unthinking member. I am not talking about the sophisticated thinkers and the top leadership. I did not know them closely, but I think at that point some of the top leadership would also have been thinking that the role of NIS was helping to protect the order. You see, it all had to do with the order in the state and we have to protect it against chaos, because black rule was associated with chaos and decay and anarchy.

Ann never adhered to this belief and used to mock it.

I was never there for *volk* and *vaderland*. I never ever did that job. Never in my life did I go to work thinking that I was going to save the nation. I used to mock it and make nasty jokes about it. We are doing the job for the *vaderland*. I didn't have that sort of doing my duty for the *volk*.

#### 'I NEVER FELT I COULDN'T DO AN HONEST DAY'S JOB'

She offers a somewhat confusing account of her ability to work amongst the prejudiced majority within the NIS. While she did not perceive the convictions of her colleagues to be compromising her work, she does admit that their objectivity was neither that objective, nor entirely unproblematic.

It is important to make a distinction between the political point of view of individual members and the work that we were doing, because the work that we were doing – now it sounds stupid to say this – but it was stripped of the personal prejudice, but of course it cannot be. I mean if most people are thinking that way, it has to be built in that. I think this is one of the...advantages or disadvantages of the whole intelligence process, because there is such a refinement process that a document goes through before it actually reaches Cabinet, that it gets stripped every time of layers and layers of prejudice and perspective, which is probably also bad, because in the end, you

get the naked truth but not the real truth. Cabinet gets the report: '50 people were shot in Gugulethu yesterday.' That's what you get, but you don't get the context, because it is refined. While it was possible for individual members to be extremely racist, it somehow was possible to work in NIS without [it] affecting your work... I never felt that I couldn't do an honest day's job in the NIS.

Furthermore, she felt that the prejudiced elements were diluted due to the different areas in which they would be involved. 'Not everybody was working on the struggle. Some were working on NUSAS. A lot of people were working on overseas organisations – the Anti-apartheid Movement.' Yet, as they were living within a system which isolated blacks and whites, there was not an adequate understanding of the way apartheid affected black people.

In general, I would say that there wasn't a deep understanding of how apartheid was affecting black people in society. Where were we supposed to get it? There was...one extremely talented black guy we had in NIS. I don't know how they managed to recruit him... He lived in Soweto and he said, 'I read your intelligence products and it is not the truth, because you don't know what it looks like in Soweto. I know you are trying your best, but it is not what is happening there, because you don't understand it because you are not there and you don't understand what makes us tick.'

Despite the predominance of a racist ideology, Ann and others found it intellectually challenging to grapple with the issues. This enabled her to remain in the NIS, despite its drawbacks.

It was a very challenging environment with lots of really, really intelligent people... I loved it. I absolutely lapped it up, because it was an intellectual exercise... There were a lot of thinking people in there who really were grappling with what was going on. It wasn't just identifying if anybody opposes the government. It was trying to define that line between identifying legitimate protest and revolution and making a distinction between them... Trying to figure out what was it that made somebody cross that line between the legitimate protest and revolution... There were quite a few people who were thinking like me.

#### 'THE STRUGGLE WAS NOT GOING TO STOP'

Ann identifies two defining moments during her career:

The one was when Steve Biko was killed. When it hit the newspapers and you saw it, everybody was happy in the corridors like, 'Wow, at last. Well, that's one cheeky kaffir out of the way...' I realised that they beat him to death because he was a cheeky kaffir, and for no other reason. Okay, he was involved in...but I figured that that was the main reason. He wasn't throwing bombs... But that sort of understanding that he was beaten to death simply because he

was trying to express his rights as a human being – that wasn't accepted at NIS.

The Soweto riots represented another key moment.

Another problem time that I remember was the 16th June 1976... We would go through the files at night and I would verify what was happening, give a briefing the next morning and then there would be this big Cabinet Committee meeting, where they would decide what is going to happen and they would decide on the action. They were going to ban them all. So they banned them all and it just got worse, and then they were probably going to close the schools and it just got worse. Then I said to myself, 'This is not going to stop. Things are going to get worse and worse and worse.'

She realised it was futile to try and stem the tide of resistance.

So I increasingly realised that the struggle was not going to stop and that they had a reason for doing what they were doing. It wasn't unacceptable in NIS to think that way. I think I was on that set, because there were quite a few people who were thinking like me. There was a big spectrum between 'beat the kaffirs to death because they are black', on the one side, and all the way to the more sophisticated thinkers.

According to Ann, these 'sophisticated thinkers' realised

that apartheid was out, it wasn't going to work; it was morally unjustifiable and that we have to find a way of getting out of that... We had to explain to the government what was really happening... In the last days... [we] repeatedly told the government that it was making a balls-up, but [the] conservative faction... wanted to tell the government what it wanted to hear.

Ann also maintains that the NIS *leadership* was 'predominantly on the *verligte kant* [liberal side], but that the 'majority of the *operational managers* were more on the conservative side'.

The majority of the analysts were more on the 'open up the process' side... The analysts always had a broader perspective, because they don't only see the small reports coming in, they also read the newspapers. They read *The Star*, they also read what is written about them, so they are also influenced very much by what those people were writing... That is an interesting point about how much one was influenced by what the lefties were saying, because you were reading about it all the time and beginning to say, 'But they have quite a point here.'

#### TOLERATING DISSENT?

Ann maintains that differences of opinion were tolerated within the NIS – up to a point. She saw herself as someone who often voiced an alternative position.

I did feel that there were sort of groups of alternative thinkers that felt safer to speak out under my influence, especially because I was very vocal in the

things that I said; that more people felt it was all right to speak out and criticise, even if they did not do it in front of the bosses...because it was not a very good career move. I am not saying that dissent was not allowed...but within limits, and I always went over the limits. I never adhered to the limits. But I think I made other people feel safer to do that and challenged people with things that they had never been confronted with, because I think that most of the people I had in training came from such a small little world.

Her lack of ambition to rise within the ranks of the NIS enabled her to be critical and voice her opinions.

If they were looking for someone to appoint to say a managerial position, they would say, 'Ag no, not that woman; she just makes too much trouble,' which was a disadvantage for me. I never had any ambition really to...go up in the ranks. If I had, I would have been more careful about the criticism, but I never really was. My supervisor often advised me that I should present my points of view in a way that was more acceptable to management. But I couldn't, because the views I had were opposed to the current thinking. Perhaps I should have been more careful. If I think of the fools they appointed above me, I should have done much better, but I did not really have the desire to be what was required for appointment as a manager. I can understand why my previous managers would not have appointed someone like me as a manager, because I was too critical. When I was in a managerial position (in the new National Intelligence Agency [NIA]), I appointed people who were more like myself to work with me, because I valued that sort of open criticism that they had. But I don't think I am the type of material that makes good management material in a *bureaucracy*. It is just a fact. It is nobody's fault.

Although she felt she was permitted to challenge the limits, she was often not taken seriously.

I said at a meeting that I honestly felt that we need to get more English speakers and more people from the Progressive Party into the organisation (to get different viewpoints in). Afterwards [a good friend of mine] said he was so shocked, but then realised that I was just joking (which I wasn't). So maybe I did not have an impact... I think that I had a very limited impact in the end... It is nice walking around in the shopping centres and meet people that were old students of mine for whom the world sort of opened. But I think it is typical for a teacher – you have...one out of a hundred that you hit the jackpot. You don't expect to hit... 90 per cent.

#### NOT SPEAKING OUT

In 1977, at the time of the student unrest, Ann was moved to the Labour Desk.

I was by that time considered to be someone who has a brain, because I had the capacity to work and I was asked to move to the Labour Desk, because

everybody was scared that unrest would move to the labour field and realised that they could cripple the country if everybody started striking. Also it was at a time when trade unions were starting to get established.

She recalls a frustrating incident relating to her intelligence work:

One of the most important things that I had to do was to draw up a list when the government decided to ban some trade union officials. A colleague and myself had to draw up a proposal on trade union leaders that were considered to be involved in subversive activities. And I remember the two of us working night after night...going through all the files on all the labour activists and then we drew up a list of the people that were considered to be involved in illegal trade union activities. Then there was this big meeting with Jimmy Kruger,<sup>17</sup> who was Minister of Justice, chairing the meeting on the 11th floor of NIS. Because we had worked so hard, we were told that we could sit in on the meeting. We weren't allowed to talk, but we were allowed to sit in on the meeting. There was the NIS report on the table on trade union activities and then some senior manager put forward the names of people recommended for banning orders... There were about six or seven people, if I remember correctly, that were on the list proposed for banning orders – a group that everybody in the intelligence community considered should be banned... Jimmy Kruger sat there in front and went through the report. I remember him pointing out the one trade union organiser, whose name was *not* on the list. He was identified specifically as being involved in *bona fide* trade union activity, but there was a whole trade union network under him (the Urban Training project). And Jimmy Kruger just picked up the list and looked at everything and said, '*Wat van hierdie man?* ['What about this man?'] He has all the trade unions under him, let's ban him.' And nobody said a word, and until today and the day I die, I will always regret that I didn't stand up (although I had been barred from participating in the meeting) and say no. I am disgusted and disillusioned that from myself all the way up we knew that this man was not supposed to be on the banned list, and we let it go ahead. Maybe it was at that specific point in my life that I decided never again will I be in a meeting and shut up when I know I should have spoken... What infuriated me was the fact that we had gone through a meticulous process to identify those who were involved in legitimate trade union activity, and the Minister stands up and because he says, 'Ban them,' everyone just agrees to it. I remember speaking afterwards to my divisional head...and I said to him, 'This is appalling, you know,' and he just shrugged his shoulders. And when I spoke to the operators in the field, they said, 'Good riddance, they are causing us a lot of trouble.' And he was banned for four or five years, despite the fact that there was no evidence that he was involved in anything illegal or subversive. And I am partly responsible, because I did not speak up when I should have.

**AN EIGHT-YEAR BREAK**

At the end of the 1970s Ann moved from the Labour Desk to a regional office as an operator. Shortly thereafter she had her first child and took a break from her job for eight years. In 1984 she went overseas with her husband for five years. Upon her return in the late 1980s, Ann was appointed to the Training Unit of NIS and remained with the organisation for another 10 years.

**THE TRANSITION**

As it became increasingly clear that a new dispensation was approaching, Ann was excited, because it also promised new alternatives and an end to the ‘thinking that a woman’s place is in the kitchen’. She organised monthly meetings during which different speakers were invited to voice their opinion and understanding of the political climate. Not only did she have a battle to get the venture going, but she also faced opposition to her choice of speakers. ‘I remember when I wanted to invite Thabo Mbeki – it was about two years before the election – and the manager said to me, “Why do you want to invite Thabo Mbeki?” Who is he anyway?’

Many of her colleagues

were in a great state of shock and uncertainty and what is going to happen to my job and what is going to happen to the country, because the communists are going to take over and no church is going to be able to exist and it is going to be like the end of the world.

She tried her best to ‘make people understand that there was going to be tremendous change and that it wasn’t so bad. It may actually be good for the country in general’. She became frustrated with the naivety of her colleagues, as she perceived them to be in denial about the inevitability of an ANC government.

What shocked me is that when the ANC took over power with the elections, how many people in the NIS were shocked that the ANC won the election. I was shocked by their naivety. A lot of people were very uncertain and upset. People would stop me in the corridor and say, ‘Explain to us what is happening here.’ ‘Well, the ANC is going to win the election hands down. Accept that and work from there on.’ And I thought, how could one sit in NIS and see all this information come in, and not realise that the ANC was going to win the election?

She recalls many confrontations within the organisation, including being accused of arousing unnecessary anxiety.

I was always controversial. People would say, ‘You are trying to be controversial.’ But I wasn’t trying to be controversial; it was the way I thought. This was in the period before the election, which was very interesting, because there were a lot of prophets from the new dispensation like myself, who were saying to people, ‘Prepare yourself, because the ANC is going to take over the

country in the election and the white role is coming to an end, and the country and the Intelligence Service is never going to be the same again... It is going to be a black government, of black control.' I remember one student who said to me, 'That's rubbish, because we know a lot of black people who like apartheid...' He has an uncle who has farms and he beats up his blacks, but they are still going to vote for the National Party... I said, 'Bullshit.' It came up again and I said, 'Bullshit, bullshit,' and eventually I was called in by my boss, who criticised me for saying 'bullshit'. But I said, 'I am sorry, but it is bullshit.' And he gave me this patronising speech about one soldier marching out of step and his mother being so proud of her son who she perceived to be the only one marching in step. He drew parallels to me always being 'out of step' and then instructed me to stop scaring the students on my courses with *bangmaakstories* (horror stories) that would not become reality anyway (meaning the profound changes in the South African landscape for which I was trying to prepare them).

So you block out what you don't want to see and this is why the shock of the ANC winning the election was so big, because all the time they knew the ANC wasn't going to win and they knew that the separate development was working and that black people actually liked having white people in power. You often had people saying, 'I spoke to this black guy yesterday and he said to me, "*Ja, my baas, ek hou van 'n wit baas, want hy weet om te regeer*"' ['Yes, my boss, I like a white boss, as he knows how to govern']. I mean, twaddle like that.

### INTEGRATING THE NIS

At the time of transition, some employees of the NIS resigned, as they were not prepared to work for a new government. According to Ann, these people were never professional intelligence officers – for them, national security was synonymous with Afrikaner identity. Job security and lack of alternatives compelled many to stay.

The NIS management gave an opportunity for people to leave who wanted to leave for political reasons, you know, who felt they could not work for the new government. And of course I had my thing to say about that, because I said if they want to leave for political reasons, they should not have been here anyway, because we don't work for political reasons. We work irrespective of party politics... I think then about 30 people left... So not many people left. But I think the reason more did not leave was the mentality of civil servants: you've got this job and you've got this pension and you've got your office and it is not so bad and you just carry on. So not that many people left... Also people did not know what to do with the rest of their lives, so they stayed.

While some believed the NIS had sold out the 'government to the enemy' and that the NIS had been sold out, the 'saving grace' was that the rank and file were 'very

obedient followers. If the boss said you no longer side with the NP, then they no longer sided with the NP. The make-up of those people is that the boss knows best and if he says, then you do’.

Integrating the NIS (from the NIS to the NIA and South African Secret Service [SASS]) in a new democratic order involved complex politics. Ann found it frustrating to witness the lack of understanding between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ groups.

I found the change within the organisation generally very frustrating... because I saw the opportunities to do things which were not done. Because I did not really belong to the staunch Afrikaner-type group, and having had more exposure to the ANC-type thinking, I realised how they simply did not understand one another... The efforts that they made to try to bring the two together did not really work. There was a lot of ‘bringing the races together’ type of thing and they had facilitators who came in to address the issue of race and so on, but it never really worked – so I think the whole transformation was bungled. Not deliberately, I think, [but] by ineptitude.

Ann feels the attempts at understanding each other were very superficial and inappropriate. She recalls how they had ‘this big cultural diversity expert’ teaching them how to understand the other, by focusing on things such as the way to greet people.

I flipped at that meeting. I said, ‘You know, this is just a lot of rubbish. That is not what it is about.’ I remember one specific black guy... I said I have far more in common with that guy, although he is black, than I have with this guy who is... a...really respected staunch Afrikaner... It is not just the colour of his skin that makes this thing and you’re not going to solve this problem by saying...we just need to understand whether you want me to say good morning first... It was...on a very superficial level. I remember a friend of mine who was a psychologist at NIS who had the same frustration. They came in one morning and said...we’re going to have to get an instrument now to draw up a psycho profile of black people. ‘What?’ she said. ‘WHAT?’ People are people, you know, they don’t have one instrument for black people and one for whites... It is like for baboons and then for white and for these sort of people in between.

In addition to the strained relations between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ groups, the various factions within the liberation movements did not always agree either. Ann therefore perceives the issue of race to be secondary to the politics of the organisation.

There was a lot of tension in the ANC people who came in. There was a lot of politics that made this thing difficult. It wasn’t white and black, to a large extent. I mean we had a lot of black people in the old NIS, but they were all sort of labourers. There were some that were a little bit senior, but no senior management or anything. The racial thing was not that important. This is also what I said at that meeting, when we had the discussion on how to understand black people. I said this is far more of a political thing here.

Political differences are more underlying here than the racial issues and of course nobody wanted to address that.

Ann was surprised by the tension between the members of the SACP and the ANC.

There was very clearly a lot of bargaining between members of the ANC alliance. You knew there was a lot of bargaining between the ANC and the Communist Party on which of their people would be placed in senior positions. And then there was a lot of dissatisfaction among some ANC people who felt they had given their blood for the struggle. And this was interesting for me, the antagonism against the communists which I experienced. I did not know it was there. Somehow I thought that the ANC and the communists were on the same side, but I remember in class discussions...some students who was always talking the communist talk. Nobody said they were communists; nobody admitted that, but you could hear from the jargon. And the other students would start mocking them, and they would not even give them the opportunity to talk. I remember a few occasions when I said to them in class, 'But let's give the guy the opportunity to talk. You may disagree with him, but at least give him the opportunity to talk.' And they just laughed and they said, 'Bullshit man, you know, this stuff (communism) works nicely if you're sitting overseas, but it is not going to work here.' So there was a lot of tension there, which I think made it unhealthy.

According to Ann, the internal politics worsened after the integration, since there were so many factions.

So the internal politics in the ANC ranks that came into the Intelligence Services was far worse than what it had been in NIS. (Maybe because we understood it in NIS, and there were far fewer 'factions' in NIS. There was basically the side who thought the ANC was not so bad, and then the other side.) There was no way that you could confront that politics in the amalgamated Intelligence Services, because it was just too difficult and the alliance had not yet sorted out amongst themselves what the power positions were going to be.

These tensions were never addressed openly.

So nobody wanted to talk about those issues. The previous NIS members did not want to, but also the ANC people coming into the intelligence organisation, because there was just a lot of tension and nobody wanted to scratch there.

#### **DIVISIONS: RACE, AGAIN**

Despite Ann's perception that the problems were not primarily racial, race did creep into ostensibly political arguments.

From the ANC side you had the exiles and the UDFs and you had the coloureds and the Indians and the blacks... Especially, there was a lot of antagonism towards the Indians – and then the communists, of course... Because we had a white communist who was appointed to a senior position, I remember one black woman said, ‘He is just a white opportunist.’ She said, ‘He has been sitting in a chair talking revolution for the past 10 years, while we were being shot at in Soweto. Now he comes into this cushy little job.’

Similarly, a black woman who was appointed to a very senior post with the task of assisting with the amalgamation of the Intelligence Services, came under fire for paying too much attention to whites.

[She] is a phenomenal person. She is so incredible... She is such a refined person... She had a very hard time, because she had to manage all this antagonism within her own ranks between the people. And then she was very approachable to us who had been in NIS... Maybe that’s why I like her. No, most people like her... She had an open-door policy... She was always very open... Very intelligent woman – very much an academic though, not a street fighter... And then she started getting criticism from the blacks, because she was allowing too many whites to talk to her. You know, that sort of thing, which made it very difficult. I remember a black woman making a bitchy comment once about her: ‘What sort of an African can you be if you speak no African language?’ She does not speak any African language.

Ann is angered by the way in which disputes are often reduced to the issue of race, which does not allow for the real problem to be dealt with.

You know, so many times I remember blowing my top at the military, where I lecture from time to time. You know, there is this thing that because you are white you are thought of as stupid and you did not think about things like the struggle, and you voted for the National Party and you are just dom [stupid] because you are white. You know, that really grinds me, because I think what they try to do now when addressing problems is that they assume that it is a racial thing, while many of the problems are not racial. They should rather focus on finding some way of finding out what is the problem here; what is the cause of this conflict and if they are dissatisfied with this manager, why are they dissatisfied with him.

Since people with scant knowledge of intelligence or management were appointed to managerial posts, Ann felt her professionalism was compromised. Yet, criticism was interpreted as racism.

Often my dissatisfaction with the new dispensation had nothing to do with blacks or ANC politics. It had to do with incompetence. People who could not do the job and because they could not do their jobs, I could not do my job. But you need management that is willing to confront that. It is so difficult, because most of the managers appointed from the ANC alliance had no management experience... So you had a lot of people who just absolutely had

no clue and if anybody criticised a manager, he said that it is because I am ANC and because I am black, and that is why you are criticising me.

### REASONS FOR STAYING

She started questioning her reasons for having remained in NIS for such a long time.

I felt I should have left long ago, I should not have stayed that long... Remembering the frustrations I had experienced for so many years, I thought, 'Why the hell did you do it? Why the hell did you just not bail out?' Somehow I think I am one of those idealists who always feel you can make a difference, but then I thought afterwards, maybe it was not worth it. Maybe I did not make much of a difference. Maybe I made a difference here and there with individuals, or maybe in training. My whole attitude towards training is that you try and change people. You want them to walk out different from what they walked in and especially if you're dealing with issues such as the political situation in the country. If you can sort of change one out of 20 to get them to say that, 'Well, what we are doing in the country is not quite right,' then you have achieved something. But I just had this sense of frustration that I had experienced over the years and really realised that I did not belong there anyway... I always felt that I did not really belong.

Besides her more idealistic notions of making a difference, she also stayed because she enjoyed her work, viewed it as a lifetime career and felt she was not really qualified for anything else.

I liked the job... The work was nice, but I also never really considered leaving. It is okay, you have a nice job, a salary, and I came into the job market with the idea of lifetime employment. I mean, you were just going to sit there and do your job. And I enjoyed the work I was doing... A lot of people that went into government, into civil service, did not have the mentality of breaking out and doing your own thing. I mean, what would you do anyway and I think it is also the fact that you really have quite a limited profession. You don't learn a trade that you can go out and sell, which I think is a big problem for people who are leaving government at the moment. I was able to leave, because I had gone back to university to study training and could do that. But it is an occupational hazard. I mean it is like when you are a diplomat; you can't really do anything else, because it is like you are a soldier, you are a soldier, unless you go into the private police. I think that was also a very strong thing, but I never really considered leaving, and my husband was there and all my friends were there.

### REASONS FOR LEAVING

Her eventual decision to leave in 1999 was influenced by her disappointment that nothing had really changed. If anything, there was even less room for critical thinking.

Then when the ANC took over power and the new people came into power they were exactly the same. There is no difference between what the ANC is doing in the Intelligence Service and what the previous dispensation did. It is the same narrow-minded perspective. I got into the same trouble, because I was always challenging people and I was saying things that shouldn't have been said... There is far less open debate now in the Intelligence Service than there was under the Nationalists. People don't believe me, but that's my experience. There was room for criticism and opposing views from the mainstream, although you got into trouble like I did when my bosses called me in, but you could still do it. Now it is impossible to do it.

In addition, she was tired of incompetent bosses being appointed due to their political links: 'I was sick of having incompetent bosses appointed above me for reasons other than job criteria. Either they had the right connections to the *Broederbond* or the right connections to Joe Slovo.'<sup>18</sup> She denies leaving for political reasons:

If you don't allow differing opinions within the Intelligence Service, it is going to rot. I didn't leave because I had a political problem. It is just a narrow-minded way of looking at things and also incompetent bosses. I was sick of it... They must close that place down (the NIA and SASS) and start from scratch, because it is just going down and down. It is becoming totally irrelevant and you cannot have a politically-laden intelligence service.

#### 'I DID NOT KNOW'

Ann highlights the importance of revealing the truth about the past. She feels there is a need for an acknowledgement of the horrors of the past.

I think it is very good for the nation for the truth to come out. I mean, even I was horrified about some of the things that came out from the police and Vlakplaas that people simply did not know about in NIS, and I mean, I should have known, because I was right there... I was in the intelligence community at least. You would have thought that we would have known about these things. I would often use those abuses as examples to explain to people why everything had to change, because I am sure most ordinary white South Africans were very shocked when they heard these things. I mean, basic good Christian people, even if you are a rabid racist, you wouldn't agree with the ways the blacks were treated... It just was not on, this abuse of state power or state authority. Some policemen just did exactly what they wanted.

As a former employee of National Intelligence, she distances herself from the atrocities committed by individuals in other state structures.

For me what is important is...to be able to distance myself from that – to say that we did not do that in NIS. That has not been successful, because I always find that when I have discussions even with the man in the street, they think

Military Intelligence and National Intelligence and the police and Vlakplaas are all exactly the same thing. So if Eugene de Kock was cutting off people's ears, I was doing it as well. So that never came out and that is something I tried after the new dispensation in the intelligence community to say, 'But look, there was a difference. We were not the same as those guys.' And people simply just do not believe you. I often remember, I would say, 'Bring me one example from the Truth Commission of a NIS member that was involved in this sort of thing,' and they said, 'No, but you were just more professional than the others. You did exactly the same thing – you were just more professional and you were not caught.' So that did not work. I mean, I thought the Truth Commission would have made that distinction to say but there were a group of people that were really functioning within a legal mandate and within acceptable behaviour in a quasi-democracy – we were not really a democracy. For me the greatest impact that I have seen is on white people, to make them aware that these things actually did happen. And maybe underneath to say there was a reason for the struggle. Maybe I would have done the same thing. For the total injustice of the whole thing to come out, I think that has been very good... For it to come out and to say, 'But gee, there are some things that were not on. This was not an honest fight.'

Ann is angered when people lump the NIS together with all the state apparatus. I get angry that I was associated with that, and helpless at the inability to say, 'But we were doing something different,' and that I did not believe in that, that we were making a positive contribution. But I think the main thing was just to say that that was not what we were doing, and we don't believe that that was right.

She has difficulty on an individual level convincing others that she was not aware of all the state perpetrations.

When family members say, 'What we hear about this Vlakplaas – did you know about the stuff?' You say, 'No, I did not know about it,' and they would say, 'Ag, come, of course you must have known. You knew everything that was going on.' Also this misconception that if you are in the Intelligence Service that you know everything that's happening... I think more just on a personal level one is trying to say, 'But this is not what I was involved in.'

#### DEALING WITH TRANSITION

Ann believes that most whites, including herself, were ignorant of what was happening in the country during apartheid. Those who had an inkling were in denial and did nothing about the injustices which they witnessed.

I think...what one could probably make an interesting study of, is this deliberate denial that many white people were in; that you knew it was happening, but you did not really do anything about it. And maybe each

of us has guilt in that... What had a profound impact on me... was a series that the ANC made, round about early '94, '95-ish. A series of four- or five-hour programmes, *Ulibambe Lingashone* – 'Hold on to the sun so that it does not set'. I asked someone what it means, and he said you have to remember, don't let what happened in the past be forgotten, you must remember it. I watched those videos very intensely... and I was horrified. I thought, but how could I not have known that it was so bad, and I thought, OK, I was overseas, which is true, I was overseas... Seeing it concentrated into four hours made me realise how bad it really was, but I don't think the majority of white people actually realised it was so bad.

Since many people did not realise the extent of the injustice, or merely have a selective memory, they find it difficult to deal with the transition.

You still find now amongst 'thinking' white people how they battle to come to grips with the fact that the ANC coming to power was a necessity. It was not an inevitability, but it was actually a necessity, that we actually had a rotten system, and that it had to go. Or just the fact that somehow people forgot how bad it really was... You talk to people about the 'good old South Africa', and they talk about how wonderful it was and how it was so peaceful, and you watch this video series and realise we were on the border of anarchy.

The ignorance and denial enabled people to think the system of apartheid could be sustained.

Many [people] don't realise that there was no way that we could have carried on. I remember so often that I used to say that to people. There was not any way you could carry on. You could bitch and moan as much as you want about the ANC and it being incompetent and local government falling apart. But there was no way in which we could have carried on with the previous system. But somehow a lot of people, and a lot of thinking people, really believed that you could prop this thing up and still make it work.

Ann believes that the historical selective memory or amnesia applies across the political spectrum.

I am surprised at how short people's memory is about how bad it was... Maybe for that reason it's good that somewhere along the line people look at the history... I wonder if people don't have the same amnesia about Dirk Coetzee and Wouter Basson and all of these guys. And whether most people don't really want to reflect – people don't really want to reflect on the past, do they? They don't really. I am thinking about the common man in the street... On the other hand... black ANC people also don't want to reflect on the past – they are also looking back at it selectively, because they don't really believe what they're hearing, especially about the NIS. They don't believe that and they have the same sort of amnesia about their own people. I came across this guy the other day, who's a prominent member of the NIS management, who was the main man at Quattro and those torture camps. I mean, he is a senior

manager, so in a sense they are doing the same thing. It is as if people don't want to learn, or whether they say, 'Ag well, it does not really matter, under those circumstances it was all right.' What are people going to do with the truth? I don't think they want to confront the truth... Maybe we are doomed not to learn from our lessons.

Therefore people are making the same mistakes.

Some of the more idealistic parts of my paradigm...was shattered by the new government, but maybe I was so desperately hoping for something new and fresh, but it did not happen. I see the new managers in the Intelligence Services making exactly the same mistakes as their apartheid predecessors, and people in power, in government, acting no differently from the previous bunch.

### THE NEXT GENERATION

Ann is perturbed about her children's apathy regarding the country's brutal history.

What I find disturbing, is that the next generation – my children that are now going into university – don't even want to hear about this stuff. It is disturbing, because my daughters are very aware people and I have begged them so often to watch these *Ulibambe Lingashone* videos and to read Alan Paton...but they never wanted to. And we have had discussions about it...and they say it is because they don't want to be part of it... They know that there was a hell of a mess, and they feel they are in the mess in that they are being disadvantaged and not being able to get bursaries and not being able to get jobs, because their skins are white, and seeing black people get all the benefits, and they don't want to know what happened. That I find disturbing.

She surmises that part of her children's apathy is an effort to distance themselves from their parents and their repetitive conversations.

My kids were so completely like, *ag*, so what is the struggle...and what's this big fuss about? My eldest daughter who's in psychology – and she is very much into thinking about what's going on in your mind – she said to me she thinks it is a deliberate mental block. They just don't want to hear it and they don't want to confront the history. Maybe because they hear us talking about it all the time and they're just so sick of it, because when white people get together at cocktail parties, inevitably that is what they end up talking about – about the race issue. I think it is probably common. Maybe for us it is worse, because you inevitably get together with people who were ex-colleagues. We try not to... But when old intelligence officers get together...they talk shop, because they can't talk about anything else.

She believes the children should be educated in a medium that they will understand.

There was this stupid little television programme, a SA comedy thing with a bunch of students living together, and there is an Indian guy and a coloured and a few blacks and a few whites and so on. And my daughters love it. They're watching it and it looked a bit stupid for me, but they actually address some of these issues... They talk about the racial issue, but it is in their medium and perhaps the lesson is that one must give it in a medium that they understand. Both my daughters have suddenly cottoned on to 702.<sup>19</sup> They listen to it all the time and what that DJ says is like the truth and maybe that is sort of the place that one should target to bring it in, because it speaks to them, rather than having [NIS] members going around schools and giving talks about why racism is a bad thing.

A part of her thinks one should concentrate on the next generation, as it might be too late for the older generation to change.

Maybe one should not be targeting the message...of the Truth Commission to my generation. Maybe one should be targeting it at the new generation, so that at least they can start from somewhere fresh... I had a wonderful experience in the early 80s – I was in Durban...and I had to catch a bus. And there were three black ladies sitting on a bench and I asked them whether it was the right bus, because I speak Zulu. And so we sort of just starting chatting...just sort of the way white people and black people chatted in those days. Just so to say that it is the right bus and so on... So I stood there and then two very nice English ladies came up – real decent true Natal English ladies – very polite and came up to the ladies and said, 'Are you not well?' And they said, 'No, we're fine.' And they said, 'Well, are you pregnant or something?' And they said, 'No.' And then they said to them, 'But excuse us, but the bench that you are sitting on it says *Slegs Blankes/Whites Only*.' And this was just after that had been scrapped and it was so interesting and the black ladies said, 'Yes, but it is an old bench, you know, because the law has changed. Now we can actually sit here. Yes, we could not, but now we can sit there...so it is not a problem any more.' And then the white ladies kept on very polite and nice and said, 'We don't mind you sitting there if you are sick, but it still says *Whites Only*.' And I can't remember whether they got up or they did not, but then one of the black ladies turned to me and they were really ordinary, not domestic servants, but maybe sort of junior nurses or something. And they turned to me – and I was much younger than now – and they said, 'You know, we are going to have to be patient with this generation, because they are not going to change, because it is too difficult for them to change.' And maybe anybody over 40 in the country we should write off and say you cannot educate them, because they don't want to be educated. [Perhaps we should] focus on the next generation.

To Ann, revealing the truths on both sides of the political divide is important, in order to learn from the past. She believes it is important to try and understand other points of view. She has tried to inculcate this in her children.

The way I see things, is also not the ‘truth’ and I was thinking that everything that I would tell my children, their father would contradict me, because he sees the ‘truth’ differently from the way I see it... What I do is try to deliberately influence them not to see all black people as bad and all white people as good. I remember from the time they were small, they would go and play in the park and granny would say, ‘*Wel, jy moet pasop vir die kaffers*’ [‘Well, you must watch out for the kaffirs’]. And I would say, ‘Watch out for the white guys too, because you know there are just as many bad white okes as well.’ In small things, in small little things to say that there is a distinction between human beings – whites are not all good and blacks are not all bad – and trying to develop an understanding for somebody else’s point of view. My kids often get frustrated when they visit my family, because my family are very conservative and they bitch about the government and how bad they are, and so on. And then I always come with a counter-argument of trying to explain why I think they are doing it, and that the government actually is not so bad and so on, and then my daughters often say to me, ‘Why do you always do it? You cannot say anything bad about the government and you know there is something bad about the government.’ And I say, ‘Somebody has got to present the other side.’

She even contemplated starting her own school.

I was so strongly motivated to start a school, my own school where you just get people to think. You give them that freedom to think all the time, and then I realised that it would not work, because most parents don’t actually want their children to think... I sound like this model parent, which I am not at all, but my children are allowed to think and allowed to differ all the time. They are even allowed to make choices that I don’t agree with. So giving them that freedom to be able to disagree with me and to be able to hold opposing points of view. [But] in the Afrikaans community it is still very strong to teach people the way of understanding things. Parents see that as their function.

Despite her misgivings, Ann is more optimistic about the new generation.

I have much more hope for the new generation. I mean they grow up with a black guy as president, and I mean, with Mandela. What an amazing guy he is. Even my staunch conservative people are saying, ‘Well, we have to admit that he is quite a guy,’ you know, and to start seeing role models, I mean sports people who are our role models. Maybe we should not fret...too much about the younger people. I remember my daughter was in a Portuguese primary school and there was a black guy from Nigeria. Pitch pitch black, because they are sort of blue black. The only black guy in class. And my mom was there and this was a very big thrill, this little grandchild of hers which is in class with a kaffir. And she called her one day after school and she said, ‘Tell me about this little Ovoruru...’ And my daughter said, ‘He has this funny curly hair.’ The fact that he was pitch black she did not even recognise.

While Ann advocates a general tolerance ('it is not only about being more tolerant towards black people...that is also true for gays and lesbians and everything'), she does not see it happening on a broader level.

I don't think our nation as a whole is sophisticated enough to live in harmony together. I don't really think so. I think it is not in our national make-up... I saw just as little of it in the ANC ranks as I had seen in the staunch Afrikaner *Broederbond* ranks – that tolerance of saying it's all right to disagree and it's all right to be different.

### A DECADE AFTER THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

Since resigning from the NIS, Ann has been self-employed. She has established a successful consultancy.

#### Notes

- 1 President De Klerk commissioned Air Force General Pierre Steyn to conduct this investigation.
- 2 Jan Breytenbach founded 1 Reconnaissance Commando. He eventually became the most decorated soldier of the SADF. He retired in 1987 and wrote three books about his experiences. His brother is the Afrikaans author, Breyten Breytenbach.
- 3 The *Broederbond* was the secret Afrikaner organisation that was a driving force for Afrikaner domination. See Moodie, 1975; O'Meara, 1983; Serfontein, 1979; Wilkins & Strydom, 1978.
- 4 The *Ruiterwag* (Afrikaans for 'The Cavaliers') was the youth wing of the Afrikaner *Broederbond*.
- 5 South-African manufactured 7.62mm rifle, similar to the British SLR.
- 6 The SSC was a powerful Cabinet committee, established by P.W. Botha to advise the Cabinet on security matters. As such, it was at the head of the elaborate NSMS. Its 23 permanent members included the State President as chairman, the Minister of Defence, Ministers and Directors-General of Law and Order, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Constitutional Development and Justice, the Chief of the SADF, Chiefs of the Army, Navy, Air Force and medical services, the Director of the National Intelligence Service and the Chief of Military Intelligence, the Commissioner of Police, the Chief of the Security Police, the Director of Security Legislation and the Director-General of the Office of the State President. The SSC met every fortnight on the day before Cabinet meetings.
- 7 The events are related in *Days of the generals* by Hilton Hamann (2001).
- 8 *Die Werf*, literally meaning 'the yard' or 'the farmyard', is the name of his restaurant.
- 9 A pseudonym.
- 10 In 1933 the NP formed an alliance with the South African Party. The following year saw this alliance being formalised, resulting in the United South Africa National Party, or the United Party.

- 11 Ann recalls: 'I remember I had the opportunity to do my honours in political science, which would have made a total revolutionary out of me, but the Education Department refused. They wouldn't give me the loan because they said it wasn't a teaching subject, which was true. It would have been interesting, because I think my life would have changed completely.'
- 12 NUSAS: National Union of South African Students, a multiracial, anti-government organisation. NUSAS consisted mainly of white English-speaking students of liberal universities like Cape Town, Natal, Rhodes and Witwatersrand, all of whom identified strongly with the black struggle.
- 13 Years later when Ann was doing training, she tried to retrieve the letter, as a case study of what an agent feels like, what goes through an agent's mind and how one handles it. However, her handler had burned it, as he did not think it would look good on her file.
- 14 By 1967, many black students became dissatisfied with the NUSAS leadership. White students were less politically active as they were more concerned with academic policies. Furthermore, the number of black students at universities had quadrupled since 1960 and NUSAS's predominantly white leadership was incapable of addressing their specific concerns. The turning point came in July 1967 at the annual NUSAS conference at Rhodes University, when black delegates were prohibited from using the same social facilities as their white counterparts. This resulted in a reaction of intense bitterness and anger from the black students as they became increasingly aware of the artificial integration of student politics. Steve Biko, a delegate at the conference, began to advocate the idea of an all-black movement. The overwhelming support for a black student body led to the formation of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) in July 1969, with Steve Biko as its first president.
- 15 Progs: Members of the Progressive Federal Party, for years the official opposition to the NP. Although Frederik van Zyl Slabbert was its leader from 1979 to 1986, its membership was predominantly English.
- 16 Johan was a chief director in NIS.
- 17 Jimmy Kruger was the Minister of Justice, Police and Prisons in John Vorster's Cabinet. He is remembered for saying that the death in detention of Steve Biko left him cold.
- 18 Joe Slovo joined the Communist Party of South Africa in 1942 and served on its central committee from 1953. In 1969 he was appointed to the ANC's revolutionary council (a position he held until 1983, when it was dissolved). He was considered the ANC's main theoretician, becoming chief of staff of MK in 1987. In 1985 Slovo became the first white member of the ANC National Executive Council. He held the position of secretary-general of the SACP from 1986 to 1991. Slovo died of leukaemia on 6 January 1995, at the age of 68.
- 19 702: A talk radio station broadcasting in Gauteng.

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## 7 LIBERATION MOVEMENT NARRATIVES

### 'A VERY LONELY ROAD'

#### THE STORY OF A FORMER MK COMMANDER

Shirley Gunn's political activism began while doing a community placement as part of her social work studies. During this time she was recruited into the ANC and MK. She later worked as organiser for the Clothing Workers' Union (CLOWU). She was first detained in 1985, when she was held in solitary confinement. In 1986, she left the country for further military training. Upon her return in 1987, she and fellow MK member, Aneez Salie, set up and co-commanded the Ashley Kriel Unit.<sup>1</sup> Operating in the Western Cape, their detachment carried out an unspecified number of sabotage attacks, primarily targeting symbolic institutions and installations of the state, for example, magistrate's courts, rent offices, police stations and SADF bases.

Shirley went to the TRC as a victim of gross human rights violations. She wrote her statement and testified in a public Human Rights Violations hearing in August 1996. In her testimony she describes the violations she experienced at the hands of the security police during her second detention with her son in 1990. She also described her experience of being falsely accused by the Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, of bombing Khotso House (the headquarters of the South African Council of Churches) on 31 August 1988.

When it transpired that the security forces were responsible for the bombing, Shirley laid defamation charges in a civil case against ministers Vlok, Rina Venter and Kobie Coetsee. She eventually won an out-of-court settlement for the trauma she and her son endured and for having been framed. Vlok, former Police Commissioner Johan van der Merwe and 17 others were granted amnesty for the bombing.<sup>2</sup> The amnesty applications of these men brought her face to face with the work of the TRC's Amnesty Committee.

Shirley, outspoken on survivor issues, was drawn into the TRC's regional think tank co-ordinated by the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee to develop policy recommendations to government. She was one of the founder members of the Ex-Political Prisoners' and Torture Survivors' Committee, which in September 2001 launched itself as the Khulumani<sup>3</sup> Support Group, Western Cape.

The following story is the result of four tape-recorded interviews, conducted between 2000 and 2004, as well as ongoing conversations and input by Shirley.

#### CATHOLICISM, WAR, MEDICINE

Shirley Renee Gunn is the youngest of a family of five children. Her father was a doctor and her mother a nurse. Shirley grew up during the 1960s in the white middle-class Cape Town suburb of Kenilworth. Her parents were not political. Her father, whom she describes as an 'immensely caring' person, seldom spoke of the trauma he witnessed in the Air Force Medical Corp during the Second World War. Shirley believes his own war experience served as a catalyst for him becoming a 'specialist in military history'.

He read avidly. He would go into the details of how the wars took place, the frontier wars, the strengths of the armies on all sides, how the battles were waged, what were the military strategies and tactics deployed. He would go on these trips into the Karoo, to the sites and look at the koppies and take slides, and he used to do multimedia presentations on the battles. He would go into remote libraries and delve in the archives. He was really thorough. What that was about, I regret I don't know. It happened to have been his interest and I think to the extent that my interests [are] related to war as well, is interesting.

#### THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD

Shirley used to accompany her mother on field trips in the various poor communities of Cape Town in 1966 and 1967.

When I was in standard four she was doing [district nursing] and there was a stage when I just skipped school on Fridays and I accompanied her on her field trips. We went into communities like Vrygrond – where Lavender Hill is now. That whole area was just wood and iron shacks. We went into many poor communities all over the Cape Flats and the townships. The job was to track down patients who had not followed up with their treatment. We would go to shack 254 and we would find the person had moved and moved again. But we carried on tracing patients until we found him or her already dead or dying, without the money to get to hospital for treatment. That was the issue every single time. They could just not afford the bus fare to get to hospital. So from a very early age, from about 11, that made a really deep impact on me. My mother said she would not have been as determined to find the patients without me. Most people would have abandoned it, but we carried on. That was a conscientising experience and I enjoyed that with her, and I enjoyed this connection I had with her then.

Shirley believes that this experience and others, like losing childhood friends through the Group Areas Act and attending a convent school from age five to 18, profoundly shaped her early understanding of the world.

I was educated in a convent – not the usual schooling experience that most white children got in white government schools. It was different. The Dominican Nuns had experience of teaching in rural communities. The values that I was taught were to be of a service to others. Not cut-throat capitalism. I got an understanding of global oppression.

#### **'SERVICE TO OTHERS' – WITHIN LIMITS**

From standard nine Shirley worked in hospitals during the school holidays and after matric for her brother, a doctor, at a clinic in Hermanus. She decided to become a nurse.

I left school not really clear about where I'd fit in, not at all clear. I ended up nursing – that was kind of the health profession which, probably because of my background...I thought would be the direction I would like to go into. As it worked out, I did it for a few years, but discovered that I didn't fit into the system.

Shirley left nursing in June 1976. She found the hospital environment of that time extremely frustrating. White student nurses were only allowed to work in white wards. These wards were overstaffed and the children and adults primarily suffered from first-world diseases. In contrast, the black wards were chronically understaffed and patients suffered from predominantly poverty-related illnesses.

Eventually I was hauled over the coals because I wasn't fitting in. There were a couple of situations which I found quite intolerable and I challenged them, and then I was told they didn't need people who were going to rock the boat.

One of the things that really disillusioned me in the health profession was that only a very few professionals actually challenged the system. Most of the graduates were just absorbed into the system. There was little alternative at that stage and still is. I felt pretty much that it was an institution that I couldn't change. There was no back-up and little support for change.

Shirley enrolled at the University of Cape Town (UCT) for a social work degree in 1977. She was one of only three students in the class who took the option to do community work in her honours year.

#### **BEGINNINGS OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM**

Shirley's honours community placement took her to Hout Bay. That was 'really where the depth of my political involvement took off... We learned by doing things.' She became a member of the ANC in 1980, 'so I could bring in a bigger political agenda into the work, which was, of course, covert.'

When she was recruited into the ANC's political underground activities, she was approached and recruited by somebody I know, a South African who had left for Zimbabwe to avoid military conscription. I think the difficult thing

was...by nature I'm a more kind of open, honest, upfront and extrovert person. Operating covertly was all about secrecy, about being withdrawn, about pulling back, about keeping agendas and so on... Initially my role was in the political arena...not the military, because of my work as a political activist, a mobiliser of people. I also served on the organising committee of the Cape Areas Housing Committee and on the housing sub-committee, so I was well networked, not only in Hout Bay harbour, but within the Cape Flats in general.

Shirley worked in the Hout Bay community for three years, from 1980 to 1983.

It was a pretty tense period. We were fighting the officials in the bushes of Hout Bay. There were horrendous battles... The officials would just come with their trucks and barge up the mountain and drag the community into the vans and destroy their houses; perpetually they would come at the dead of night so no one could resist. To deal with them we had to develop creative militant strategies.

Later she was assigned to co-ordinate the work of the Advice Offices<sup>4</sup> in the Western Cape. While still working with the Advice Offices, the first clothing workers' union strike took place. Shirley mobilised the Advice Offices to support the strike. She then became an organiser for the Cape branch of CLOWU and organised the Cape Underwear Clothing workers in Epping. She worked 'around the clock', producing pamphlets 'into the night' and distributing them 'from five in the morning'. In the few gaps in between, she received military training. During this period she was closely monitored and came under a number of attacks directed at her.

The surveillance around 1984/85 was hectic, it was blatant surveillance, blatant harassment, but it didn't serve to stop me... I would sort of retreat for a while, hours, just cool off a little bit from time to time, but basically I didn't stop. I worked out ways of operating under this watchful eye of the system.

Being 'constrained' by the relentless police presence, she had to involve more people to help her. Since Epping is close to Bonteheuwel, the students of Bonteheuwel gave her much support, distributing pamphlets and informing people of meetings, thus 'enabling their mothers to attend to union matters'.

#### SOLITARY CONFINEMENT: A GALVANISING EXPERIENCE

In 1985, the year after her father died, Shirley was arrested at her house, which she shared with other activists. She was detained in solitary confinement from August to December under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act.<sup>5</sup> Shirley describes the harrowing experience of solitary confinement and the impact it had on her.

I was *bedonned* after that experience in detention... It was very intensive, I was interrogated endlessly... I withheld the information that they wanted

throughout that time... Colonel Griebenaaw was a ruthless interrogator and was in charge of the investigating team. I was either interrogated at Caledon Square or at Pollsmoor [Prison] and on some occasions he would say, 'You fucking coward...you're a member of the ANC, I know you're a member of the ANC, but you haven't got the guts to admit it. Now go and stew in your cell. Just fucking get out of here.' It was nerve-racking; it went on and on. But at the same time, as long as he was saying that I was a coward, my head was held up high, I was in an honourable position. So I...kept my head... It was difficult to keep it, and you start talking to yourself. I'm sure that I was electronically surveyed [in my cell]. I had to rehearse what they might raise in the interrogation, in my mind, so that I wouldn't flinch in interrogation sessions. I was able to not respond to what they were saying, what they were interrogating me about. And then I had to shut off from that, I had to dispel any thoughts about the police, these people who were coming in their droves to interrogate me... It was hard, but I think those were things that kept me sane in that period... I came out in the end, and I was more militant than ever...there was no way that I was going to stop after that.

The very first words that I said when I came out, the very first recorded words were, 'Now I have got steel in my bones' and that comes out of having had one hell of an experience, being in solitary confinement for 113 days, from August to December. It makes or breaks you. In most instances, I found that the forms of oppression had the reverse impact. If you come out of an experience that is meant to put you down, crush you, to stop you forever – and you come out and you can do more, then it is not working. Instead you are only being trained as a revolutionary... All of those experiences turned me into a hard-core revolutionary, even if I had to kill or be killed.

After her release, she continued working for CLOWU, organising the Cape Underwear workers. Shirley's closest comrades had either left the country or were in detention. In addition, organisational changes made things less familiar. 'There were all these new structures that were being formed, there were detainees' support groups. With great generosity and kindness these structures were there to support me, but they weren't what I needed. One needed to be debriefed and rebriefed.' She also struggled adjusting to her work, because of ongoing police harassment and surveillance.

When I came out, I found it more difficult to get on with the humdrum of organising. I managed to crack the backbone of the factory that I went back to. Of course the workers were most happy that I was out, in their minds it was because of my work with them that I was detained. I couldn't dispel that notion, of course. I couldn't say, 'No, no, no, actually I am a member of the ANC...' But we managed to get the majority at that factory and held the first elections, so the organising and recruiting members didn't stop. Caspirs<sup>6</sup> would follow me to the factory, there were 900-odd workers there. Some of

the workers were too scared to come out and greet me outside the gates. So myself and workers from the factory would go out at night and recruit them. We just tirelessly got more and more of the workers onto our side. By June '86, I had absolutely enough of this, my political work in the underground was pretty impossible, I think I stretched the boundaries beyond human limits and the support network of Bonteheuvel students was compromised because of their militant activities. So I planned my exit.

### MOTIVATIONS

Although Shirley was well aware of the dangers involved in becoming an MK operative, she still decided to leave for further military training. She outlines the practical, political and personal factors that lead her to take that step:

To some extent my options were reduced, because of the amount of surveillance surrounding me. So that was one of the circumstances.

I continued on the path of reaching the goal that my comrades had died for. I know a lot of people who are dead. But also, I think one has a certain make-up. It is in my nature to take risks. I haven't sat back and left the work for others. If you are prepared to take risks and knowing full well of the dangers, you go out there and do it properly, work efficiently and properly, you should be able to hold out. And I think we proved that we can hold out.

I proved that to myself and also to the people that I worked with.

As mentioned, her solitary confinement galvanised her commitment. In addition, she realised she had done her share of mobilising for the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM), and that peaceful means of resistance were not sufficient on their own.

People who fought tooth and nail unarmed, peacefully, were *donnered* up.

They are now living with the consequences of it. So it was also out of a sense of responsibility that I realised there is a limit to what I can do as a leader to take people down this path, where they are consistently getting injured and psychologically damaged. My experience showed that to me. I couldn't have ignored it. I felt responsible for doing more than just continually going down that same route and ending up worse off, in a sense.

Proving herself as a woman also played a role:

Besides the interest in the military, I am challenged as a woman. I have done what very few women have done and I have always resisted a limitation on my sex and you do have to do so much more to prove yourself. It is pathetic.

### BOTSWANA

In 1986, Shirley crossed the border into Botswana 'under a load of cabbages'. She was:

left at a place where I had to then contact the ANC. It was a safe house, but it was one that I had set up and I also got some assistance from Aneez. He left contacts for me to draw on if I ever needed them and I precisely went those routes and all this memorised. There was a lot of information that I had to just store in my head for the right time.

Eventually she met up with the ANC contact. The first question he asked her was, 'Who are you following?' I thought this was the most insulting question and snapped back at him, rudely, I think. He was quite taken aback. He had never been answered in that way...you don't speak to your ANC contact who was supposedly your superior at that moment and tell him shit. So I said, 'I am not following anyone. I am here for military training. Take me where I must be.' So he said, 'You know where you have to start. You must write your biography.' I wrote my biography and handed it over to the contact, then waited. Quite quickly, in the next couple of days, in quite a rush, he came with a car and I was transported to an ANC safe house, until the next orders.

Then eventually I was told, okay, I must prepare myself, I will be fetched quite soon and I will be told at short notice... I was collected at night and we drove to a game park and were confined to a chalet, a little house on these wooden stilts in the park, until the following night. It was an exquisite environment and all the time these men were talking, so it was a case of like sitting there, waiting for the next instruction. The idea was that you didn't get to know them for security reasons, so you had to be isolated.

A day or two later they left, again in the night.

We were taken on a long road and then eventually along the road the driver said, 'Well, this is the last shop, if you want some chocolate or something then go and get some.' So I thought, let me do that. It was a good idea. I bought some chocolate and then he drove on again. It was just dark, dark, dark and the car started going slower and slower and then there was communication between the driver and his navigator – they thought they have gone too far and they had to turn around and go back slowly, slowly, slowly. And then all of a sudden we just came to a stop and then there was a knock on the window. They opened the window and okay I was told I must get out, get the bags out of the boot, goodbye, thank you, the handover had happened. Then the car drove off.

So then I crossed the road and at the other side of the road I was handed an AK and was told, 'Follow us.' So I was trudging with a bag on my back and an AK in my hand. Now nobody was going to carry my bag, you see. I had already been asked who I was following. I was going to carry this bag, all those men, fuck them. So I carried my bag with an AK in my hand, through a swamp, through a marsh, over distances, a long, long walk until we got to the water. We slowed down as we approached the sound of water, then we reached

the Zambezi River where the dinghies were waiting to take us across the river. We were told to get into the dinghy and remain silent. Sit there like mice. The oars went through the water without making a single rustle, across, across, across, strong oarsmen taking this dinghy across this crocodile- and hippo-infested river with flares going up in the distance. Just the night sounds and the soft sound of water and blackness, I couldn't see, I am night blind. Eventually we reached the other side and were transported to an ANC base in Livingstone. The following day we drove to Lusaka.

## CUBA

Shirley underwent training in Cuba. One of her instructors had been a CIA double agent for 12 years. 'He had so much experience that he could communicate.' As she was the only person 'fresh from home', she was 'the only one who had an intense understanding of the psyche of the enemy'. The other ANC trainees 'had had long gaps between home and the war at home and didn't seem to engage with the course material as I did'.

Although she does not think it was a 'particularly prestigious course', Shirley felt fortunate that she could do it and found it very beneficial.

I benefited from the course. I really did. I also found, as I have always found, practical procedures the most challenging. The one thing is to understand why you do something, but to be able to do it properly is another thing. I have always been a practitioner, actually, a nurse, activist, community development worker, trade unionist and soldier. I have always got my hands dirty.

She describes her assignments:

The practical assignments included doing underground exchanges both from dead letter boxes that you have made and from route plans that you had worked out. You had to work out a whole system of stops en route where you could double-check that you were not being watched; when you penetrate an area there must be absolutely no trace that you were there. I did lots of practicals in Old Havana, a very busy part. Then I would commute by public transport into another area and then out of that area again. So I would do a whole lot of route checks before I did an operation. You're just shrugging off any possibility of a tail in the endeavour.

I liked the photography course the most. We were trained in underground photographic techniques. We firstly learned how to take photographs and how to develop them in a dark room in a house – a converted bathroom. We had the comrades at the door saying, 'Hurry up now, hurry up now, we need the toilet.' Of course I didn't only take pictures related to my military practicals, I also took photographs of life on the streets of Havana. My excuse

to the instructor for all the other frames I had taken was that I wanted to just be natural with the camera. I printed them all out, you see. So I was in the dark room for quite a long [time] compared to the others. Our instructor quietly appreciated the images. We learned how to camouflage cameras and take pictures without looking through the lens. We also worked with telescopic lenses, surveilling people in buildings. It was fascinating. A waiting game that teaches you patience and prepares you for underground work that is all about patience, absolute precision and patience.

She was the only woman in her group. As commander of the logistics of the underground house, she had to distribute the rations among the 20-odd comrades.

They had full trust in me and I did a good job of it. When the cigarette rations arrived, I counted the number of smokers and would even break a couple in half to make it even. Our cooking was brought to us in pots, but we had to make sure everyone was fed. There were other rations like toilet paper, soap and sanitary towels, which were mostly in short supply.

#### ANGOLA AND ZAMBIA

From Cuba, Shirley was sent for further military training to the Jeremy Rabkin Centre, also known as Pango, in Angola.

It was just so interesting. Every single day was so interesting and challenging. During most of my instruction I was on my own. I wasn't in a group, so I could work at my own pace, which was quite nice. I did politics, military combat work, firearms and other courses completely on my own, except during engineering practicals with explosives on the minefield. Also because I was on my way back home, training alone provided protection. I had to work as fast as I could at my pace and leave, which I did. I was out of there in record time.

In 1987, just before Sharpeville day (21 March), she was called up and sent back to Lusaka to prepare for her re-entry into South Africa. But the wheels turned slowly.

It all took such a long time, long delays and then eventually I got to Lusaka where there were endless discussions amongst the command structures about how I would be deployed. I had some contact with Ronnie Kasrils and I know that he had wanted me to work with his Special Ops unit. But eventually I think Chris [Hani] won the day and I worked with him and his structure. A senior person in the structure was Charles Ngcakula [Minister of Safety and Security at the time of writing].

Shirley contracted malaria, which also delayed her return.

I got far too sick. You get sick very suddenly and you just deplete. It is the most horrific disease. It is horrible. I was delirious at one stage. You know

when you're lying and you start rambling on about your family and things like that. Your last rites sort of thing... I can't say how long I was sick for. I lost track of time in those days of waiting. Also the unspoken part of your training is that you wait for instruction, and you don't know if it is in a week's time or a month's time. You don't know. Slowly I had to sort of get on my feet again. That took ages and I was so weak. I couldn't stand. I was completely and utterly emaciated. I remember even when I returned how weak and thin I was. I could hardly carry my bag. In fact, I shed stuff on the way so it was not too heavy. But I could hardly carry it; I was so weak. The positive side was that I was hardly recognisable. I looked very different... certainly well disguised.

### BACK TO SOUTH AFRICA

Finally, Shirley was sent back by train to South Africa on 12 June 1987 and was deployed in the Western Cape. However, there she experienced difficulties communicating with her contacts that she had left behind in countries to the north.

I entered with money, trained to do what I had been sent in to do and then there were delays and further delays... The waiting was endless. It was like not happening. I have never got an explanation as to what went on in Botswana and Lusaka that there wasn't any delivery. I was due to receive instructions and hardware. All I had was money and a Makarov pistol.

At the time, she was in periodic contact with Aneez, who was also having a difficult time.

I met with Aneez at various intervals, in Johannesburg, then in Luanda and again in Jo'burg when he was crossing the border again, because the communication had broken down, the contacts he was supposed to work with in the country had all been detained and he had no money. So we worked out a way that when he came back, he would be able to reach me. So on his return we very tentatively made contact, under very, very tight security measures.

They eventually received permission from the command structure to work together.

We combined our forces, resources and skills and we operated as the core of the unit which we slowly and carefully built over the years – over the next three years.

We were both very angered by Ashley Kriel's death and decided that we would call our unit the Ashley Kriel Unit, abbreviated it was the AK Unit.

Shirley describes their activities:

The next three years were solid military work, many of them executed with my own hands and many others under our direct orders. Because of my experience of detention and holding out, I was the one who took the risk

entailed in leaving one's quarters. And don't forget, there was a reward on Aneez's head before he left in 1985, so he skipped the net then and was still very much a wanted man. So I was much more the one who had to disguise and go out and I don't think I did that very well in retrospect, but I was always quite covered up. There is a limit to how you feel comfortable in looking completely different.

Besides constantly being in disguise, she also had to take care not to use the same routes. 'There are 101 basic rules that you just have to apply every single time you set your foot out of the door; even when we are inside the door – 101 more rules.' Although operational circumstances were very difficult, the unit was highly regarded.

We got some feedback along the line and it was always encouraging. We also heard that O.R. [Oliver Reginald Tambo, referred to as O.R. by his peers] had taken a personal interest in our unit. We had to submit reports regularly. And he got them and they were always very, very pleased with our achievements.

Shirley describes being faced with life and death decisions every day:

As I worked in the field and as I did things, I was faced with life and death...and right and wrong issues, just so in my face, with explosives that could cause an immense amount of suffering. As I took each step and each day, I think I became clearer and more precise about engaging the enemy and taking every precaution to respect life. Even where it came to the enemy, life wasn't paramount, but the symbols of oppression were the target, and not their lives themselves. And so at every stage and every time you are out there and you're working, those choices go through your mind and as I got more and more experienced, I got more confident. Your confidence is built through successful operations, as you go in and lay a mine and get out of there in one piece, one after the other, after the other. You build confidence and you build experience that you can draw on and be proud of.

She had to make some difficult decisions:

There were two particular missions that were aborted and the one was to Captour Offices, because of a rebel tour that they were supporting in the late 80s. Their offices were in the Golden Acre building and quite close to an auto-teller. Ordinary civilians working there and even behind the counter the faces of the young people working there and I had gone in there with mines...I think on three occasions and every time I took the risk of leaving the building with them, believing that it was not appropriate. Somebody would have been injured that didn't deserve to be injured. And then again at the Newlands rugby grounds... I did lots of reconnaissance around that building during the time of the rebel tour – watching who goes in and out, workers as well, just seeing the faces and taking those faces back with me, people who could have been injured. No, it wasn't going to serve our purposes if I had followed through with the plan. But it would have been a militant and clear response

to something that was happening at the political level. There would have been a direct association in the media of the Rugby Board's defiance of the sanctions against sport and all of that.

On 28 September 1988, members of the Ashley Kriel Unit planted a limpet mine in a milk carton at the rent office<sup>7</sup> in Bonteheuwel. A man 'came sniffing around the rent office...late at night'. He picked up the milk carton and

when he dropped it, it went off and he burned. He lost a couple of fingers and he burned and he lost his eyesight and hearing on the one side... It was really such an unfortunate accident...and we have obviously felt really remorseful... As soon as we were able to, members of the unit met with the family and told them what had happened.

Despite this casualty, Shirley is proud of the way she and the unit operated.

If I had gone ahead [with the Captour and Newlands missions] I don't think I would have sat here feeling as proud of our entire operation and proud of every single person for everything that was done, even the unfortunate casualty in Bonteheuwel, a one in one million chance that something like that would happen. I am sorry for the people that were right there, the ones who had laid the mine. It wasn't me, but I was part of the command and Aneez and the operatives very bravely applied for amnesty. They finally received amnesty in 2001, I think. That was just the other day. But it is the one who is right there that lives with it. It's most damaging for the person who is directly responsible. It is most hard. You live with it less in your life if you were somewhere remotely commanding somewhere up there, than you do if you were at the coalface, and unfortunately...it's people who were at the coalface that have to bear the brunt and I think that is very unfair. Very, very unfair.

#### DETENTION, AGAIN

In June 1990, Shirley and her 16-month-old son Haroon travelled with her mother and sister to a guest farm outside Victoria West in the Karoo. Here she was arrested by large numbers of security policemen. She and her son, who was still being breastfed, were driven to Cape Town where they were detained and Shirley was tortured for 64 days, again under Section 29.

It was a terrible experience... the particular torture that I endured in 1990 was...quite horrific and by then...they had everybody on me, they had NIS, the terrorist tracking unit, Croucus [a security police unit targeting white activists] and Vlakplaas operatives; they just had everyone out to eliminate us. That was their intention. So finally when they took me alive, I lived in a state of fear for a long, long, long period, believing that at any point I could have been snuffed out.

In her testimony to the TRC,<sup>8</sup> Shirley recounted how filthy and cold the cell was, and how the security police tried to get her to hand her son over to them to put in

a 'place of safety'. When that failed, they sent two social workers who forcibly removed her son from her. She had to watch him screaming for her, his arms stretched towards her.

They tortured me by playing a tape-recording of his voice calling my name. After a court interdict led by Siraj Desai exposing the detrimental effects of mother-child separation, the judge ruled that Haroon be reunited to me. When the police returned him eight days later, he was thin, his eyes were glassy and he was visibly depressed. Hours after his return, Haroon became seriously ill and I battled to get the prison to get medical attention for him. When a district surgeon finally arrived three days later, he told me there is nothing wrong with my baby – he just had a serious case of diarrhoea and vomiting. He said, 'There is something wrong with you.' The doctors were in cahoots with the security police.

Her engagement continued after her release in August 1990. She believes the armed struggle and the military detachments like her own afforded the liberation movement a stronger position from which to enter negotiations. Since they were concerned that the political process would 'roll back', their 'military structure had to remain combat ready'.

1990 was not the end of things; my release was not the end of things. My involvement in the underground detachment continued. In fact, it could be more, because I was coughed up into the above-ground legal world again... I was able to do things for the detachment still and of course dealing with the lawyers around a civil suit, because I believed that they should be sued for what they did.

#### 'LETTING GO OF MY IDENTITY'

In 1993, the year MK was formally disbanded, Shirley unsuccessfully tried to integrate into the South African National Defence Force (SANDF).

I was a soldier. I was a soldier into the 90s and was advised by Richard Seed to explore my options in the military. He was part of a regiment from Britain, overseeing the integration of the non-statutory forces into the new SANDF. I had the benefit of two long discussions with him. He said to me, 'You shouldn't stop. Seek your options... you would be very highly ranked because of your nursing/social work/community work/trade union work and military work.' My whole life of work was of benefit... would be of recognition in an integration process. Everything. Absolutely everything. He strongly urged me, but at the time I had a four-month-old baby girl, Haanee. She was tiny. She was maybe three months then, and Haroon... In his mind he was also part of the army and if anyone needed to demob or integrate, it was him, and he was an attachment of me. It was his identity and my identity were one. He was not to be left behind when I went to Pretoria. So we entered the bus in

Youngsfield in Wynberg. It had all been set up. I had spoken to Bongani Jonas, from the ANC office and was told it was fine, I could go up with Haanee. I was assured my passage would be quick. They would send me back as soon as possible after the interviews. I must just get on the bus to Pretoria and from there we would go to the military camp to be interviewed and ranked.

I didn't get beyond sitting on the seat of that bus, because I was then confronted by this white soldier who ordered me to get off. I said, 'No, I refuse to get off this bus, because these children are part of me and I have permission. And there is Bongani Jonas, going up and down in a Hi-Ace on Wetton Road. You can see him, he is the person who has made it all possible, so perhaps you should go and speak to him. In the meantime I am staying right where I am.' So he went and he came back and it was the same line. He said, 'No, my instructions are that you must get off the bus.' So I said, 'No, piss off, I am not getting off this bus.' And then he said, 'If you don't get off this bus, I am going to arrest you.' At this stage Haroon was going hysterical, because his experience of being in prison in detention was close enough for him to realise that this is now a very shit situation to be in – and he was screaming on the top of his voice. He was getting quite hysterical and the more I could not hear what was being said, because he was going so hysterical, the more I was getting impatient with Haroon, because I wanted to hear what this man was saying to argue it out. It was the most unreasonable situation to have been in. Can you imagine? So eventually I was forced off the bus and all of the other men sitting on the bus...not a single soul did a thing. I don't know if they thought, '*Ja*, it is right what this white man is doing here, throwing off this woman here with her children. This is the military. This is out of order.' I don't know what they had in their minds. I didn't know many of them, but even if I was sitting and witnessing this, I would have got up and smacked that soldier. They sat *tjoepstil* and I was thrown off the bus and Haroon was still hysterical. And I came back home and I was phoning everywhere and there was absolutely no recourse. And then seriously something snapped in me. I just felt that this is the last straw... It was like being stabbed. I became from then on more and more angry actually, because it was really a violation. I felt it was a violation as a woman, it was a violation from the structures, it was a wrong thing that happened and I had no support from anyone whatsoever.

Because she had been a soldier for so long, this was a severe blow to Shirley. 'I was a soldier and to let go of my identity was so traumatic. It was so traumatic. I mean, not having anything else to cling onto.' The situation was never resolved.

For those who were prevented from reintegrating into the SANDF or opted not to, the demobilisation process was less than adequate.

Well, there was also a pickup point and we were taken to that camp near Khayelitsha...on the other side of Khayelitsha. Well, firstly there was a whole lot of red tape and whole lot of signing forms, having our fingerprints taken and identification and all of that. There was a whole sort of procedure – from one room, to another room to another room – and then finally we were led into what was probably a lecture room and told about different options for soldiers, like different skills training courses that were offered through the Department of Labour. Also that one should invest the money, the demob money, whatever it was.

### A BLACK HOLE

Shirley describes the excruciating times that followed. Besides her failed attempt at being integrated into the army, many of her friends had died. 'I miss them all tremendously. I really do, really. Many of my favourite people are dead. It is actually a lonely world.' One of her friends that was killed in 1993 was Chris Hani. 'I had lost him too, on top of other closest confidantes in my life...'

I just felt like a zombie. I was depressed. There was no other word for it. It was such a dreadful depression that set in and slowly just hit me. It was like this black hole. I even went into therapy with Andy Dawes and I cried for a year. I cried for a solid year – 1993 and then it wasn't over... That wasn't the end of it. The 90s were just so dark and so hard and eventually I went on anti-depressants. I resisted that for a long time and then eventually succumbed and it helped, strangely enough. I only came off them towards the end of the 90s... The anti-depressants served to pacify me a bit, but my anger was still beyond all...reasonable limits, beyond what most people would ever experience, I think. Probably by most standards it is still pretty high. But it is more manageable.

In December 1994, Shirley laid a complaint of *crimen injuria*, criminal defamation, defeating the ends of justice, and malicious and unlawful arrest and detention, against former Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, Minister of Prisons, Kobie Coetsee and Minister of Social Welfare, Rina Venter. In May 1995, she issued a civil summons for R1-million against them. The action was for damages, defamation, unlawful arrest and detention and deprivation of freedom. (Shirley eventually received an out-of-court settlement of R70 000.) She felt she received little support in this matter:

Right throughout the entire 90s and taking on a defamation case against Adriaan Vlok, and Kobie Coetsee and Rina Venter, and pursuing civil claims against the three former Cabinet ministers, there wasn't one single person from the ANC that came to me and said, 'Congratulations for taking on that massive task' or 'What support can we give you?' or 'What legal advice can we give you?' There was just absolute silence. I have had to rack my own

conscience every step of the way. And so at the end I think that my civil claim pushed Adriaan Vlok, the only Cabinet minister to go to the Amnesty Committee, to apply for amnesty. That was a direct result of this civil claim and not an achievement of the TRC. It has been a road where I have had to draw on my own insights all the way. Carrying the flack all the way, because everyone is so silent and you don't know if that's disapproval or what. You just don't know and you have to read those silences and cope with them on your own. It has been incredibly hard and unfair actually.

The hardship was unrelenting.

It was one continuous process – 1993, '94, '95, '96. Even when I went to the Truth Commission [1996], I was very depressed then and the year after. I was still on anti-depressants and only later, after the TRC's special Women's Hearing did I receive a call from somebody from the Trauma Centre. His name is Eric Harper and he phoned me and he said...his job was to contact those that went to the TRC and find out why they don't come to Trauma Centre for counselling and if there is anything they can do and they are there to help and dah dee dah... Can he speak to me? So I said, 'Of course you can speak to me. I can give you advice. I'm sure I can assist you in your mission.' The first appointment or meeting, I completely forgot about. I stood him up. Not stood him up – I didn't arrive and he very politely got back to me a couple of days later and said, 'In view of the fact that the first meeting did not take place, let's reconfigure a meeting time.' So the second one I made and at the end of it he took out his diary and said, 'When are you going to come for an appointment? Give me a time.' In fact, I did and I started seeing him, but if I compare the time that I was going to Andy in his Psychology Department at UCT and what took place in his rooms, with what I was dealing with when I was seeing Eric Harper in his room, by then I had completely dried up. I didn't have a tear to shed any longer. I was absolutely exhausted emotionally. He always wanted to get to the tears, but I was dried up and I think he was dissatisfied.

In Eric's room it was the divorce from Aneez, work and coping with Haroon and Haanee and the bigger question of support for all survivors of gross human rights violations. I quit my work and went on the path of setting up the Human Rights Media Centre, all in that time I was speaking to him. Haroon also had some sessions, eight I think in all. With Andy, it was my anger and outrage at being so abandoned by my party and by the Army and the breakdown of communication with Aneez. Those were dreadful times, absolutely dreadful. So those were the kinds of the things that I was dealing with. I was so angry. There was no recourse to say things at the right place at the right time to the right people.

In January 2000, Shirley joined the Ex-Political Prisoners' and Torture Survivors' Group.

And then after a while most of the sessions were taken up with his [Eric's] work with political prisoners and torture survivors and...what was happening in the group. The relationship...changed and in fact, I would often lead the opening question and say, 'How was the group at the last meeting?' and we would go into the details. So then eventually I said to him, 'No, I think I should join the group. I don't really belong here any more. I think I must go to the monthly meetings or whatever they are.' 'No, no, please stay. God, you can't just walk out of here. There must be some wrap-up you know.' Three sessions he said. I compromised and went three more times and that was it. I haven't spoken to a therapist since then.

At the first meeting of the Ex-Political Prisoners' and Torture Survivors' Group Shirley attended, she was co-opted onto the committee.

We worked towards finding a strong, loud voice on reparations and the many other needs of survivors, to act as a conscience of the nation on these issues – a collective conscience. That is still where I put a lot of my soul. I have lost friends and I have lost family. They are alive, but I have lost them... I have a great sense of loss in my life actually. At least I am on my feet and many of the people that I know so well and work with – in Khulumani – are not. They are still so vulnerable, I mean my existence is also quite tenuous, but not like so many of the people I work with.

#### NO DEBRIEFING, NO HONOUR AND GLORY

Part of the difficulty for Shirley is never having had a proper debriefing.

I think it would be very nice if the military structure had an opportunity to get together and reflect on what we did and how we did it, but unfortunately there hasn't been that opportunity, but I am still going to pursue it... I had some opportunity to talk to Chris Hani.

After her second detention she met him and they had a chance to talk.

I talked about how I handled the enemy, but I didn't get to talk about the years of our working in the underground, which we should be able to do. Because...it is a deeply collective story, but it is ending up in individual vessels and I think we need to put it all together in one pot and stir it up.

Besides not having a proper debriefing, 'we on the ground...certainly haven't had the honour and the glory'. She describes how this hit home during a visit to the Deputy Finance Minister, Siphso Mpahlwa, in 1998.

When I went there, I was very hungry, and Siphso said very politely, 'Are you eating?' And I said, 'No.' And I did not have any money on me, sitting in this rather fancy parliamentary lounge and so I drank lots of coffee and I was so spiked up by the end of it, I could hardly sit any longer. And what made me so furious was all these parliamentarians, I couldn't keep my eyes off them,

because I knew them all, MK people came with these medals attached to their breasts and they were walking past and 'Hello!', 'Oh look, hi, hello!'... I was completely distracted. I couldn't listen to the conversation over that coffee table and I was so *bedonned* with what I saw. *Bedonned* because I just felt that here you have people who have already been affirmed, affirming themselves again and again and yet we, who were on the ground doing the work, sitting here in your lounge, don't have any money to eat, getting spiked up on coffee and having to find this a happy moment. It was incredibly hard... The people who did the work have never been honoured – only the dead, not the living. And only the dead in a half-hearted way. Very much in a half-hearted way... Yet, on the other hand, there is all sorts of handshaking, back-patting, ladder-climbing and moving above everyone else, creating this huge distance between them and the foot soldiers on the ground.

#### REPARATION AND RECONCILIATION

Shirley is ambivalent about forgiveness and reconciliation:

It's just too painful to see how various people who had such terrible things done to them, are out on a limb and are hungry and homeless... Reconciliation means that...you give back, you give back to the people who have paid the price of the terrors of the past. Survivors should not be the people who are still paying the price, and they are currently.

While she recognises the need for reconciliation, which in her view requires actively addressing social and economic disparities, she is critical of people who merely pay lip service to the issue and is aggrieved that people like herself are left to fight the battle for reparation.

We have to do the donkey work organising survivors to go and speak about reparations, knocking on the doors of these people who earn huge salaries, living fancy lifestyles, to prick their consciences for them to...open their hearts to the issue. We're still having to do that stuff that we've had to do for the past decade... It's a shame that we have to do that still. I've spoken to many of these people and some of them are comrades... 'When are you going to respond to the TRC's reparations policy, what are you doing? What does it take to move your arseholes?'

She is dismayed by the government's dismissal of the TRC recommendations for reparations. She regards the final reparations of R30 000 per victim as inadequate to help victims rebuild their lives. To her, social spending is a priority: 'If you don't have houses and education and all of these things, then you're not going to have reconciliation.' Shirley is sceptical of all the intellectual debates, as they are never translated into action.

I'm not too sure that the...academic people of the world have ever done anything that's moved things and I don't think they're going to do it now all

of a sudden... Of course I support everything that is said here, but I see no line of action... That's what's going to make a difference... These ideas have to be transferred into a programme of action.

Despite her frustration with the lack of support for operatives, she is proud of the 'little steps' they have taken, such as lobbying for a special pension for soldiers.

At the time I couldn't even imagine that this money was going to come out of the coffers of the state. I just knew that it was absolutely necessary and appropriate that there be some form of pension to soldiers and to people who had fought gallantly in the mass democratic struggle, who had given their lives and had faced the Caspirs and the pellets and the whips and the electricity and all the torture and faced it all. There should be some kind of pension for people who are suffering as a result of all of that. It takes its toll on the human psyche. You are changed from these experiences. You are different. You have to live with your difference. You are never the same again, never.

I strongly think that I must go and knock on their door and I must have the opportunity to ask some questions and have some discussion with some people to get some answers on these things... All of the people that I know are not going to do it. I was in a unique situation... It is not something I can say 'let somebody else do it', because I am in a unique position. They can't do what I can do. They can't ask the questions that I can ask. They don't have that relationship.

### LOOKING BACK

Recounting her story has been 'an excruciatingly lonely passage':

It is a very lonely road and it has pushed me to realise the need to sit down with people I worked with in the military to get answers to the many questions that I have. Because I do think that we have a long way to go. We have a long way to go to acknowledge the living and the dead... *Ja*, we started off a conversation about how I feel about the arrests of Nieuwoudt and Van Zyl, for murder. For me, it is the silences that are most disturbing.

After years of struggle, Shirley's own situation has improved. In 2001 she founded the Human Rights Media Centre, a non-profit organisation working with oral history and its dissemination.

I have managed to build the NGO. I have food on the table, having created work that is fulfilling and makes a positive difference in the lives of others. This supports me and my family and in fact three other families. Directly ten people, even more actually... As hard as it is to continually raise funding needed to sustain the organisation. We have a good track record, so the longer you are able to go, the more you can prove your ability, so I am fortunate in

that regard. I am fortunate that I have been able to make this leap, to take the risk, once again.

Looking back, she is philosophical:

If I look back, you know, from outrage to depression to possibly a more...manageable form of outrage, moving forward with a lot of that energy at least. Not so much that it is eating away at me, but it is directed... I can look back and say, 'You have had a unique set of experiences and nobody can take that away from you. Nobody can...' I feel I can confidently hold on to who I am. Although I feel I have lost a lot. I have lost it for what is right and not for what was wrong. I feel more at peace about that.

#### **A DECADE AFTER THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS**

Shirley is currently the Executive Director of Human Rights Media Centre. The Centre uses various forms of media to raise awareness about human rights through oral history project-based work, focusing on issues such as child maintenance and the plight of refugees from war-torn African countries.<sup>9</sup> It also conducts oral history and multimedia training for other human rights organisations. Shirley finds this work rewarding and stimulating and believes it is imperative to establish a human rights culture in South Africa.

**'A HUNGRY MAN IS AN ANGRY MAN'****THE STORY OF A FORMER APLA HEAD OF OPERATIONS**

Letlapa Mphahlele served as Director of Operations and as a member of the APLA High Command during the period from 1990 to 1994 when PAC launched its most sustained period of armed attacks. His position as Director of Operations meant that he was ultimately responsible for the APLA operatives and their operations. During this period, APLA was reportedly responsible for over 30 attacks, resulting in large numbers of deaths and injuries. Letlapa was cited as overall and sometimes direct commander by most APLA amnesty applicants. While he submitted an amnesty application to the TRC, he ultimately did not appear before the Amnesty Committee in respect of any incidents and his application was refused.

Letlapa was directly involved in an attack on white motorists near Zastron in the Orange Free State on 18 March 1992. Three of the occupants managed to flee the vehicle, but a fourth man, who was injured, was shot dead by an APLA operative, Luyanda Gqomfa, on Letlapa's orders. He was also cited as the overall commander for the King Williams Town Golf Club attack on 28 November 1992. Four APLA operatives attacked 54 patrons who were attending an annual wine tasting dinner, leaving two couples dead and 17 people injured.

Letlapa applied for amnesty for his role as overall commander in the St James Church attack on 25 July 1993 in Kenilworth, Cape Town. APLA operatives opened fire with automatic rifles and threw grenades, killing 11 congregants and injuring 58. He was also cited as overall commander for the attack on the Heidelberg Tavern in Observatory, Cape Town, on 30 December 1993. In this attack, APLA operatives killed three young women and a man and seriously injured several others.

Letlapa's interaction with the TRC and its amnesty process mirrored the rather rocky relationship between the Commission and the PAC. While the PAC supported the establishment of the TRC, it took umbrage at how slowly amnesty applications from its members were processed and at the rejection of several PAC applications. The PAC also objected to what it perceived as the TRC's adoption of a legal equivalence between gross human rights violations committed by liberation movements and those perpetrated by the apartheid government, which it felt 'criminalised' their struggle. Letlapa formed part of the PAC's delegation to the TRC's Armed Forces hearing on 7 October 1997, which examined the policies and practices of armed organisations. However, he reiterated that he would not 'appear before the TRC on cases involving APLA cadres as a person who has given an order, until F.W. de Klerk, P.W. Botha, Magnus Malan<sup>10</sup> and General Constand Viljoen and company appear and own up to the evil deeds of the South African Defence Force across the countries and inside the country'.

As had become the custom, I received a phone call late one afternoon, the voice on the other side familiar, yet not identifiable. This time it was someone from APLA. He had spoken to a former colleague who was willing to be interviewed. 'He will be a very useful person to speak to, he says what he thinks and he is very honest. Call him now if you can. His name is Letlapa Mphahlele; he was the former Head of Operations of APLA.'

I immediately made the call. I was still introducing myself, hoping to say the appropriate things to secure an interview, when Letlapa interrupted me. 'I heard about you from a comrade; I was expecting your call. I believe you would like to meet with me.' We began to discuss the logistics of the meeting. I was in Cape Town, Letlapa was in Johannesburg. Since I was due to be in Johannesburg the following week, we set up an appointment. We would meet in an office in downtown Johannesburg.

As the plane took off over the farmlands of Stellenbosch, I was filled with a mixture of excitement and apprehension. I made a mental map of the route to the venue. I would have to ask for a map at the car rental counter – I did not want to get lost in downtown Johannesburg.

The building was easy to find, all the car lots were fenced in and car guards were on duty. As I entered the building I was comforted by the presence of security guards. I found my way to the offices and introduced myself to the receptionist. She said Letlapa had not yet arrived, but should be there shortly.

The scheduled time for our meeting came and went, and the receptionist began to glance in my direction in a reassuring manner. People walked in and out, but not knowing what Letlapa looked like, it was impossible to pre-empt his arrival. I began to ponder the image of the man I was about to meet. The Head of Operations of APLA, the organisation feared most by whites during apartheid, as being white automatically made one a legitimate target. The man behind a number of notoriously brutal attacks on civilians. What would this man be like now? How would he receive my visit? What would he think of me, a beneficiary of apartheid's racist policies? As time passed I became increasingly uncomfortable, but reassured myself that I had come this far and that he had agreed to an interview.

Half an hour later a tall, distinguished-looking man walked in. He greeted the receptionist in Sotho and they shared a laugh. He then turned towards me, hand extended and in a full, strong voice said, 'Paul, welcome! Sorry I am late. I have to rely on public transport and the taxis were very busy this morning. Let me find us a place to meet. Did you have a good trip?' I was immediately put at ease by his civility, his broad smile and infectious laugh and my apprehensions ebbed away. As we walked down the corridor, he greeted everyone we passed, joking and laughing. While trying to secure an office, he introduced me to an elderly, slightly bewildered-looking man, a comrade who was in exile with him. Letlapa sounded him

out for an interview with me, but the man said he did not like to remember his experiences – they were too difficult to think about.

Although Letlapa was unemployed and did not work for the organisation, they allowed him to use their facilities. I became more curious about what he does now that the conflict is over. He asked me whom I was going to interview from APLA. I explained that while I had thus far only spoken to operatives, I was attempting to interview higher-ranking people. Letlapa thought it important to speak to the operatives, as they are the people who have borne the brunt and are seldom heard.

### STRONG ROOTS IN A POOR RURAL VILLAGE

Born in 1960, Letlapa grew up in Manaleng, a traditional rural village in GaMphahlele (in the Limpopo province). The family was poor and he recalls supplementing porridge dishes with mopane worms and grasshoppers. When he reached the age of nine, his father decided he needed experience in raising livestock. Since they had no livestock of their own (only three families in the village had cattle and goats), he was sent to live with his more affluent maternal grandparents in Rosenkrantz, where he took care of theirs. 'My stay there for three years was disastrous in the sense that I couldn't cope with the pastoral life. Each time goats or sheep got lost. Jackals used to eat them, because I wasn't just like other boys...who grew up looking after these things.' Not only was he punished and teased for being a poor herd boy, he could not hunt either. In addition, he did not perform too well at school during this time. He used to leave after the mid-morning break, as he told himself he did not need much education to be a miner or a labourer. After three years in Rosenkrantz, he left and returned to Manaleng.

'In the winter of 1975, I climbed the mountain where I was initiated in the ways of the tribe... In my people's culture we go there twice with a year in the interval, and...one is regarded as a full man when you have gone through both phases.' For Letlapa, this was a torturous experience. By December of that year, he became ill. Besides being physically ill, he yearned for something more than the village could offer. 'I was nostalgic of some places I haven't seen before...my head was buzzing with things that one couldn't reach... I was yearning for some life, but it was out of that village.' His father took him to a doctor, but Letlapa remained unwell. By Christmas he was taken to a *sangoma* (a traditional African healer)

who said I should wear some beads which were left over by my great grandmother... I wore those beads...[and] New Year's Day I threw them away. I wanted to burn them, but I was restrained. Everybody thought I was mad, because...only mad people...defied instructions of *sangomas* and their ancestors, so I felt that I should break ties with those *sangomas* and ancestors.

In his quest for something more, for meaning, Letlapa 'resorted to church'. He became a born-again Christian. He describes himself as a 'fanatic, because I used

to move [from] house to house, village to village, preaching to people to get ready for the second coming of Jesus'. In 1976, he had to return to complete his initiation rites, but he refused. This resulted in great tension with his father and the tribe. 'One day I took a Bible and...I had...nine cents and I left home for good, because I felt that I was not going to submit myself to satanic practices for initiation.'

Letlapa's freedom was short-lived. Having lost the money and having no food or shelter, he was obliged to return home within 24 hours. His father and men from the village forcibly took him to the mountain to complete 'that manhood thing'. After his return, he continued 'preaching against those practices', but started questioning his religion. 'I felt that all my house-to-house preachings and village-to-village preaching were not helpful, because they were promising people a world thereafter when people...were suffering in the world of today. A hungry man is an angry man.' He 'resigned' from church and, according to his autobiography, asked God to understand that he needed his freedom, and that he was prepared to die or kill for it (Mphahlele, 2002, p.46).

Having left the church, he felt a void, and looked for 'something else to stimulate my mind' (2002, p.46). He proceeded to write two books that were never published. The first was a narrative poem about 'the clash between Christianity and traditional life, but the book was biased in favour of traditional life... It portrayed Christianity as a form of hypocrisy'. His second book was 'about prominent people around the village', the history of his people related to him by the elders. 'I felt inspired because a tragedy of our history is that as Africans we only know our history in relations to the arrival of the Europeans. On our own we seem to have no history whatsoever...'

### A SUDDEN MOVE

Since he considered himself an 'admirer and spectator of history', he was inspired to do something to 'make history'. Following the Soweto student uprising of June 1976 and the death of Steve Biko in 1977, Letlapa started organising students at the Ngwana-Mohube High School.<sup>11</sup> Despite only being in standard eight, he was elected president of the Union of Self Study. When the principal learned of the new union, he banned it. Not finding support and feeling 'politically unsound and unable to articulate our objectives, we gave up. But as an individual I felt that I shouldn't give up. I knew that there was something lacking and that was clear ideas on what the struggle is all about'. With this in mind, Letlapa decided to go into exile.

While the interview only yields a few clues about his reasons for choosing exile, his autobiography elaborates on this turning point in his life. Having rejected the traditional ways of his village, and finding Christianity lacking, Letlapa was still yearning for something bigger and more meaningful to fill the void in his life.

‘Thoughts continued to buzz in my head, and they settled on one idea: I had to leave the country and to train as a soldier, and return to fight whites’ (2002, p.46).

The picture of the young Letlapa that emerges is that of a questioning, enterprising teenager yearning for something to ease the conflicts engendered by growing up as a black youth in an impoverished rural village during apartheid. His unwillingness to conform and concomitant need for autonomy fuelled the tension between himself and his tribe. These experiences, together with the volatile political climate of the time, seem to be the primary motivating forces behind his decision to engage in the struggle.

Having contemplated going into exile, he had saved some money and got his papers in order, and when his father sent him to the building society in town to deposit R120 one day, Letlapa seized the opportunity to buy a few things and leave. On 15 August 1978<sup>12</sup> he boarded a train for Botswana. Exile seemingly promised, amongst other things, a way to escape the confines and conflicts of his life and an opportunity to find direction and clarity about what the struggle meant. The exact form this would take seemed less important than the decision to leave.

#### THE JOURNEY: BOTSWANA, TANZANIA AND GUINEA

Letlapa was determined to make an informed decision about which political organisation to join and remained unaffiliated for more than a year.

When I arrived in exile, I wanted to be an individual and study all these political organisations from a distance, but I wasn’t given that opportunity... When I reported at the [Gaborone] police station, I wanted to know how many organisations were there and who are they and what are their policies. I was told that there was only one organisation – the ANC. Then the PAC was somewhere in the...Kalahari Desert and there were a few *tsotsis* who were...taking chances with politics... I sat in the police station for a week, because I did not want to join a political organisation... I had bad experience of being in Christianity, of being a fanatic, and I didn’t want to move from a spiritual fanatic into a political fanatic. But ultimately the police said the whole condition for leaving the police station was that I should join a political organisation or else they will keep me there indefinitely.

The police advised Letlapa to join the ANC, phoned the ANC people to fetch him and advised him to get his papers from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Botswana Refugee Council. There he met Tom Nkoana, who recognised that he was a South African and asked about his political affiliation. When Tom learned that he had just joined the ANC, he was very angry. He told Letlapa the police recruited members for the ANC and that he would be taken to Angola ‘where people were being massacred in the camps’. Tom also ‘spoke darkly’ about the PAC. According to him the PAC was ‘promoting tribalism and its cadres are dying in

Tanzania and the organisation was dominated by Xhosa and I had no chance unless I was a Xhosa.’

Since Tom did not belong to any organisation, Letlapa regarded him as an ally. Tom promised to help him retrieve his luggage from the police station.

We went to Gaborone to a township called Bontleng, and when we arrived...the fellow [Tom] was praised... They were saying...he is a tiger... He had taken me to [the] SSRC<sup>13</sup> – the [Soweto] Student Representative Council... The fellow must have told them that I did not belong to any organisation, but since I would be living with them obviously they would recruit me... The SRC people helped me to fetch my luggage... When we came back they told me that Tom had told them that I belonged to no organisation, so I said, ‘Yes, I belong to no organisation, but...get me now the literatures of all organisations, because I want to read them and make an informed choice...’ They had plenty of ANC literature; they had plenty of PAC literature, plenty of South African Communist literature and [literature of] the New Unity Movement.

Letlapa resisted the pressure to be recruited and began reading the literature available to him. He was attracted to the writings of Robert Sobukwe.<sup>14</sup> ‘The man was saying something that had been in my subconscious’, especially his views on race (endorsing non-racialism and condemning multiracialism), the central role of land and the crucial role of education. Letlapa’s decision to join the PAC seems to have been primarily motivated by Sobukwe’s formulation of the meaning and aim of the struggle for liberation.

Acknowledging the difficulties that the PAC experienced, Letlapa recounts his ambivalence in becoming a member of the PAC.

I felt I should be in the PAC, but at the time the PAC was going through serious problems. Its leaders were being massacred like David Sibeko,<sup>15</sup> [its] cadres were disillusioned... I was reluctant to join the PAC, because I did not want to go into troubles. But...those people [SSRC] felt that I should join them. I think three times I had postponed...

Eventually the SSRC gave him the choice to either join them, or find alternative accommodation. ‘So reluctantly I had to join them... But my heart was still in the PAC.’

Despite serious reservations, Letlapa did join the PAC a few months later (in early 1980). While he was unhappy about the leadership, he felt he needed to be part of a political structure. ‘I felt that as much as I am not happy...I am joining because I cannot pursue the whole thing [the struggle] on my own, but I won’t accommodate mediocrity, especially from leaders.’ Letlapa felt that there was ‘a sea between the leaders and the cadres’ and that the political leadership did not take care of them in the same way as their ANC counterparts, for example, by visiting them in the refugee camps in Botswana. ‘We were just there, forgotten, being on our own...

There was something fundamentally wrong with this organisation, but...its writings and its beliefs, its philosophy was always...attracting me to it, but its administration...was so repulsive.'

Following a clash with members of the Botswana refugee camp, Letlapa left for Tanzania in February 1981. On his arrival, he found that PAC and APLA were in a deeper crisis than he had realised. Severe internal conflict had led to its High Command having been disbanded and there were 'accusations and counter-accusations of tribalism, factionalism, etc.' Various groups that had been trained in Lebanon, Sudan, Nigeria, Guinea and Cambodia tried to find common ground. In July of that year, 40 men, including Letlapa, were selected for a year's military training in Guinea, West Africa. Neither the interview nor the autobiography clearly explains why he decided to join APLA, instead of staying within the political realm of the organisation. When he initially applied for membership of the PAC, he was told that the organisation would decide how and where he would be deployed, depending on his 'gifts and talents' (Mphahlele, 2002, p.63). It is likely that due to the above-mentioned disarray, the PAC, now headed by the popular Pokela,<sup>16</sup> was eager to solidify their armed wing and therefore deployed the new young recruits in the structures of APLA. Since he had already decided three years earlier that he wanted to become a soldier, it seems he did not object.

On his return to Botswana, a new High Command had been appointed under the leadership of Sabelo Phama (the PAC's Secretary of Defence from 1981 until his death in February 1993). However, the organisation was not yet rid of its difficulties.

I felt really that there was still something lacking... At that time the ANC was making strides, diplomatically, politically and otherwise and we were busy trying to contain tribalism and fear of tribalism... What really worried us was we were crowded in the camps and people used to leave the camp with the understanding that they were coming here in this country to fight, but we only learned that they...were deported either by the Botswana government or the Lesotho government. Another thing really that worried us as cadres was that, everything being equal, our political leadership did not measure up to the formidable task of the liberation, because I would not say that they were leaders... Besides that, it seems everybody had a different interpretation how our struggle was going to be waged... We were not up to scratch in terms of revolutionary awareness and revolutionary training and of foresight... There was a problem really in the liberation movement, because there were no elections. People were appointed into the leadership and once a person became vocal, he was summarily expelled. And the governments which were hosting us, which...were not democratic, would always side with the leadership of the day... So we had to endure the mediocre leadership, because a person did not have to perform well to be a leader. All you needed to do was to ingratiate yourself to the leader of the day.

## BACK TO BOTSWANA

These organisational difficulties were not limited to the political realm, but extended to the military realm as well. APLA was 'moving at a snail's pace'. The Soviet Union, 'the superpowers' were supporting the ANC, while the PAC was 'scantily' supported by China. 'Besides, [they] were not doing anything on the ground to justify support.' Against this backdrop, Letlapa went to Botswana in 1984 as Deputy Chief Representative, 'basically to pursue an army programme'.<sup>17</sup> The PAC was planning to deploy APLA members in South Africa, using Botswana as a base. Conditions were difficult and at times they had no food or water.

In 1986, the South African government requested its Botswana counterpart to deport a number of PAC and ANC members. Letlapa was one of them. He was declared a 'prohibited immigrant' and left for Zimbabwe. After a brief spell in jail, he was appointed to APLA's High Command. Several months later, Letlapa returned to Botswana, operating underground. He was arrested in 1987 and sentenced to five years for possession of arms of war and carrying an unlicensed firearm. He was released in 1990 and deported to Zimbabwe.

## WAR, 'A CONTINUATION OF POLITICS BY OTHER MEANS'

According to Letlapa, APLA did not believe in war as a redeemer of everything. We were aware that war is a continuation of politics by other means, and if you are politically weak, you cannot be militarily strong... The task of war was not something that was on the shoulders of the army...of APLA...it was something...to be performed by the PAC... War is not won on the battlefield, but it is won in the...minds and hearts of people... The military victory that was hoped for...was not the destruction of the South African National Defence Force, but it was the destruction of the idea that the army was representing, because once people believe that colonialism has no room in their country, then that is the beginning of victory.

Initially, APLA concentrated their attacks on the security forces: 'Our cadres were told that you are being trained that you should attack or destroy the security forces...' However, that began to change over time. Attacks on security forces did not generate much exposure. 'It was lost in the mist, in the cloud of killing.' In addition, 'the late Pokela put it explicitly that we should take war into the white areas so that they too should bury their dead. We should not be the only ones who should bury our dead'. During the height of the 'so-called black-on-black violence' the killing of white civilians was justified as a strategy to 'make the state think twice before they sponsor that violence'. It was felt that 'our people, the African people, cannot be killed with impunity, so therefore we should try to inflict blows on whites because...the government that was doing that, did not have the mandate of

the wider South African population. They were voted for by the whites...' The attacks on white civilians led to widespread condemnation: 'APLA was portrayed as an army that was afraid of another army, and had resorted to killing civilians.'

In APLA the details of the operations often depended on the initiative of the operative.

When a cadre was deployed we always emphasised the question of initiative... If we had told you that you are going to destroy a bridge and you don't see a bridge...you must know that the broader objective of our war is the destruction of any communication capacity... We didn't want to have people with no initiative. Of course people can have excesses, people can be, you know, blunderised, or they could do something that is going to endanger the bigger plans.

Yet they did insist on a report or a post-mortem after an operation, to determine whether an operation was 'consistent with...[their] political objectives'

#### WELCOME HOME?

By the early 1990s, conditions in exile were becoming increasingly difficult given the 'optimistic' political atmosphere in South Africa. It was becoming hard to procure financial aid and military training, even from their 'main backers' like Tanzania and Zimbabwe (Mphahlele, 2002, p.152). The APLA High Command, in which Letlapa was now Head of Operations, felt unwelcome in Zimbabwe and decided to relocate to South Africa. However, this move was challenging too.

In 1991...the ground was shrinking, because...De Klerk had convinced the whole world that he was genuine in what he was doing, and the ANC, especially Nelson Mandela, had endorsed De Klerk's changes. African states viewed us with suspicion in that we were just an odd bunch...trying to go on with fighting when everybody said that what we are fighting for is going to be realised.

Relocating to South Africa meant finding a safe place from which to operate to minimise the arrests of their cadres. Ironically, Transkei, a place 'that politically we did not see eye-to-eye with', became a safe haven. Weapons were being supplied by the Transkei security forces, MK and the PAC's external missions (Mphahlele, 2002).

Letlapa's return after 15 years in exile was taxing on all levels. The fundamental purpose of the armed struggle was being challenged in light of the political negotiations, questioning the very notion of a revolution.

It was no longer the struggle to liberate this country. The liberation of this country had eluded us, but to quote one kid...'it was revenge for the deaths of his people who were killed by police, by soldiers in school uniforms'... I was the Director of Operations and...I could feel it that our struggle was ill-fated because...politically we had lost the initiative as the PAC... We were

marginalised to an extent that even if we are not there at Kempton Park, nobody asked where we were... Now the people started to ask why were we fighting, because 'we no longer have passes'. We said we were fighting for the land... Some people were asking us, 'Which land?' Because we are having a land... We were put against the wall... We continued to fight, even continued to dream, that maybe this is a Dingane trap<sup>18</sup>... Maybe at the crucial time there is going to be a change, and once these negotiations were derailed then we are going to be relevant and we will have followers.

Thus the '90s saw a change in the motives for armed attacks. They now represented an attempt to retain some political relevance. Enemy targets also shifted from urban to rural areas and farms, since whites in these areas were seen to be militarised: 'They belong to the Commando system, they belong to this or that security... The whole thing was militarised.'

APLA operations continued

against the background of imminent defeat, because we had read the writings on the wall that our struggle has been sold out. Actually, everything we were doing was done half-heartedly. You didn't know what would happen today or tomorrow, or the next hour... The pre-election period was characterised by a lot of uncertainty and chaos within the PAC.

While Letlapa believed the struggle could continue simultaneously with negotiations, many 'township militants' believed they were mutually exclusive and negotiating was selling out. Many cadres were starving and took to armed robberies. 'During the nineties APLA suffered more casualties on "repossession missions" than on combat with the enemy' (Mphahlele, 2002, p.144). From a military point of view, Letlapa hoped the negotiations would fail. However, he eventually realised that 'no one had the capacity to derail these things' and 'it was too little too late'.

#### ST JAMES AND HEIDELBERG

The two most publicised attacks during this period were the attacks on the St James Church (25 July 1993) and the Heidelberg Tavern (30 December 1993). At the time of the Heidelberg Tavern attack, Letlapa had issued an order suspending attacks on civilian targets. 'I announced it to the comrades and asked them to make [sure] that it filtered down to the lowest level, but it was very short-lived... I had waived this order after the murder of five schoolchildren by the SADF in Umtata' in October 1993 (Mphahlele, 2002, p.202). On 14 February 1994 APLA reciprocated with an attack on the Crazy Beat Disco 'somewhere in Newcastle... just for revenge'.<sup>19</sup>

While other attacks were conveniently but erroneously attributed to APLA, Letlapa takes full responsibility for the Heidelberg and St James attacks (as he has done on many other occasions).

As the ex-Director of Operations, it is true that I have given the orders. For instance, the King Williams Town one, I did give an order, so was St James, so was Heidelberg... I made it a point that it should be my responsibility and only I could tell people that now you can attack this... For instance, on Heidelberg, I told them they can only attack it after they have attacked the army and the police, but not before that.<sup>20</sup>

As indicated earlier, the attacks on white civilians received much more media exposure. 'Heidelberg captured...the imagination of the nation and the international community...but that very day the same unit had attacked an army base during a drill and a police station, and Heidelberg was the last.' The commander, who applied for amnesty for these attacks, was only charged for Heidelberg, and not for the other two. 'Under the circumstances, really it was difficult, because we had no media to make our point.'

#### AN ABRUPT END TO A PROTRACTED STRUGGLE

On 16 January 1994, PAC president Clarence Makwetu announced the suspension of the armed struggle. Despite being the Director of Operations, Letlapa heard this news on the radio. 'I took it as a betrayal, a betrayal of those cadres who were in prison, a betrayal of those cadres whose photos had been splashed on screen and national newspapers as being looked for by the police, and I happened to be one of them.'

People were not consulted and 'the whole thing was messy'.

People were not tuned for the suspension of the armed struggle. People slept tuned to war and the following day they were told that [it was over]. Of course I wasn't surprised. It was just the continuation of comic leadership that we have had over a long period, years. Each time there was a promise for serious leadership, the leader died...Pokela...Mothopeng...he was leading the PAC from a deathbed, basically. So now the comics...were reincarnated.

Letlapa decided to defy the order for the suspension of armed conflict. 'Everyone agreed to defy the PAC leadership... We agreed to formally inform the cadres throughout Azania to ignore the order and continue with their operations' (Mphahlele, 2002, p.171).

Communication between the military and the political leadership increasingly deteriorated.

What we were doing, we were doing for politics, or we thought so. I think the PAC leadership...decided to stand aloof from what was happening, from what the High Command was doing, because in other wars, the political leadership is involved... You wouldn't get two different statements. For instance, once St James Church was attacked, the first man to comment was a PAC leader, and he condemned it and other PAC leaders joined the chorus, and they came up

and said, 'We did it'... I think APLA was given more autonomy, which we enjoyed, but later on we regretted it. APLA became just too autonomous and actually...I wonder if the right hand knew what the left hand was doing.

Although political negotiations were well under way, liberation had not yet been achieved. In addition, the PAC had boycotted the negotiation process, and hence APLA had no representation in these crucial negotiations. Letlapa recounts his frustration when he and a few military colleagues made suggestions to the political leaders.

My organisation, the PAC in all its rhetoric, had never put the fate of political prisoners on the table as one of the bargaining chips... Some of us even made suggestions to the leadership that we must make a graceful exit from the battlefield... At that stage there was a serious offensive against farms and security forces and over time we made the suggestion that the PAC should approach De Klerk...and...see, if we cannot link the cessation of farm attacks with some of the benefits for our people, for instance, amnesty and release from prison...and even integration into the civil service... Because the whole thing – liberation – as we had understood it, had been aborted... But with us, it was just full stop to the armed struggle...and there was no bargaining.

#### LEAVING THE COUNTRY, AGAIN

Shortly before South Africa's first democratic elections, warrants of arrest were issued against Letlapa for murder, attempted murder, arson and terrorism. In April 1994, he sought refuge in Lesotho and could therefore not take part in the elections.

I felt that I should go beyond South African borders because even in PAC ranks...some people were going to go on with the fight, and...I wanted to disassociate myself from any acts of violence against the democratic state to be. After people had voted overwhelmingly and we would go on with the violence, you become a bandit.

Many APLA operatives faced the same fate.

They were on the run and they continued to be on the run and some of them were arrested even before the elections, others after elections, some ran into Lesotho, there they were abducted and I was one of those...ultimately abducted from Lesotho... There was this strong feeling, actually bitterness... It is still there... People really felt let down by their commanders and by the PAC.

The operatives felt betrayed. They argued that if the PAC knew that...they were going to suspend the armed struggle, they should not have led them to commit acts which were punishable by law. In addition, most of our cadres were from poor families and they were uneducated before they joined the PAC. They had opportunities to further

their studies through UNESCO and other international agencies, but they opted for military and once they were in military they were not scholastically developed. And unfortunately the...organisation that sent them to war did not have the decency of coming down to them and... explain why there was a need to terminate that war and what are other options for them in life... [That] bitterness is not something that evaporated... It is still there.

### THE TRC: A RAW DEAL

Since the negotiation process was boycotted by the PAC and rejected by APLA, it was not surprising that the TRC was criticised by APLA. No direction was provided by the political leadership, as the PAC did not adopt any official position when the TRC was announced. Letlapa remains unclear on the PAC's official response: 'Actually I don't think we in the PAC had a concrete response to the TRC.' There were those – 'especially those who were not in prison – who said that they are not going to go to the TRC'. Others in prison were 'very desperate to get out. So I took it upon myself to visit them and actually encourage them to apply for amnesty. You cannot be radical when you are burning'. In Letlapa's opinion, the political leadership of the PAC did little more than 'dilly-dally' on the issue of the TRC. Although they 'would...condemn the TRC', they did not provide 'a realistic alternative to the people who were languishing in prison'.

According to the PAC, they should not be required to apply for amnesty. In their opinion, their policies and the actions of APLA constituted self-defence against a system that had been declared a crime against humanity by the United Nations. To APLA, it was preposterous – and insulting – that the TRC equated their actions with the actions of the oppressors, the apartheid state's security forces.

In a conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed...the murder committed by both cannot be put on the same level. Where justice and liberation is the goal, that murder...amounts to medicine; and the perpetuation of injustice and oppression, that murder...amounts to disease. And you cannot treat disease and medicine on the same level – poison and antidote as the same thing. The murders the oppressors carried out upon us were unprovoked murders, but having been provoked, we had to retaliate and those murders should not have been equated.

Although Letlapa is critical of the TRC, he supports the idea of truth and reconciliation and recognises the role the TRC played in releasing many of their members from prison. However, his hope that it would 'blow a fresh breeze into this country' was soon dashed by the 'severe deficiencies in the whole thing'.

Letlapa was part of the APLA delegation that met with senior members of the TRC, among them Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

My very first question...was, 'What is truth?' Of course they said they understood my definition of truth, that truth is ultimately a partisan concept

in as far as politics is concerned, and has nothing to do with the correspondence or statement in fact. But they said they were governed by an Act, and that Act did not allow people to say they were innocent... The TRC is not a platform where people plead their innocence. It was a platform where people say why [they] did what they did...giving their reasons and their motivation. Now there are two examples of where this becomes ridiculous. The one is the case whereby three ANC cadres were arrested, tried and convicted for something they did not do. They applied for amnesty to the TRC and in their amnesty application they pleaded their innocence and... the TRC turned their application down, saying that as far as they were concerned, they were looking for full disclosure and pleading of innocence did not amount to full disclosure. I saw this a long time ago...[when I was] still in Lesotho... I didn't know that it was going to happen to me directly.

He cites his own case as the second example:

In my case...a lot of people have pleaded with me saying, 'Why don't you go to the TRC and apply for amnesty?' But I said, 'No, all these things that I am charged with, I didn't do it.' For example, one of the charges was that I was found in possession of making guns, explosives, firearms, grenades, explosives, etc. But I am told illegal possession can also be mental, and not necessarily physical. I must confess that I knew about them, because I was Director of Operations... It would be ridiculous that I didn't know that APLA was going to carry out particular operations. But in terms of physical participation in those things that I am charged for, it is simply not true. I was faced with this dilemma. The people who were really involved in those things applied for amnesty and they got it. I could simply say, 'Yes, I did one, two, three,' and I would be granted amnesty; but I didn't do it, and it becomes ridiculous. I know a lot of our guys are languishing in prison because they originally said that they were innocent of the charges for which they were convicted. They were looking forward for the TRC, for the opportunity to say what they really did and to understand why their convictions were false, but this was never to be.

To Letlapa, this made little sense and only encouraged people to lie in order to maximise their chances of being granted amnesty.

I know a lot of our people who got amnesty and for whom we had to lie that they did this or this and they were undisciplined. They did things that we did not sanction, but because they were in trouble, we had to lie and through lies they got off the hook; and imagine how many people got off the hook on the altar of truth by applying on the basis of lies?

In Letlapa's view, the TRC's amnesty process 'criminalised everyone', irrespective of their political affiliation. Criminalising the actions of liberation soldiers also resulted in confusion between criminals and legitimate liberation soldiers, posing serious moral challenges to the PAC.

You would find that people were affiliated to the PAC because they knew that PAC is anti-white, which was a perception and of course I don't think we did enough in the PAC to dismiss that perception. Now those people would go and attack a farm and got arrested and from there it was the end... But when the TRC came up, those people came back to us and said, 'Comrade, you remember, we were in this branch and our chairman was so and so, and when we heard of "The year of the Storm" we stoned a farm and we killed. Can you vouch for us?' And then we sat down and vouched for them, arguing that it was part of repossession, because they stole wine, they stole clothes, etc. And those people are also out, released from prison. Easy.

In my application [to the TRC] on the issue of offences by commission and omission, I said I was responsible for APLA activities from the period that I was Head of Operations. They [TRC] said that I should be very specific about what I did and not what we did... I have a problem with that. Any war of liberation is a collective endeavour. Whereas their [TRC] argument is that here they are addressing crime, so crime is individualised, so of course we are deadlocked... It was an insurgency/counter-insurgency war.

The TRC was meant to bring joy to our people, to the freedom fighters, but...it is actually bringing displeasure and sorrow. I have opted for the position that they should prosecute me on trumped up charges in court and I will have to face the consequences. As a liberation soldier I feel humiliated by the question, 'What did you specifically do?' I mean, that was not my war. If there was something wrong that I did, a lot of people should account for it. Those people who recruited me and those people who indoctrinated me, those people who forged passports for me. I mean the entire leadership of the PAC. But now we are in a situation where the elite of the liberation movement are sitting pretty cushioned, and the troops, the foot soldiers are bearing the brunt of this. Something that they were instructed to do, because as much as I was giving orders, I was being ordered by higher authority. It is like going out and persecuting Nazi soldiers and having Hitler in the Cabinet. It is unfair.

Letlapa views the TRC's definition of a 'gross human rights violation' as arbitrary: Murder, attempted murder, abduction, detention without trial and severe treatment. You can grossly violate the human rights of a person without abducting him, without kidnapping him, without killing him, without even attempting to kill him or torturing him... We had Bantu Education where the aim was to stifle the growth of African minds and we had forced removals, we had migratory labour systems, we had pass laws... All those things brought together amount to gross violation of human rights... Look at the results of the matrices among African people and they are so horrible. This is a legacy of the past... All those things are violations of human rights and are being excluded from the categories of gross violation of human rights.

He raised this argument in the presence of Archbishop Tutu, who reminded them that they did not win a military victory. 'He was reminding us that we should have fought harder and perhaps we could have got a better deal. At the same time, I think all one gets from the TRC is a raw deal.'

#### A DECADE AFTER THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

Letlapa has been unemployed since the dismantling of APLA. He speaks quite openly about the transience of political positionings and the multiple levels of betrayal.

We had internalised the oppressor... It was just a question of removing the word 'oppressor' and replacing him with a black-skinned oppressor... This is a trend in Zimbabwe, it is a trend elsewhere in Africa... People I used to call comrades, today they are even avoiding me. Some are...in high government positions, they are secretary of lands, secretary of that, head of traditional things... Others went to the Parliament; they want to co-operate... Our dreams as we used to have them when we were in the bush or underground have just been betrayed and...our erstwhile comrades are even ashamed of us... They are ashamed of what we did on their orders... Now we are portrayed like dangerous peoples, criminals who are on the loose... Obviously Mandela is a chief betrayer in the whole thing in [the] sense that he is the appeaser... He would go hard on the blacks... He was hard on Africans that they don't want to learn *Die Stem* and it is part of the national anthem... He does not do the same to whites... But I won't want to speak about Nelson Mandela as a betrayer in this context, but in the context of the PAC, I think the chief betrayer is the Army leadership, the High Command.

In contrast to the above-mentioned comrades, Letlapa devotes much of his time and energy to assisting former APLA combatants, as he feels a duty to them. 'I would be a nonentity without the APLA cadres.' He is the convenor of the Demobilisation Integration Special Pension and Political Prisoners Committee. He assists people returning from exile and ex-political prisoners who struggle to be reintegrated into civil society and struggle even harder to find employment. Many of these people feel that their futures are bleak. 'They are drinking their lives away, because they feel that they are outcasts of the community. So we should try to extract some diamond out of that mud of frustration.' He attempts to use his profile to draw attention to their call 'for civilian skills, skills that these men can use to find work beyond conflict. A hungry man is an angry man.'

Letlapa has recently written a book about his life as a freedom fighter. Promoting his book has given him the opportunity to travel the country and, in so doing, he has encountered a number of survivors and family members of victims of APLA attacks. He has embraced these meetings as an opportunity for understanding and dialogue, a gesture that has facilitated the establishment of relationships between himself and former enemies of APLA.

## 'I WAS NEVER WRONG'

### THE STORY OF A FORMER APLA COMMANDER

Luvuyo Kulman, an APLA operative, applied for amnesty to the TRC for his role in five incidents, one of which resulted in the killing of two civilians. All the incidents formed part of the wave of APLA attacks that commenced in 1990 and reached a crescendo in 1993. These attacks targeted the security forces, collaborators and white civilians, particularly farmers.

The first incident formed part of a series of armed attacks on white-owned farms in the Lady Grey and Zastron areas in the Free State province. Luvuyo formed part of a unit deployed at Sterkspruit. Together with other APLA operatives, he launched an attack on a Lady Grey farm on 18 March 1992, causing damage to the house and a vehicle and killing over 50 sheep. The farm owners were not present during the attack. Luvuyo was involved in two further attacks on farms in the Zastron district during which no one was injured.

The fourth incident formed part of a series of armed attacks on white 'settler' residents and farms in the Ficksburg area during 1992. Luvuyo participated in one of these attacks in early December 1992, targeting an old age home and houses in the vicinity, in order 'to instil fear and pain' among the white inhabitants of Ficksburg. Apparently this attack caused superficial damage to property and no casualties were reported.

The last incident, the only one for which he was convicted and sentenced, took place in the Elliot district on 27 August 1993. Luvuyo and a fellow operative were reportedly instructed by their commander, Thandoxulu, to abduct a white farmer with alleged right-wing connections and bring him to the commander for questioning. According to the applicants, the operation went awry. The farmer, who sold milk to local residents from his truck, was accompanied by his 21-year-old daughter. Both were shot. The farmer died on the scene and the daughter was wounded. The two operatives then fled in the truck, taking the daughter with them. They met their commander at a pre-arranged place near the Mbashe River, some 60 kilometres away. The daughter was taken into a bushy area where Thandoxulu shot her dead. The subsequent post-mortem found that she had also been stabbed several times. Shortly thereafter the two applicants were arrested.

The Amnesty Committee refused amnesty for these killings, but granted it for the robbery of the farmer's weapon and truck. The Committee found that there was a lack of full disclosure and no political objective to the killings. The evidence presented by the two applicants and the witnesses yielded a number of inconsistencies. Luvuyo claimed to have experienced memory problems due to being severely beaten on his arrest.

At a TRC hearing in Cape Town in 2000, I met a lawyer representing former members of APLA. After the hearing I enquired about the possibility of interviewing a few of his clients. He immediately suggested three people, all serving prison sentences in the Eastern Cape. With his assistance, I was granted permission by the prison services to interview these three men. The three had also given their approval for the interview.

On the day of the interview I arrived at a faceless building surrounded by a high double-electrified fence garlanded with barbed wire – the maximum-security section. I waited for a warden to escort me. While walking me to the building, he asked if I was carrying a firearm or any other weapons. We arrived at a large metal door with a peephole. He knocked loudly with his keys, shouting to identify himself and the door was opened. We entered a corridor where I was searched and taken through a second set of gates into a passage of offices. When I told him whom I had come to see, he reassured me, saying, ‘They are fine, you’ll be safe.’ The passage was filled with prisoners waiting outside the offices. They stood up straight, greeting the warden as we passed. (Prior to my next visit, a prisoner would kill a fellow inmate in this very passage.)

I was shown into the parole hearings office – a large boardroom-like office with a long table surrounded by chairs. The warden walked over to the telephone and picked it up. ‘It works. This is my number if you need me, but you should be fine. I will wait with you until the prisoners get here.’ I smiled politely, hoping not to show my trepidation. ‘Call me if you have any problems or when you’ve finished the interview. Don’t leave this office on your own. I will fetch you and walk you out.’

A few minutes later, there was a knock on the door and in walked three shy-looking men. We shook hands. The warden left, closing the door behind him. Knowing that these men had already served five years in prison and that they seldom received visitors, I had bought them each a cool drink, some sweets and a packet of cigarettes. As I retrieved these from my bag, their faces lit up like those of children about to blow out the candles on their birthday cake. Luvuyo Kulman said he had not tasted a Coke for over four years.

These three men, aged between 28 and 34, were arrested and convicted within months of each other during 1994 and 1995. They were imprisoned together, serving prison sentences ranging from 25 to 69 years. This is Luvuyo’s story. He was 28 at the time, serving a 25-year sentence.

### **BORN INTO THE HEART OF CONFLICT**

Luvuyo was born in 1972 into a politically disengaged family of seven and grew up in New Brighton, a township outside Port Elizabeth. Due to the political unrest and the riots at the time, it was virtually impossible for a young black man not to

become politically active. 'It was because of the oppressions and then I joined the PAC. In fact, in our location after the burning of the school, most of the youth were forced or...were influenced to be involved in politics.' Not only did the political climate inspire him to join a liberation movement, he was also attracted by the status it would confer on him.

In our locations there was a belief in African youth that by joining the Army you will be a hero in our nation... So we were so keen to join the ranks of the liberation movement in order to liberate our nation so that we can be recognised or honoured as a hero.

Luvuyo recalls the heavy police presence at funerals in townships during this period.

When there is a funeral, you will go and bury that person and you will find out after you buried that person there is another person who needs to be buried next to him. He has been shot now by the security... When you are going to a funeral the oppressors or the police [are] at that funeral. When the funeral ends, they will shoot tear gas, they will shoot some people, that also affected us a lot... We cannot tolerate what is happening. Let us try and join the liberation movement so that we can defend ourselves.

After matric, he did a motor mechanics course, but at the age of 18 he suspended these studies, joined APLA and was sent into exile for military training. Besides the status associated with being a freedom fighter and the compelling political climate, Luvuyo does not expand on his reasons for going into exile. He emphasises that joining APLA was a voluntary decision: 'It depends on the person himself. In fact, the APLA welcomed everyone. It doesn't select which person does not fit or who fits in the Army. The one who is willing or feels free to join the Army then he can do so...'

Despite the reported lack of screening and the fact that the majority were 'juvenile members', Luvuyo insists that one needed certain qualities to be 'a good fighter'.

You must be brave, you must obey orders, you must endure hardship, initiative and flexibility through activeness... Those are qualities of a good fighter. You must be flexible, you must be brave, but you must not be stereotyped. As we always said that the commander of the soldier is a situation, the terrain. You can't do your things as well whereby the terrain say to you, you must do things important to it.

Believing that he enjoyed the full support of his community, Luvuyo and many cadres like him saw fighting the oppression of the apartheid state as the only option. Having grown up with political unrest and living under a state of emergency in the extremely politically volatile Eastern Cape, the identity of the enemy was clear to him.

**'WE DEAL WITH THEM WHEREVER THEY ARE'**

Luvuyo explains his understanding of 'the enemy' during his career as an APLA operative and (later) a commander:

The general army was created with the aim to attack the security forces, the government installations, etc.... The struggle changed, you see. Now it deviated from its own course. The people were also attacked, because it was believed that the apartheid is not being practised by the pillars or by the building. It is practised by the persons... Apartheid was...encouraged by the Euro settlers by voting for their government... This evil system...will end if you eliminate that person [the white voters]. There is a saying in our politics. In fact, it was something said by our late hero Robert Sobukwe... He stated that you can't hate a *sjambok*<sup>21</sup>... You are supposed to hate the person who is wielding the *sjambok*... I can't [hate] apartheid. I should hate the person who is practising apartheid... So it is difficult to hate the *sjambok*, instead of hating the person who is wielding the *sjambok*. If that person is not there, then that *sjambok* will be fine.

Targeting civilians was also a form of reciprocation, because 'the security forces, SAP, SADF were also attacking our civilians which were Africans'.

The state is organised. If they wished to arrest the soldiers or the operatives, they would have managed to do that. There were cases [in] which they committed some atrocities. For instance, in the North Crest there were young children, aged 13 or 14, which were killed by the state operatives... De Klerk and Pik Botha [Pik (R.F.) Botha served as Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time] claimed...they wanted to nail APLA cadres. They had information that APLA was using that house. Unfortunately, the APLA cadre acted on their information, instead they ended up killing the children... What they have done [to] those children... They were using sub-machine guns... An Uzi contains 30 rounds or 30 bullets. Almost the whole magazine was being shot in their face... That was a barbaric action... I mean, how could you explain that as political... They should have tried other means to nail [the] liberation movement.

APLA attacks therefore not only constituted self-defence, but also retaliation – and a way of ensuring that white people also felt the pain of war.

In APLA we don't have light targets and hard targets. We attack those who benefit in the government. Those are white people and we deal with them wherever they are – in the supermarket, in [the] tavern, in church or whatever. That was our duty in APLA.

Yet Luvuyo insists that they do not hate white people *per se*:

We were not killing the white people because we hate them. We hate what they did to us. We were hating oppression that they were doing to us. You are here with us. You see that we shake the white people's hand or whatever. We

don't have any hidden agenda against white people, but what we were hating against white people is the oppression and the brutality that they did to us.

## DEPLOYMENT

After having received six years of training – 1986 to 1992 – in Tanzania, Uganda, Egypt and Zimbabwe, Luvuyo was deployed in South Africa as a counter-intelligence officer in the Matatise unit of APLA, a specialised sabotage unit based in the Orange Free State and operating in the Lesotho area.

I was deployed in Sterkspruit, Lesotho and in Transkei... It was a saboteur unit which was established with the aim...to attack the farmers in Lady Grey, in Ficksburg, all the areas belonging to South Africa. I was deployed [in the Transkei] because there were cadres who were trained there. I was asked to lead them to another operation...which occurred in 1993 at Kei Mouth... In Lesotho...I was...second in command...Deputy in Command.

Luvuyo explains that operatives functioned in small units of approximately six people co-ordinated by a commander to avoid detection by the security forces:

We were six operatives. In fact, to be an APLA soldier you had to be so flexible. It was so difficult for the police to identify us, because we wore clothes that are similar to those worn by the civilians... We are so young as you have noticed... So it is difficult to identify exactly that person is a soldier. The same applies when we conduct our reconnaissance. You will think that I am just having some looks or I am just looking for a job, so sometimes the police had difficulties in identifying our units. For instance, if it happened that they arrested one of our soldiers, we do not accommodate ourselves in only one house. We separate our units. We were six, divided in twos. Two guys will be in their own house which is known only by the commander... We only meet when we supposed to conduct an operation.

Further steps were taken to prevent information leaks.

The only person who liaise with us is the commander. The soldiers do not know exactly what their mission will be, nor when the mission will be executed. They only wait for the commander to tell them, 'Prepare yourself, we are now going...' In fact, the reasons for the commander not to disclose or not to tell the soldiers is for...security...because...I might discuss with my soldiers that on a particular date we will be going to operate on the area so and so and so. Maybe it happened that the person might be arrested and then he will disclose all that information and then the mission will fail.

The commander, with the sanction of the Chief of Operations, selected the target. 'Our target is our oppressors, so the commander can easily identify the target, because the targets were the oppressors. So when the soldiers are attacking, they are attacking with the understanding that they are attacking the oppressors.' The commander was

‘the highest person in the unit’ and had multiple duties, from the selection of the target, the planning and logistics, to the obtaining of arms. When the combatants were not on a mission, the commander would also act as political commissar.

He will explain to them about politics...what are the reasons for them to conduct such operations, so that when...[the] operatives are incarcerated... they can easily motivate or justify their actions. So we also had the belief that our actions or our operations are being led first by the politics and the gun is after the politics. The gun is after the politics.

The operatives prepared themselves psychologically before each attack, singing songs to boost their morale.

Those songs... In fact, it is an old, old thing that were used even by Shaka<sup>22</sup> and those heroes, the late heroes. They used to sing a song before attacking that particular place. So we also do the same thing. Before we go to our target, we boost our morale by singing songs and make sure that everyone is comfortable. Even when we share our firearms, we spread our firearms; if we are spreading them [on] the table, we spread them here, you will take a firearm which you will feel is comfortable for you. Then as a commander you will ask your forces... ‘Everybody is he comfortable? Everybody is he ready?’ Then you will command a unit, a happy unit. No one had a fear in that unit. They all accept what might happen during the course of the operation.

Luvuyo describes how they armed themselves with rifles, pistols, grenades, ‘cocktails’ (petrol bombs) and spikes, which were thrown onto the road to delay pursuing vehicles. Sometimes they ambushed vehicles. In contrast to his amnesty record that only mentions one incident in which people were killed, he describes the *modus operandi* for farm attacks:

If you attack a farm, if it happened [that] the owner of the farm...survived, we will kill him... If it happened for ourselves to see him, we will kill him. If he is lucky he will manage to run...but in most of the cases we usually go physical by killing that person or destroying that building.

APLA operatives were trained to fight to the death. If they were to be cornered, they would sacrifice their lives to protect the movement.

People [are] not allowed to surrender... If I am fighting [and] I only have one bullet, I can shoot myself, because I destroy the information that police want from me. APLA members...must know that you like or not, if you have only one bullet inside your pocket, then if that round is finished, then take that round and shoot yourself. The information is dead.

The operatives not only took pride in their dedication and willingness to sacrifice their lives for the cause, they are also proud of the result. ‘He [the soldier] is proud in such a way that he had seen what he had fought for now. He had seen that our country has been emancipated... Now he is proud, because what he was doing was right.’

Luvuyo was arrested in 1994. He was charged and convicted for the double murder of a father and his daughter in the Transkei.

I was given a mission to eliminate the deceased, as it was believed that he was threatening our intelligence network, since it was known that APLA was based in Transkei... He was pretending to be selling milk while on the other hand he was collecting or surveying bases of the Transkei. There was also information that he had harboured some SAP members in his house... That information was later verified... The farmers in that area had a fear that they might be attacked by APLA, as a result they harboured some policemen, some with the aim to counteract the APLA operatives. Some were just secured by the SAP... The daughter wasn't supposed to be killed... The father tried to resist and the daughter also tried to make some funny tricks and it happened that she was killed. She was shot dead. For that matter, I don't... *Ja*, I do sympathise with their families, but it was a struggle. It was a struggle and there were many young African daughters who were killed... When there is a war one should expect such things... It is difficult in the struggle not to have victims.

He was given a 25-year sentence. He had served five years of his sentence when he appeared before the Amnesty Committee of the TRC.

#### 'THE TRC IS THERE TO DISTORT OUR HISTORY'

At the time of the first interview (November 2000), Luvuyo was still waiting for the amnesty decision regarding the attack for which he was convicted. 'It is almost two years seven months now. I appeared in 1998 on 14 to 17 April, but up to now I am still looking for their decision.'

He is very critical of the current government and the TRC, which he perceives as biased.

It is the TRC who is delaying our decision and for that matter we don't feel that the TRC is there to rehabilitate... They are retaliating. For instance, last year, they had granted [amnesty to] 20 AWB members in the Northern Province. If I recall well, there were almost 30 ANC members who were granted amnesty for killing witches. That makes no sense, because you can't politicise or you cannot motivate where a witch was being killed. The TRC is delaying our case in order to frustrate us, so that we can lose confidence in our organisation, the PAC. Secondly, to the government: the government are the ones who initiated the TRC and...we are the ones who put the government on that position, but the government has deserted us. We are no longer political prisoners. We are treated as criminals... Nothing is said about our release. Yesterday they said they have no political prisoners, while this country was being liberated by ourselves. So we have lost confidence in the TRC and the ANC government... They are there to frustrate us.

The TRC is there to distort our history. The TRC is there to give a deformation of our actions as if we were barbaric... We were never barbaric. In all our actions we were guided by politics. We never fight because we like to fight. We fought because we were oppressed. In order to voice out we had to reply on the bullet. So our struggle was aimed at the Euro settler. Now the TRC thinks that by killing a Euro settler it appears that we have done something wrong. Magnus Malan was granted amnesty for killing people in the night vision and in their testimony they said that they got wrong information. How can a general who is leading an army... He should have verified the information before attacking the house... The TRC is so biased, especially when it comes to APLA... The TRC chooses the sides. But we tolerate to be crucified by the TRC. Some day we will be free.

Luvuyo describes the pain of not being able to experience the liberation they fought for. 'We don't have any idea of how freedom is. We are incarcerated during the time of the change in our country. Since then, we were never given a chance to go out and enjoy what we fought for.' He accuses the TRC and the government of gross unfairness.

We are experiencing a very painful life while our people or other politicians are giving their children some chances to study in the Model C,<sup>23</sup> while the people who fought for this country are still in prison. So we are experiencing a very painful, painful history... It is not a mistake. It is made deliberate by the TRC and the government.

His condemnation of the government extends even further:

Nothing has changed. The people are still nearly the same, instead they say now the oppression is worse than before. So nothing has changed. Things are still the same, except that there is a black man in the chair now... In fact, the people are now preferring the old regime, that it was better then.

Luvuyo's account provides a few glimpses of disappointment with the PAC. Because of his prolonged incarceration, his parents 'have lost confidence in the PAC'. Referring to what he perceives as preferential treatment given by the TRC to Trevor Tutu,<sup>24</sup> he says: 'Maybe...we [were] affiliated in the wrong organisation or in the wrong liberation army and we are also illiterate. That's why you have been taken advantage of.' However, he tries not to be bitter and has no remorse about his actions.

I feel nothing. I always said what I did in the past it was never wrong. I was doing the right thing. I should not blame myself for what I have done. So I don't see anything wrong, so I don't blame myself. That's my justification... I will always hold my head high, because I have done something for my nation.

He also does not see the need to apologise to the victims.

I never apologised to them because I believe I had never done anything wrong. According to the information or to the training I received, I never

done anything wrong, so I don't think I owe them any apology... If they would say that the perpetrators should apologise, then that would mean that the struggle was totally wrong, so that means we were just kidding by joining the armies. In fact, we were just unguided missiles.

#### 'SOME DAY WE WILL BE FREE'

Although life in prison is hard, they try to remain hopeful and fight bitterness.

Maybe it is because of our political background, we always advise each other that, 'Guys, you hold on and let's tolerate for the moment. Some day we will be free...' We are always together, we advise each other. When we get freedom, we want to integrate so that we can build up our lives afresh, so that we can rehabilitate ourselves. If you would be bitter you have no choice, that's the way you approach life, in a harsh way... Some day we will be happy and we will enjoy the freedom that we have fought for.

The three of them decided that if one were to be granted amnesty, the released person would raise money to appeal against their failed amnesty applications. On my fourth visit, I found only Luvuyo remaining. He had been in the prison hospital with tuberculosis for four weeks and on his return he discovered that his two comrades had been granted amnesty. They had been released the previous week. Luvuyo did not have the opportunity to say goodbye to them.

Since my comrades have been released, I have felt bad. In fact, I feel down, because there is no one in my organisation who has yet come to console me and my comrades have not come since they have been released just to console me, but I hope they will come to boost my morale.

While Luvuyo received amnesty for four farm attacks, he was denied amnesty for the Elliot killings. 'According to the Amnesty Committee...since the daughter was killed, they said she was a minor, so...the lawyer of the family said we shouldn't be qualified for the amnesty, because the daughter was a minor and according to the PAC, as he was quoting, that the PAC was not attacking civilians. I don't know where he gets that information.'

On 12 May 2002, having served seven years of his sentence, Luvuyo and 32 other prisoners received a presidential pardon and were released from prison.

#### A DECADE AFTER THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

Since his release from prison, Luvuyo has been waiting to be integrated into the SANDF. His two former inmates and fellow cadres were integrated into the SANDF approximately one year after being granted amnesty. As he was granted a presidential pardon and not amnesty, a number of 'technicalities have to be overcome between the Department of Correctional Services and the Ministry of Defence'.

Luvuyo currently lives with his parents and four siblings in New Brighton. Since they are all unemployed, they are dependent on his parents' pension money – approximately R1 400 a month. Luvuyo dreams of studying journalism and is exploring the availability of bursaries at various tertiary institutions. 'Besides waiting, I am also reading a lot. I am reading John Kehoe's book, *Mind Power*, he is a motivational author. It helps me to keep my mind focused and improve my English. Can you hear that my English has improved since I was released from prison?'

### Notes

- 1 Ashley Kriel, an MK commander, was killed by Captain Jeffrey Benzien, who was later granted amnesty for the murder.
- 2 The 17 people are Gerrit Erasmus, Willem Schoon, Wahl du Toit, Eugene de Kock, Paul Erasmus, Douw Willemsse, Charles Zeelie, Andries van Heerden, Izak Bosch, Jacob Kok, Larry Hanton, Nicolaas Vermeulen, Hendrik Kotze, George Hammond, Michael Bellingan, Frank McCarter and Petrus Snyders.
- 3 *Khulumani* is a Zulu word meaning 'speak out'.
- 4 Advice Offices were community-based paralegal services providing information and advice to develop and enhance access to justice in South Africa.
- 5 Section 29 of the Internal Security Act ('Detention of certain persons for interrogation') gave commissioned officers of the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel or above the power to arrest and detain people who were suspected of committing or intending to commit offences of sabotage, or were believed to be withholding any information regarding such offences, or who were believed to have failed to report the presence of such persons.
- 6 Caspirs: armed, ballistically protected troop carriers used by the SADF, which became symbols of political repression in the townships during the 1980s.
- 7 Rent offices were municipal offices located in all townships throughout the country. These offices were responsible for the collection of rent from community members who lived in council-owned property and for serving conviction orders on tenants who were in arrears. These properties were referred to as 'rental stock' and consisted of high-density flats and semi-detached dwellings.
- 8 The hearing was held on 7 August 1996 at the University of the Western Cape.
- 9 In late 2003 they published a volume of refugee stories called *Torn Apart*.
- 10 (General) Magnus Malan was Chief of the Defence Force during the late 1970s and Minister of Defence during the 1980s.
- 11 Ngwana-Mohube High School in Seleteng (the name given to a cluster of villages) was on the outskirts of his village and was used by a number of neighbouring villages.
- 12 In the interviews this date is (seemingly erroneously) given as 1976; however, his autobiography dates his leaving as 1978.
- 13 The SSRC had led the student uprisings in South Africa on June 16, 1976 (Mphahlele, 2002).

- 14 Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe was the founding president of the PAC. He broke away from the ANC to form the PAC in 1958.
- 15 Sibeko, a reformist, was the PAC's permanent observer to the United Nations. He was assassinated by six PAC members in 1979 (Mphahlele, 2002).
- 16 John Nyati Pokela (Poks) was imprisoned on Robben Island from 1967 to 1980.
- 17 The autobiography refers to his title as 'Assistant Chief Representative' (Mphahlele, 2002, p.105).
- 18 In 1837 the Voortrekker leader, Piet Retief, set out for Natal. Retief favoured a negotiated treaty with the Zulu king, Dingane, for land to settle in Natal. Dingane promised Retief a large piece of land on condition that he recovered stolen cattle from the Tlokwa chief, Sekonyela. Retief had told Dingane of their battle with Mzilikazi. In addition, Dingane's councillors thought Retief had treated Sekonyela with disrespect. Retief arrived at Dingane's kraal with 70 white trekkers and 30 servants, expecting the king to sign the treaty. Dingane persuaded Retief and his men to leave their arms outside the village, as a sign of respect. This turned out to be a trap and Retief's entire party was executed (Giliomee, 2003, pp.165–166).
- 19 In his autobiography, Letlapa states: 'There was a standing order in APLA that in the event of an enemy raid...we were to go on the rampage and kill whites and destroy their property. It had been hammered into us in meetings and outside, like religious indoctrination. Every cadre knew it, even those who had defected to the enemy' (Mphahlele, 2002, p.167).
- 20 Both the St James Church and the Heidelberg Tavern were situated in historically white areas, but were unusually multiracial for the time. According to the TRC records, the unit leader, the late Sichumiso Lester Nonxuba, selected St James Church as a target, as whites were using churches to oppress blacks. The selection of the Heidelberg Tavern was motivated by a belief that it was frequented by members of the security forces.
- 21 A *sjambok* (Afrikaans: *sambok*) is a long stiff horsewhip, originally made of rhinoceros hide. The word originated from Persian and Urdu and entered the Dutch language via Malay. The police often caned people during demonstrations with *sjamboks* made from moulded black plastic.
- 22 Shaka was a Zulu chief and warrior of great repute. He was born in the late 18th century and was assassinated by his half-brother, Dingane, in 1828. Historians have often referred to Shaka as the 'black Napoleon'.
- 23 Model C schools refer to former white schools that in 1992 chose to convert to a system whereby the state would pay teachers' salaries and the parents would pay all other expenses. These schools exercised their power to decide who could attend their schools and many opened their doors to pupils of other race groups who could afford to pay their fees. Since these schools could employ staff members additional to those paid for by the state, they could provide their pupils with the best tuition in the best education environment.
- 24 Trevor Tutu is the son of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the chairperson of the TRC. He was granted amnesty for making a bomb threat at East London airport.

## 8 NARRATIVES OF TOWNSHIP CONFLICTS

### 'WHAT WAS THE GAIN OF KILLING PEOPLE?'

#### THE STORY OF A FORMER MEMBER OF A SELF-PROTECTION UNIT

South Africa's brutal history extended to so-called 'black-on-black' violence, a euphemism for large-scale horizontal violence within black communities. Amidst speculation of 'third force' activities, the violence took various forms, one being the notorious clashes between the IFP's SPUs and the ANC's SDUs between 1990 and 1994. These battles, which resulted in the largest number of killings in any period in South African history,<sup>1</sup> mainly took place in the former KwaZulu homeland and Natal province and on the Witwatersrand. The community of Katlehong on the East Rand experienced the full brunt of the conflict. Katlehong, together with the communities of Vosloorus and Thokoza, formed the East Rand area of Kathorus, where large numbers of youth were organised into combat structures.

Two Katlehong residents, former members of the SPUs and the SDUs, recall this conflict. Neither of them gave testimony to the TRC. As mentioned before, the TRC did not manage adequately to penetrate this aspect of South Africa's conflict.

Inkatha claimed that 4 000 office-bearers had been killed by the ANC in what they termed 'serial killings'. During TRC investigations, it transpired that many of these incidents fell outside the April 1994 cut-off date. The TRC eventually investigated 289 alleged murders, but was unable to corroborate 136 of them. Regarding the remaining 153 incidents, it could not verify whether the deceased were indeed office-bearers. In a few cases, death certificates revealed that the deceased were children. The TRC did find that UDF and ANC members were responsible for at least 90 of the 289 incidents and that they killed at least 76 Inkatha office-bearers during the period from 1985 to 1994 (Boraine, 2000).

The TRC also found that Inkatha was responsible for gross human rights violations against people perceived to be supporters of the ANC, the UDF, the SACP and COSATU, as well as against their own supporters whose loyalty was questioned. It also found that the ANC contributed to the spiral of violence in the country through the creation and arming of the SDUs. It concluded that, in the absence of adequate command structures, SDU members often took the law into their own hands and committed gross violations of human rights.

**GROWING UP IN A GOOD FAMILY**

Vision<sup>2</sup> was born in 1968 and grew up in Kambule, a village near Vryheid in KwaZulu-Natal. He was the second youngest of four sons. His father, who hailed from Mozambique, came to South Africa at the age of 23 to flee the violence in that country and worked on a coal mine in Vryheid. His father, who used to play the violin, never really spoke of his family in Mozambique. Vision surmises that 'he maybe made killings or maybe conflict between the families...' Vision's mother was from Kambule. Her family was killed in 'tribal violence' when she was two, and she was raised by 'another family'.

Vision grew up in a stable family. He attended Kambule Mission School and Lamontville Secondary School. In April of his matric year, he was expelled for bringing his brother's gun to school. As the gun was a secret between him and his brother (who was living in Gauteng) he did not tell his parents that it caused his expulsion. They believed he was expelled due to fighting with other learners.

**MOVING TO THE EAST RAND**

Vision's parents were not politically active, but his older brother became involved in politics after he moved to Katlehong on the East Rand in 1985. He was a member of the IFP Youth Brigade in the hostels for migrant workers.<sup>3</sup>

In 1989, aged 21, Vision decided to join his older brother in Katlehong. He moved into the Mazinibo hostel with his brother. In 1990, he started working at Lishman Casting in Germiston. The hostel complex housed 'close to 10 000' Inkatha supporters, with the elders occupying the central hostel in the complex. At this stage, Vision was not particularly politically minded or active.

**FROM TAXI VIOLENCE TO POLITICAL VIOLENCE**

The violence reportedly started as a conflict between two taxi organisations and gradually fanned out into the political arena.

One of the taxi organisations was dominated...by mostly the Zulu people who were staying in the hostel, and the other one was dominated by the township people. When the fighting broke out, it involved mostly the school people, the learners, and from there it goes until it involves the Zulus and the Xhosas. It was then that it goes on to the ANC and the IFP violence. It started just like that.

Vision only became politically aware once he started experiencing the violence. It was only then that he 'realised that there was something called politics and all that'. He initially understood the conflict to be one of ethnic status.

On our side, at that time, it was taken as if the Xhosas are mostly intelligent. They are people and we, the Zulus, are taken as low-class people. It started

like that, or they think they are better than us, because maybe they are literate and we are illiterate.

### THE ROLE OF THE ELDERS

According to Vision, the elders used the younger people (between the ages of 18 and 25), as the latter were politically naïve – they did not have ‘any understanding of politics and all that stuff’.

We were pushed...the youngsters...maybe the youngsters are good in raiding and all that stuff. [The elders] were pushing us that we have to push hard to reach the standard of these people. Not in talking or negotiating, but...maybe using the hands or guns and all that stuff.

Pressure was exerted on young males to take part in the conflict, as their ethnic identity was less recognisable than that of the elders, whose language, dress and facial markings plainly identified them as Zulus. Younger people would therefore be used for spying, ‘because we youngsters were not recognised whether we were Zulu or Xhosa, but the elders they were easily recognised that this is a Zulu or this is a Xhosa.’ Although they were ‘pushed’ to participate in the conflict, some people fled back to KwaZulu-Natal to escape the violence.

Vision decided to stay. His participation was underpinned by his fantasy of being a hero.

From the start I was seeing myself as a hero. Seeing myself as a hero carrying a 9mm or R1 rifle and I was thinking I was that hero... I was fooling myself as a hero, carrying a gun, every time I was thinking, I was just a hero from nowhere.

They were intrepid, not only because they were young and saw themselves as heroes, but because both sides used *sangomas* (traditional African diviners with supernatural powers to protect, heal and remove curses) and *muti* (traditional African medicines, spells, herbs, animal parts, etc. used in therapeutic treatments and divination practices) to protect them during these attacks.

Vision describes the impetus to participate and the rationale behind specific attacks as seemingly arbitrary:

Sometimes [to fight] was not the matter. At other times it was the matter, or it was not the matter of like defending or whatever. Sometimes we were pushed and maybe because of the situation, and other times you’re just feeling that today you must go and attack...

In an apparent contradiction, he relates how the elders planned the attacks. ‘There were commandos and all that stuff and *Indunas* [Zulu headmen appointed by the chiefs], they used to plan it. We had some spies go and hide somewhere.’ Later he clarifies this contradiction, saying, ‘Sometimes we were given orders and other times... There are other things, like depending on this thing of who moved here...’

**SHIFTING THE TARGETS**

Initially the targets were primarily the younger males. Later the targets broadened to include women and children. This shift is presented as a reaction to the conduct of the enemy.

In our culture...we mostly don't kill children and women, but it goes on that our enemy used to kill our sisters and mothers and when we fight back, it was really terrible. We started that tendency of killing women and children.

As the conflict progressed to a purely political one, even Zulus who belonged to the ANC were killed. 'There were some Zulus who were living in the townships who were killed, knowing that they were from KwaZulu-Natal, but they were members of the ANC.' The prevailing perception was that everyone not living in the hostel was an ANC member or supporter and therefore a legitimate target.

Vision formed part of a group of five friends who mostly operated together. They were involved in many attacks. He recalls one attack in the Bikole section of Katlehong. 'I remember we broke in a house and [found] the father and mother and two kids... I think we were a group of five. We killed all the family there.' After they had shot the residents, they returned to the hostel and did not speak about the incident again. (One of their group was subsequently killed in a taxi ambush on the road between Germiston and Katlehong.)

The violence took on a life of its own. Attacks generated counter-attacks, seemingly without much reflection on the aim or purpose and without a sense of accountability. According to Vision, there were multiple attacks ('A lot. I can't tell a number') and countless killings. Again, it is not possible to quantify the number of deaths, as the groups attacked from different sides of the townships. 'One group is going to go that side and the other group [to the] other side. We don't know what that group did or how many people they have killed...'

**THE QUESTION OF ARMS**

Initially, Vision is rather vague on the source of their weapons.

At some times you don't know where the weapons come from and [on the] other hand we used to buy them. You used to donate R50...to...our leader and then he would go and buy the guns elsewhere. I don't know where. When they come back with the guns, they just distribute it to anybody who was willing to carry a gun.

He later concedes that some of the weapons were supplied by the Defence Force. 'I think mostly they were from...the Force, the Defence Force and the others were from our leaders.' He recalls one incident during which the Caspir came from the township and it comes straight to the hostel and guys started to shoot it and then they just come inside the hostel and just open the door

and call one of our *Indunas* and talked to him. Then I saw a number of them – about 30 to 35 of them. It was my first time to see the R5<sup>4</sup> and then to see this thing of someone supplying us with guns, because then on both sides of the township people would have R5s and we are having R5s.

### GETTING OUT

The fighting continued from 1990 to 1994. Vision withdrew from the conflict in November 1993. While he was visiting his family, ‘something came to him’. He realised he could no longer justify his participation in the conflict. He told his parents about his political involvement and they were ‘shamed and disappointed’.

What I was doing was very, very wrong and then I come back to my brother and I told him that I am no longer interested in doing these things and I better find myself a place. I am no longer willing to stay in the hostel. Then he said to me, ‘If you are willing to move, just move. It is your own choice...’ Where should I find a place? And I didn’t find any place and then I stayed there and he said, ‘Just stay back if you feel like. It is your choice. No one is going to force you from behind.’

His brother also disengaged from the conflict shortly afterwards and moved to Germiston. While attempts were made to recruit Vision into politics, he was not interested. He was also not prepared to join the SANDF.

I don’t see myself involved in politics. I remember in 1994 when the government were recruiting the SPU, I refused to be a member of the SADF because...I did tell myself that I don’t want to see myself carrying a gun for life.

Despite the dangers at the height of the conflict, Vision did not want to return to KwaZulu-Natal. He remained steadfast in this decision, even after he decided to withdraw.

My aim was maybe to stay here and work here and even today, I am not willing to go back and work in KwaZulu-Natal... It doesn’t feel good. That place is no good for me to work there... It is more like a village run by a chief. There is no development and structures and the decision are taken by the chief and the *Indunas*... I am having two children... For my children it is not good, because they will grow up knowing nothing. Other townships and other places are developed places. You don’t have electricity, no water supply, so I don’t think it is good for my family.

### LOOKING BACK

Despite having withdrawn from the conflict much earlier, Vision only started questioning his motives in 1996. At the time he was with a group of SDU members attending a rehabilitation programme in the Drakensberg. He then realised that

these people are no longer his enemy, 'they are just friends'. He believes they were being used as 'ladders' by the IFP politicians and the government.

Vision is unable to formulate the ultimate goals of the war: 'I really can't tell. I don't know'. According to him, the leaders were not clear about the goals either: 'Even if you ask those leaders, they can't tell'. The leaders on both sides have reportedly moved on and away: 'They are staying somewhere in different areas, some are in the council... They have all gone'.

In retrospect he seems ambivalent about that period in his life. While he believes what he did 'was really bad', he also views it as 'a good experience for the youth of South Africa'. He does not blame anyone for what happened.

It is me that took the decision. It is my decision and it is my life. I was supposed to sit back and think about taking my own way or at least try other means... Maybe to flee to somewhere and maybe seek help or whatsoever... You need to have some choices and hope.

He is still unclear about his own motivation to take part in the violence.

I am not too sure about it... It is like not taking the right decision. Just like seeing other people carrying big guns and seeing them as heroes and then you think, 'Okay, this one is a hero and even one day myself I will be a hero,' but you don't know. Maybe...I was not too sure...what that thing would lead us to. Just like not taking any decision and just doing things without thinking, one day this thing is going to hurt me or it is going to hurt someone.

He compares politics to football:

These things [are] like football: we don't just go to the field and play football without knowing the rules of the game. We don't just kick the ball. Firstly, we must know the rules and then play the game. You don't just play for the sake of maybe scoring a goal, but not knowing how.

In retrospect, he views them like players competing, but not knowing the rules or the results. He questions whether the violence led to any gains. 'But today what is my gain? Nothing. I am struggling. I was like thinking I was playing nicely... I am questioning myself what was the gain of killing people.' The experience 'hurt him' and remains indelibly in his thoughts. 'I think it is in my mind. I don't think it will go. It will just stay.'

#### FORGIVENESS AND RESPECT

Vision did not participate in the TRC process. According to him, the apology needed is a personal one ('from inside'), not a political one. He needed to apologise to the people he had hurt. He has subsequently spoken to survivors and their families in Katlehong, with mixed results.

He tries 'by all means to cope', attending workshops and sharing his life story with others. For him the key to the future lies in knowledge about our history and respect for others.

We need to know exactly where we come from and where we are going and we need to respect other people, who they are and where they are living and have a better understanding or make life go on in the right way. Like when someone is talking about something which we don't know, we need to find out what is it all about and not just go there without having any knowledge of what is it all about... Like in politics, you need to understand.

In order to move forward, we need to have respect for each other. In addition, politicians should be mindful of the effects of their rhetoric. He cautions them to 'mind their language'.

They must realise what it is that they are talking about. If they talk, they must understand that maybe that something is going to affect us who are in grassroots level. If they felt something, they must know that we are all living human beings and...if they have said something wrong, they must go in public with that or apologise for that.

#### KATLEHONG TODAY

The current relationship between the various groups, both the former enemies and the different groups within the hostel community, is less than amicable.

Sometimes it is bad. It is bad. Like that development in our side in the hostel.

It is very, very bad. It is poor. Maybe if they come up with something...

Mostly the youth, they are no longer willing to attend any meetings. Not at all. They don't have any trust in our leaders.

Vision does not condone this attitude and believes that the various groups 'need to talk about it'. He was helped by a psychologist from a Natal hospital and is willing 'to help other young people...to see the need of rehabilitating themselves and reconciling with other people and developing themselves'. Although some Katlehong youth are attending computer courses and trying to develop skills, others are just 'sitting on the corners'.

He is particularly concerned about the 'gap between the older people and the youth'.

If maybe we can try to...close that gap where we can talk to each other...because those gaps are mostly causing a lot of differences and lead to crime in Katlehong, where older people are afraid of us. They don't have any trust for us and we don't respect them, because most of us still having that pain or that of being heroes. And some of us are still having those guns and we have to sit together and talk about this thing, you know, but some of our community they are trying their best. Mostly of our youth who are willing to change, they are attending workshops and all that stuff.

He expresses the wish that the government could help them run such workshops and instill a sense of social and personal responsibility in the youth.

#### **A DECADE AFTER THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS**

Vision still stays in the hostel with his 28-year-old wife, the mother of his 11-year-old son. His son and his 17-year-old daughter from a previous relationship are living with his mother.

He is currently unemployed. Before 2000, he did an internship with the National Peace Accord. Part of their work involved taking people on rehabilitative hiking trips into the Drakensberg. In 2000, he and a few friends started a programme to help the Katlehong youth, particularly the SPU and SDU members. They were funded by various organisations and aimed at encouraging self-development and working towards reconciliation. The programme ended in 2004 due to 'misunderstanding in terms of how to run [the] programme'.

At the time of the interview, Vision's two older twin brothers had both died. One died in a car accident in 2000 and the other, the secretary of the local IFP, was shot in Germiston in October 2002.

**'NO REWARDS'**

## THE STORY OF A FORMER MEMBER OF A SELF-DEFENCE UNIT

## GROWING UP IN THE 'DARKER STREETS'

Jerry was born in Tembisa in 1972 and has been living in Katlehong for 28 years. He is the third eldest of six children. The household consisted of 18 people, mostly paternal relatives. His family was very poor and he grew up in the 'darker streets' of Katlehong, where there was a lot of fighting among the children and the youngsters.

His father was a preacher in the Zionist Church.<sup>5</sup> He was a harsh disciplinarian and Jerry feared him.

Even if you make an honest mistake, he will beat you to hell. He would beat you really to hell, so he was that person that you would never mess with. You would never, never mess with my father. Like if he wants you to clean the home, if you didn't do that, then you know that you would be *sjambokked*. I remember even one day when I started smoking – I think around 1986, '87 – he heard that I was smoking, and wow, he beat me as never before... So he was the strictest person. He did not want us maybe to go [out] after 6pm. You should be at home before six and then if you arrive later, then you would be beaten up.

According to Jerry he was 'not feared' until the age of seven, when he became aggressive. He attributes his behaviour to their poverty and his strict father.

When I was with other boys, I have to ensure that I am strong... When I am thinking about kids now, I am thinking that in my home...maybe a situation like growing [up] with your parents who are poor and then...my father was very strict and I think that might be a cause of me being strict to the outside...that was the reason why I was so aggressive maybe in the outside world.

He describes his aggressive, competitive nature:

I was very aggressive in a way that even if we play soccer, my team cannot be beaten. It can't be beaten; even if you can score a clear goal, I will say, 'No, that is not a goal' and I won't give you money until I am satisfied that okay, now I have been robbing you for quite some time and then I give to you... So I was being feared. I was feared in a way that even someone if he has done something at his home or place, or maybe he has stolen a radio or something, then that person, if they ask him at his home, he will point to me. He will say, 'Jerry asked me to steal that thing,' even if I didn't do that. So that was how I was bad in some way. I engaged myself in many things, in many activities.

## GETTING AN EDUCATION

Although everyone at home was unemployed and the family was struggling, his parents wanted their kids to be educated. His father was illiterate and wanted a different life for his children. His mother worked hard to keep them at school. 'She used to work sometimes, maybe in the shops, earning R20 or R25 so that we can go to school.' Against this background, Jerry started school in 1979.

Jerry recalls the violence starting in the schools in 1984. The students protested against the policy that learners over 18 should not be allowed in schools.

There was this violence by students...mostly by students, whereby they were fighting for the age limit in our schools. It was in [the] 1980s, so that's where I started to be involved, even if I was not involved physically, but emotionally, because seeing people toyi-toying around the street, burning cars, burning people and things like that... You know, you get involved mentally. So that's where I noticed things.

Around this time his initial enjoyment of school started waning. He used the protest climate to manipulate the situation.

When I want like maybe school to come...out, then I would throw some stones into the classes of the lower grades, like the Sub As. So I know when I throw some stones into the windows or even on top of the roof, they will run out and all of us around the school will come out and then go to our places, you know. That's how we were noticed.

In 1987 when Jerry started secondary school, he started 'smoking and doing all those bad things...walking with negative...people who wanted to steal and doing all those things. I was in bad company'. This was partly a rebellion against his strict upbringing. 'The behaviour of my father pushed me to do negative things outside.'

During his standard eight year, the violence mutated into taxi violence and learners became vulnerable.

Then in 1990, I think it was on 6 March 1990, when there was taxi violence around our area... It was taxi violence, between the hostel dwellers and the community members... There was an organisation meant for the hostel dwellers and then there was this taxi organisation for the community... There was these fights between them, so they even came to schools beating young people up. I can recall one time when I saw one taxi driver, he beat a kid from pre-school with an iron bar. She died – that child died because of that. So it was a very bad experience, very bad experience and then it was not easy for us now to go back to taxis, because there was that violence. And by that time, we were supposed to protect ourselves now as community members from the people who are from the hostel.

Since his school was near the hostel complex, it was too dangerous to go to school, as they feared they could be killed at any time. Consequently, Jerry and his siblings quit school.

### TAXI VIOLENCE AND CONSUMER BOYCOTTS

The violence ostensibly started as taxi violence and grew into political violence when President De Klerk announced the release of all political prisoners on 2 February 1990.

The opposition parties [predominantly Zulu Inkatha Freedom Party members] were against the activities led by these political prisoners, because most of these political prisoners were ANC members... So the opposition parties were against their activities such as boycotting, rent boycotting, not going to work, not buying in a white-owned shops<sup>6</sup>... Then the people from hostel they started going to work by force, whereas the other people they were boycotting and not going to work. They were having some marches against those who are going to work... I remember even in the train some people from the community used to tell the people in the train, beating them with stones and all those things...and asking them why are they attending work.

Vehicles from white-owned shops ('the meat cars, the milk cars, the maize meal cars') entering the township were burned. People defying the consumer boycott were forced to eat or drink the products they had bought at 'forbidden' shops.

Like if we were boycotting, we say people should not go to the town and buy. If you come back and...carry like a Checkers<sup>7</sup> [bag] or something like that and if there a soap in there, or washing powder or Jik [a brand name for household bleach] or whatever, then it will be poured on you or sometimes you will drink it and be beaten up. So those were the most things that we were doing during those days.

The violence soon escalated.

That caused the hostel dwellers to attack...members of the community, maybe late at night and then there was a blood fight. During that time...I saw an interview...with...the opposition party leader...[in which] he mentioned it publicly that people like his own party people should not be doomed...they should go to work. If someone fights them, they should fight back. So that thing...caused a major problem. He was a youth leader, that person. I think those are things that contributed a lot in this violence.

### RECRUITMENT INTO THE SDUs

For Jerry, this time was 'a very bad experience'. When they were attacked by the hostel dwellers, they had to run away to other neighbourhoods like Tembisa. According to him, the hostel dwellers did not discriminate in terms of their targets, attacking even children and elderly people. This led to the formation of the ANC-affiliated SDUs. Jerry, who was 17 at the time, attended local meetings and was recruited by a friend.

We decided that we should do something about [the attacks] and that is when we decided to form the SDU – Self-Defence Units. I attended meetings and I

was not that much interested in those things... However, my friend he showed me how important it is to protect ourselves... So we were called in a meeting and then we would discuss how we can protect ourselves. My friend...said, 'You must be there. Let us fight. Let us fight for our community.' We started now to get money from some elderly people in our community in order to buy weapons and all that self-defence things.

They started mobilising other youth and Jerry was elected as a platoon commander. In addition to fighting for his community, his involvement was fuelled by his wish to vote and see the ANC in power.

I wanted to see ANC winning the elections, actually. To see the ANC being in power, you know. So those were the things that were motivating me and other people... We noticed that since the release of the Nelson Mandela, other parties did not want... actually they noticed that the ANC were ruled because the majority of the people are the followers of it. So they wanted now to fight against us and then diminish the numbers of people who maybe would be voting. So, for us, we wanted the ANC to succeed and ANC to win. We wanted to vote for the first time.

Jerry feels their fight was justified in terms of the opposition the ANC faced at the CODESA negotiations. Not only was the NP against them ('I won't mention De Klerk, but I will mention P.W. Botha'), but Mangosuthu Buthelezi<sup>8</sup> was 'a perpetrator' who did not want released political prisoners to be in power. In addition 'the white ruling party...were also working together with the IFP to move the ANC'. For Jerry, an ANC victory was not negotiable, therefore these opponents had to be confronted.

Jerry's platoon consisted of about 36 people from zone 5 in Katlehong, ranging in age from 13 to 36. He believes the leaders exploited the youth to some extent.

They will use these words that they are still using now...that the young people are the future of this world. The young people are brave, so those words...are what they encouraged young people with, because by using those words then you would be encouraged, 'Yes, I am brave, I will be the future leader, then let me fight.' So they [the leaders] were not fighting...but they were perpetrating. They wanted us to fight to do that. Maybe they were busy with information... So they were not involved... They would tell us that, 'Yes, you are doing good.'

### CONDUCTING ATTACKS

'The activities of the platoon was mostly to conduct attack.'

The hostel dwellers were in [the hostels] and they were attacking, so we wanted to demolish the hostels, so that there would be no one in the hostels who would be attacking the community. That was the main aim. We wanted to break it down... One time...we chucked gas bottles through the hostel and

then we put them in...the hostel and we opened them up and we put petrol to the outside and then light and then it will like a bomb, explode.

Although the plan was not entirely successful ('we saw members from the hostel carrying those bottles out'), they did manage to burn down a part of the hostel. 'Then they started to move from that side. So in two days' time there were no people on that side, so we used now to get in to that hostel...and attack other sections.'

The attacks were brutal and up to 25 people could die in an attack. Jerry recalls one such attack:

I also remember when they attacked us in a mob. They came in a mob and that was when we opened fire. That is why I say until today I don't know how many people I killed. They were attacking. As they were approaching us, we deployed our platoon and as they were nearby, we started to shoot at them. We shoot and shoot at them and they were caught.

The attacks mostly involved shooting, but sometimes people were stabbed. When they caught someone from the IFP, 'that person...will be burned by tyre'

He will be stabbed, stoned and then burned... Just in that area, I think we had about eight or nine people who were stoned, stabbed and burned. You know he will be stoned, stabbed, shot and burned... So it was very, very terrible, because sometimes I think we killed some other people just because they were speaking Zulu and assuming that they were IFP. As long as we don't know that person from our area, then that person must be an IFP member.

In addition to attacking the hostels and Inkatha members, the SDUs protected neighbourhood buildings, shops and their family homes from being burned down. This enabled their parents and families to continue living in their homes.

#### NO FATALITIES

Although Jerry was hurt, his platoon suffered no fatalities during the height of the conflict.

Fortunately...not even a single member was killed during those times, because I think we were brave enough to sense things. Like I will go and check first if this is the right way to do things or this is the right time to do things. We were doing our attacks during daylight so that you can see anything. So we were lucky enough not to be killed. So we will get some injuries... Like myself...I was trapped: I was barricading the street and it was late, about 6pm, then there was this car... There were police inside and I still can't assure you who they were, because...they were like police and they asked me to move one stone so that they can pass. So I was pointing at them like... I was asking them to come out and remove that thing, but no, they were like pleading and begging, please can you do that. I was thinking that there was something wrong. While I was approaching them, they came out with guns... And that's when they started to

beat me with these guns and I still have some marks. They beat me with guns and then they took me with the rope to the hostel. Not far from the hostel, that's where they started kicking me and beating me up, so I played a trick. Sometimes when the one who was trying to beat me up, I would go down and then he would hit the next person, so it was just like that. It was fun and at the same time I was scared, but...maybe in five or ten minutes then I was not scared and I was free and I was like feeling like I am fooling with them around now... I would point at something like, 'Look at those people' and when they were looking at those people, then I would run away... I escaped like that and they decided to follow me, but there were some fences and even today I don't know how I jumped those fences...but I escaped like that.

Although they escaped death during the political conflict, two of his platoon members did die in a shebeen gunfight.

#### THE ROLE OF THE STATE

The hostel dwellers were assisted by the police.

In most cases when there were fights...the IFP will be assisted by the police and the police force, I can say. They were assisted by them and that's where I considered that it was these people who were working together to fight against [us].

The Defence Force was also involved.

They will come and then get in to the hostel dwellers...and then assisting them in shooting us and then they will not run away. We will only run away because we see the Defence Force... Because we were nearby the hostel, we will see these Caspirs going to hostel and...maybe in ten minutes when they are in the hostel, then there will be that fights and then you will hear even from the sound of the gun that this is R1s. Most of the IFP members, they were using R1s – or the R1s were used by police.

#### THE COMPLICATED QUESTION OF ARMS

According to Jerry, the SDUs only used AK47s or Uzis. They collected money from community members to buy arms.

So as a community we contributed something, because we need to go house to house asking for money to buy the weapons and the community would give us... Like the elder members of the community will give us that money and then we get some people who have the connections to go and buy some.

They also obtained AK47s and shotguns from the hostels, from ANC people who infiltrated the hostels, from people who were double agents and from others who used it as a moneymaking opportunity.

You see how these things [are] complicated. Some of the arms we got them from the hostel... Sometimes not the hostel nearby, but the other hostel in Thokoza... There were also those who were underground, who were living in the hostel and they can't move from the hostel because they are ANC. There were those as well who can change from anything... There were those who were [carrying] two cards – like carrying an ANC card and an IFP card... [Then there were] those who are living in the hostel, they are making business. It was their business to sell arms, so if you come and buy them, I wonder why they were not aware that these arms will also attack them.

Although the violence continued until shortly before the 1994 elections, it flared up in cycles.

In 1990 it started and then it stopped and then around September it started again and stopped in 1990. And then also in 1991 it also started... It didn't last long sometimes. It will start for maybe three months and then it stopped and then it started again. But in 1993 to 1994, before the elections, there was still fighting... We feared that we will go to those voting stations and those polling stations and then get killed or whatever or attacked.

During the quieter times, Jerry and his comrades turned to robbery.

[When] there were no fights and there was no ways that you could get money, so we decided to steal... You can say gang, but not gang in that manner. So we started to rob and I robbed people and some of them I know them, you know. So that's where things went wrong, because most of us were drinking alcohol and all those things, so we will do some of the things unnoticed.

### BACK TO SCHOOL

In 1994, the violence ceased and Jerry decided to go back to school.

I started to say hey, these are senseless killing, because...it was mostly black-on-black who were fighting each other. So I looked at it and I say, 'Hey, this is useless, you know.' So I tried to combine with other guys who wanted to go back to school to create a positive attitude now. And then held at least peace talks and things like that.

Jerry re-entered Standard 8. Despite not having attended school for five years, he managed to do very well.

When I went there in 1995, I obtained position one in June and December, and in Standard 9, I attained position one in June and December. That was amazing for me, you know, and then in Standard 10 in June, I obtained position three and then in December, it was school leaving and I passed my matric. I was so determined. I have that determination and was committed.

He then started to mobilise other young people to return to school. Sometimes the end justified the means.

I even did some wrong things in order for others to go to school... I will forge my report and give it to other persons so that they can go to school. I am happy that one of the persons, now he is in Technikon and he is so successful and he was helped by that report of mine. He was successful, he is very, very successful and I am happy about that guy.

Apart from his youngest sister, who was in Standard 8 at the time of writing, he is the only one in his family who has completed Standard 10.

I am the only person who finished matric at home. So they now perceive me as a role model even although there are the others, so they started depending on me in many things, because they saw I have this positive attitude of learning and I try to know everything. I engaged myself in everything that I can, so for that they started to perceive me as a positive person and a good person who can help them.

#### THE TRC, FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Jerry never told his story to the TRC. In his view, the TRC was not interested in their area.

We hear of the TRC here around Cape Town and in other areas, but in Katlehong particularly I didn't hear of it and I was worried again. What are we going to do now, because you want maybe to go and partake in the TRC just to see what is happening, so it was not really interested in our area.

Even if he were approached at the time, he is not sure he would have participated in the process.

I was also afraid to go to the TRC. I didn't see it as the right channel to go and speak about what happened... I had no information of what are the police [going to] think about it. I did not know anything [about] politics, but what I know is that you would be telling a story. At the end of the day maybe...you could also be jailed for that things. Or maybe if you confess in front of many people, some other people will attack you afterwards. So those were the things that made us afraid or made me afraid.

After having received counselling, Jerry realised he had to change and that he had wronged many people. He then went to ask forgiveness from the people in his community.

#### NO REWARDS

Looking back on his life thus far, Jerry feels he fought for a particular cause and their goals were achieved. Most of the hostel dwellers were driven out and the remaining ones stayed in the hostel and did not 'come nearby the communities' or the shops. In addition, the ANC won the elections and came to power. However,

Jerry feels he has spent half his life ‘mostly in negative things’ and that he did not receive any reward for it.

I have done all that because of my organisation...but now there were no rewards... I have done that and there were no rewards. Yes, I fight for my community and in a way I don’t want those rewards, but...the people who wanted us to do that at that time, they were supposed to show concern, not only to ask us to go to the military or to the police forces, but by doing other things. They were many other things that they can do, but they didn’t show... that concern of how can we help these people who were involved in the violence.

Not only were there no rewards at the time, but he feels the government is not supporting people like himself who are ‘involved in rebuilding or restoring hope to people’ in their communities.

Since they are in power, they’re now looking at their own matters now. They are focusing on themselves now, forgetting about other people who put them there in power. I am talking mostly about those who are in locally, because the government is trying to allocate to those who are in local. But those who are in local, they are not that much effective. So looking back at what I have done, I think I have done a lot. I have done a lot for my community. So now I think it is high time whereby the government realises that our work (because I don’t want to say my work, because I am working with other people, so I say our work)... so they have to support our work.

According to Jerry, most of the young people who fought in the ‘resistance’ movements left school and some of them ‘never enjoyed their childhood, because they carried guns at the early age’.

During the integration the government didn’t focus on any other good deeds that they can do, but they only focused on taking young people to be police officers, to be all soldiers because they were involved in violence... They were supposed to have like the moral regeneration workshops, seeing peer counsellors, because we were involved in violence and we were traumatised, so also to heal someone that is traumatised – that was also a critical alternative. So looking into the future, I think...the government should support the initiatives that...are taken by the community members... We as young people or the people in this community, we don’t want to look at the people in positions to do things for us, but we need to do things and then they have to support those things.

Jerry has a particular view on perpetrators and victims. According to him, the leaders were the perpetrators. ‘A perpetrator is the person who is driving everything...the person...pushing me to fight, so he will gain. Not the person who is doing it, unless it is defined in other way.’ He also feels that the leaders used them in the conflict; they were ‘remote controlled’ and eventually they were the victims. ‘At the end of the day you are going to account for yourself and then that person will be nowhere.’

**OPENING DOORS BY TALKING**

In 1998, Jerry attended an Outward Bound course in Cape Town. It involved climbing mountains, canoeing, abseiling and general problem-solving, both as teams and on their own. The course taught him how to face challenges and make choices and he feels it changed his life. He planned to find a job on his return to better his family's financial position.

I planned all this things and then I actually did it. I actually wanted to go back to school again to do shadow education [private tutoring and exam preparation classes] and I felt like I wanted to study psychology or public relations, because I know that I was good in relating to people. So I went back... When I came back there, then I applied for a job in [the] National Peace Accord and that is where I work... They were training me in office skills and after that, I started to go to the hiking. We would be hiking in the mountains and healing other people now. It was our attempt to heal other people, mostly those who were involved in violence in Katlehong.

Jerry does not experience any animosity in his community. People were scared of him before the violence started, and some still are. In addition, people have noticed that he is a changed person and they now view him as a role model. He says he is unable to fight now; he 'can only talk'.

I can only talk, because I know that there are some bad consequences of violence; so if you like fighting, then you end up nowhere, but if you want to talk we will see that you are growing now.

He realises that the voice is stronger than the bullet:

I have noticed that I can be proud of being a fighter, but I will get nowhere... Now that I use my mouth as a tool to be successful and then I will be. I have noticed that I can open each and every door not by force or by violence, but by talking only. So I think also I am a grown-up now. I think that I have matured, so I see life in a different way, that if I can approach it by mind and not by fighting, then I think I will be successful.

**A DECADE AFTER THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS**

Jerry was involved with the Peace Accord and their counselling programmes until 2001. He has subsequently used that experience in community projects, particularly helping township youths 'doing some activities that will keep [them] out of negative aspects of life'. His projects include people who were not directly involved in the fighting, 'because if your parent was killed during violence, then there is something that is happening to a child; so we have to help these children now to cope with the situation'.

In addition to these projects, he is also involved in an AIDS project and in 'art and cultural things'. He tries to use poetry, music, drumming and dancing to capture 'things that happened in the past and convey them to people'.

Jerry still lives with his parents, both pensioners, and the household still consists of 18 people. He has four children, two of them living with him and their mother. He supports the other two, both from different mothers.

### FORMER ENEMIES FORGING PEACE

Ten years after the violence that tore through the community of Katlehong, two former enemies have joined hands in peace. They work alongside each other to encourage youth in Katlehong to realise their dreams. Having met each other as former enemies six years ago, they share the story of their journey across the political divide.

*Vision:* We met each other through our work. After the violence, actually, we wanted to reconcile and we wanted to bring about peace in our area. We went to work for the National Peace Accord.

*Question:* Where did you actually meet for the first time?

*Jerry:* It was in the mountain. We went to the mountains near Durban for a healing symposium. That is where we met. It was difficult for us to relate, because we are from different parties and living here in Katlehong, it's not easy to see your former enemies. So it was our time for a healing and we had to assist each other to jump the river, to cross the river. It was an experience. It was very difficult.

*Vision:* It was very difficult, for me it was very, very difficult to be with my former enemy and helping each other. It was sort of... I don't know... A lifetime experience.

They were very guarded during their initial meeting.

*Vision:* For me it was very difficult. For the first two or three days... Oh, it was very difficult to be with these guys.

*Jerry:* It was difficult even to relate, because you were worried that hey, I will say this word and maybe it is not the right word to say to that person, your former enemy. So it was difficult in that way. You have to check your words; that if I talk that way, how will it be to that second person.

*Vision:* Sometimes you think he may be a member of that family, a family you attacked.

They share the quandaries and challenges they experienced as they confronted their mutual suspicions. After the first three days, the discomfort was slowly replaced by the possibility of seeing past the enemy, seeing another human being.

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» *Jerry:* You must believe that before going there you were thinking that how is it going to be like. But let me go there, because I want to see this experience. For the first time meeting with my former enemies on the open seas. You don't know where this person will push you down to the river or down to the sea, so it was. You were afraid, but at the same time you want to experience that things, you know.

*Vision:* It was through sharing that time with someone that I developed a trust. We became friends. More than a friend. Maybe it is like I developed a friendship with Jerry more than the guys I came with. After camp, we started visiting each other.

They began to identify their similarities, the things they shared, their common interests, their humanity.

*Jerry:* And our girlfriends started to know each other. 'Hey, when is Jerry visiting?' 'When is Vision visiting?' Hey, it is quite interesting – really, really quite interesting, because I take it to be a very effective way of healing people...of reconciling [rather] than going one on one with the counsellor. So this was a group counselling... As he said, we are afraid of each other but at a later stage we used to cook together and sometimes maybe at night-time and it is his turn to cook for other people and we would cook for other people and we share a bed, we share everything. Then even if we go to the hiking, the healing process took place when we have to climb those mountains and pass those rivers. That's when we as a group had to rely on each other.

Today Jerry and Vision struggle to imagine that once they feared each other.

*Jerry:* Now we are family. So now it is our turn to make things work, so that is why we are busy with this community development. We want to develop many things that could not be developed through all those things. We want to develop also tourism and promote the experience of hiking that we had. So you know, if we come with something and get fun out of that, I think and believe that we will be successful. So other people see us really as good leaders, positive leaders doing something.

They both have a message for the many South Africans who struggle to cross the divide of conflict, past or present.

*Jerry:* Let bygones be bygones. Forget about the past and start thinking about the future, think of yourself and of other people.

*Vision:* You have first start to respect yourself before you can be respected in the community. So my message is to be positive about life and forget about everything that would damage progress. I am saying let us rebuild our communities. We destroyed it, so let us rebuild it.

*Jerry:* It is a question of working together. That is why we are calling ourselves together as one, because we believe that together we can restore hope and dignity.

**Notes**

- 1 Between September 1984 and December 1993, 18 997 people died. Only 600 of these were white (Giliomee, 2003).
- 2 For reasons of confidentiality, only first names are used.
- 3 In South Africa, the first real wave of labour migration occurred following the discovery of gold and diamonds. Males from all over the country travelled to the Witwatersrand to work on the mines. They were housed in hostels, spartan military-style barracks with communal kitchens and bathrooms, usually situated on the outskirts of the urban areas. Since migrant workers were often prepared to work for less than their urban counterparts, it contributed to an urban/rural tension, which still exists. The nature of the work contracts and the structure of the hostels contributed to the lack of a sense of ownership or permanence.
- 4 R5 assault rifles are improved developments of the Soviet AK47 rifle.
- 5 The Zionist Church was founded in 1903 by a Dutch Reformed missionary who had become committed to faith healing. Distinguished by their white robes, Zionists have a commitment to faith healing and the Pentecostalist gift of speaking in tongues. Zionism draws from traditional African culture and is a distinctly South African form of Protestant Christianity. Its largest following is among the Zulu and Swazi people.
- 6 The UDF led a series of acts of defiance, such as rent boycotts, labour strikes and school stay-aways. White-owned businesses were boycotted to sensitise white citizens to the suffering of black people. The underlying message was that businesses couldn't operate against a backdrop of societal chaos and instability.
- 7 Checkers is a major supermarket chain.
- 8 Buthelezi was (and at the time of writing, still remains) the leader of the IFP and as such was their chief negotiator at CODESA.

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## 9 ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION

Any form of analysis of stories or narratives is primarily concerned with interpretation of meaning. A story gives us a particular version of events. Seen through the lens of social constructionism, the narrative as a form of expression works not only as a representational device, but also as a way of constituting reality (Bruner, 1991). In depicting a version of events and personae, it organises human experiences and memories of the interaction in such a way as to shape and constitute reality.

### FEATURES OF NARRATIVES

Narratives as a form of expression have various features. They are organised in terms of diachronicity, that is, as an account of events over time. But this is in terms of human, not abstract or clock time. There are conventions for expression of sequences. Narratives involve plots (what happened), characters (who did what) and modes of telling (how it is told and why it is worth telling). The notion of 'genre' refers to ways of telling; there are recognisable types of narratives such as tragedy, farce, travel saga, romance and comedy. Stories make reference to norms, to notions of what may be normative (or not) in a particular culture, a certain group or in different historical epochs. Stories pivot on breaches of norms, for example 'trouble' is an engine of drama (Bruner, 1991). The plots of stories involve both agency and circumstances. For instance, there are happenings that befall people ('I was recruited almost by accident'; 'I was transferred to that posting'), but some measure of agency is always present – people give reasons for their actions. When accused of being bad, wrong or incompetent, people invariably give either excuses (accidents, lack of proper information, biological drives, pressure by others) or justifications – as in higher loyalties, only following orders, victims' deservingness, denial of serious injury (Lyman & Scott, 1970).

Narratives may involve 'scripts', that is, prescriptions for culturally appropriate conventional actions, but usually entail breaches and deviations from scripts. Narrative accounts involve others in the form of an audience; they are shaped in part by the nature of the audience and often through negotiating with the listener. A final 'version' of reality is predominantly a negotiated version; that is, other tales could be told to another audience. A story is only one of a potential array of versions that could be told. Finally, as Bruner (1991) suggests, narratives may accrue,

be cobbled together with other stories to form a 'history', a particular cultural form or a 'tradition'. Particular institutions may invent 'traditions' in the form of relatively standardised versions which account for their own and others' actions. Stories may adhere together and, over time, constitute 'cultures', such as the culture or tradition of the police, of gangsters or of groups of males. Accumulated stories in this form take on a privileged status and become 'exterior', 'out there' and constraining. There are cultural traditions in storytelling, which may act to silence and constrain other, alternative versions. Giving attention to silences is an important part of the analysis of stories. The task of narrative analysis is to 'show in detail how narrative organises the structure of human experience' (Bruner, 1991, p.20).

There are other ways to go about the general task of interpretation of meaning. There is no need to go into the details here. The notion of 'discourse analysis', which comes in a variety of different forms, pays particular attention to the question of discursive functions, that is, it asks what discourses do, what they achieve (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wood & Kroger, 2000). It is not merely the fact that there are different versions; it is also a question of asking what a particular version does, for instance, blaming others or exonerating ourselves. In this regard, stories serve ideological purposes; they are implicated in power relations. Stories also support, bolster or shore up (or undermine) particular institutions that are involved in power relations (Parker, 1992). Analysis of discourses, therefore, is directed towards the unfreezing of taken-for-granted versions of reality and showing how they contribute to, or challenge, particular power relations. Another approach is that of rhetorical analysis (Billig, 1996; Shotter, 1993). This provides a focus on two interrelated strands of stories: (i) examination of arguments – for one position and against another competing version, and (ii) the detailed devices and techniques in language, the ways of saying things, that go to constitute the particular version of reality. Common to all of these analytic devices is a focus on the unravelling of language to see how it works to create, establish and maintain certain kinds of 'realities'. The aim is not to assess narratives in terms of truth or falsity, but to examine the constructions of various forms of subjectivity, both selves and others, and to unravel the purposes they serve.

## CONTEXTS OF NARRATIVES

We should make brief mention of the context of these narratives. They were assembled in the years between 2000 and 2004. Although a good deal of the work of the TRC was done, amnesty hearings were still under way, closing only in mid-2001, while the final report of the Amnesty Committee appeared in March 2003. Clearly, those who were submitting applications for amnesty would already have done so (closing date of 30 September 1997), but the amnesty process was still under way for most of our period of investigation. Furthermore, those in a potential position of responsibility for violence, if not granted amnesty, could still face criminal

and/or civil prosecution. Therefore neither events nor implicated persons were entirely in the past. The notion of a 'full disclosure' still posed potential threats. However, the historical conjuncture was such that the apartheid era had generally been put in the past and thoroughly discredited; there appeared to be few who would readily admit to having been staunch supporters of the apartheid system. Furthermore, the general pattern of past violence had been relatively well charted; the first five volumes of the TRC were already in the public domain. So the historical context of these narratives constituted something of a mixed situation. Some aspects were firmly in the past, in memory, while other aspects occurred in the context of a still uncertain present.

Biographies intersect with historical events in different ways. That is the case with these narratives. Ages of participants differed. They entered the arena, as it were, in different periods: Johan from the 1950s, Chris in the 1960s, 'Ann' in the early 1970s, Letlapa and Shirley mainly during the 1980s. All of the others were younger and 'collided' with historical events during the late 1980s and into the 1990s. Nevertheless, most of the events covered in these narratives occurred in the historical period of the 1980s to the mid-1990s, a period when violence escalated.

In the analysis which follows, we draw predominantly on the narratives of protagonists as presented in Chapters 5 to 8. However, we intermittently draw on other published accounts from protagonists or from the complete transcripts or from accounts from people who wished to remain anonymous.

## GENERAL OUTLINE OF NARRATIVES

Perhaps the most obvious and striking aspect of these stories is their very ordinariness. All the protagonists convey the impression of quite reasonable and indeed pleasant and engaging people, who generally offer reasoned and sensible accounts of their involvement. With some exceptions, there is relatively little direct mention of violence. In some cases, the stories almost read like travel sagas with pleasant sojourns on the way: Johan 'enjoyed training immensely', enjoyed policing in Johannesburg, had an interesting time in the Free State and 'three wonderful years' in then South West Africa. John 'liked the idea of being in the bush' and 'liked being on the border'. Some tales, such as that of 'Ann', are mainly concerned with everyday events like hassles at work. The majority of stories, despite some bumps along the way, end relatively satisfactorily. It is only one tale that could be taken as a 'tragedy': that of John. Again, with the exception of John later in his story, there are few or no hints of psychological illness. Childhoods and upbringing, depicted quite thinly, in the main appear as unexceptionable, apart from Jerry, whose violent, 'strict' father was the 'reason why I was so aggressive maybe in the outside world'. Perhaps it could be argued that Letlapa showed signs of youthful rebelliousness – 'only mad people...defied instructions of *sangomas* and their ancestors' – but

rebellion in youth is not altogether untoward. In terms of the general outline of stories, the material here does not stray much from the 'ordinary people' thesis. We comment on issues of entitlement later.

There are, however, lines of demarcation across narratives. They divide primarily on lines of power, gender and racialisation. Given the significance of racialised divides, it is not too surprising to find differences in narratives. Interviews with white respondents all indicate a relatively normal schooling process and progression towards some form of further training and education, so enabling career prospects. Among black respondents, there are hints of poverty, illiteracy, poor and disrupted schooling, everyday experiences of violence and little in the way of further training or career prospects. While there is not much direct expression of racism from white respondents themselves, there are a number of references to the surrounding climate of racism, often attributed to others, as repeatedly the case in Ann's story. Furthermore, there are hints of more subtle forms of prejudice in expressions such as 'your African way of thinking', 'a big Xhosa', 'how the political mind of African people work' and the difference between the way we see things and 'the way the black men are seeing things'. On the other side, most black respondents make reference to experiences of discrimination of one form or another. What is striking is the absence among white respondents, with the notable exception of Shirley, of any mention of poverty, hardship and oppression among black people. We know from a slew of other recent studies (Steyn, 2001, 2004) that 'whiteness' entails an identity position that is largely oblivious of its own privileged status.

Narratives are frequently gendered. In this instance, although the differences are not particularly marked, they are still there. The two women in this small sample give more space to personal relations and intimacy; their stories are flavoured by emotions to a greater extent than male participants. Where men evidence emotion, it carries more of a masculine tone: anger and a sense of betrayal seem the most prevalent. Among the women, there is little mention of heroism or of weaponry, themes that do appear in a scattered fashion in the men's narratives.

The most significant line of differentiation is across the power axis – those on the side of the state security apparatus and those on the side of the liberation movement. First, there is a more marked sense of continuity in the security personnel narratives; steps along a sequential career path. Even in the case of John there is, relatively speaking, a sense of continuity in the 1978 to 1984 phase, when he is in the police. The radical discontinuities emerge after that. Most complete school, all have some further training, all enter paid jobs. Stories from the liberation movement side are characterised by discontinuities – gaps, breaks and shifts, not least due to spells in prison or detention, with few references to anything like steady paid employment. Second, there are differences in terms of a sense of control of destiny, which is well-nigh taken for granted among those on the security side. Even in the case of John, he volunteered for an initial three-month stint and volunteered to

join Koevoet: 'I wanted to go through that baptism of fire, to live the glory and that whole cliché of going up and fighting for your country.' Stories from the other side relate experiences of witnessing or being embroiled in violence, of 'blatant harassment', being under surveillance, being on the run, being arrested, abducted, jailed and interrogated. Third, is the obvious difference in rhetoric around the central axis of power. From the liberation movement side there are phrases and words referring to 'dreams', 'yearning', 'hope', 'commitment', 'fighting for the land', 'challenging the system', 'moving people beyond apathy into action', 'a bigger political agenda', wanting to 'see the ANC win the election', 'the struggle to liberate this country', a 'war of liberation' and one who is 'prepared to sacrifice his personal life for the benefit of the country'. Not surprisingly, there was no such talk from state security personnel, who used phrases such as fighting against MK, or communism, or terrorism, or revolution; fighting for *volk en vaderland* or for regional control; or to maintain law and order.

Given this distinction and differences between narratives from the state security personnel on the one hand and the liberation movements and township activists on the other, the two sides will be separated for purposes of further analysis. First, we deal with discourses from the state security stories, in which we also draw on a further account from a former Security Branch operative who wished to remain anonymous.

## STATE SECURITY DISCOURSES

This consists of four (or five, with the anonymous Security Branch agent) rather different stories. One story from a Security Branch foot soldier is of direct involvement in various forms of violence with the Koevoet unit (John). This is the only case where there is clear and public acknowledgement – conceding both responsibility and wrongfulness ('I realised exactly what I did and how wrong it was'), as well as personal reflexivity, realising with

a huge shock... This is you, this is who you are, this is what you have done, and this is what you have become now. You are a murderer. You are a killer.

This is also the only case in which there is a story of severe consequences, with some evidence of a post-traumatic stress disorder. At the other end of the spectrum is the story of Ann, clearly not directly involved in violence and vehement in saying so: 'What is important is...to be able to distance myself from that – to say that we did not do that in the NIS... I get angry that I was associated with that' (human rights violations). In between are narratives from two senior generals, one in the police, one in the military. All make statements, and emphasise certain things, to indicate what they were not involved with.

### NON-REASONS

Johan insists that the police did not take a political role. 'We did not decide which political option was the best for the country, because that is not our task, and I do not think any of us would venture into something like that.' Instead he claims that the police perspective was 'maintaining law and order'. John repeatedly claims that he did not enjoy certain aspects of police work. Police culture was 'a culture that I did not enjoy'. On late night home searches he says, 'I did not enjoy it at all.' Regarding torture he states: 'I can't ever say that I actually got to enjoy any of that.' Nevertheless, he gradually 'became part of it', claiming that 'I was becoming hardened'.

Both Ann and Chris use the rhetorical device of three-line repetition to emphasise their non-reasons. Ann states: 'I was never there for *volk* and *vaderland*. I never ever did that job. Never in my life did I go to work thinking that I was going to save the nation.' She adds for good measure: 'I used to mock it and make nasty jokes about it.' In similar vein, here arguing against the use of the military *within* the country and against political opponents and the establishment of a 'CCB-type of organisation', Chris states: 'I said it was wrong, and I say it from any platform, and I was not involved in it. I was not part of it. I never sanctioned it.' And he adds for good measure that we can call in evidence from heads of the Defence Force to 'testify that I was against it, and that I spoke out against it'. He also stated strongly that he was not against the ANC, nor was the ANC necessarily a communist organisation. He is clearly making an argument for separating military and political functions, as in the case of Johan.

### REASONS

If our respondents were quite expansive on non-reasons, then what were their reasons? They are rather harder to find. The military leader Chris was the clearest: '...in my heart and soul I was against terrorism. That is something different to me...a guerrilla war, planting bombs in private places, in businesses, in whatever, you know, killing and maiming indiscriminately...that to me is the enemy.' Here he employs a commonly used rhetorical device, extreme case formulation, to bolster his argument. Ironically, in the preceding passage he posits a contradictory position: '...if I were black, I know exactly where I would have been... I would have been in the MK.' What is the rhetorical purpose of such a contradictory claim? It is to show that he is fair-minded, a reasonable person; it paints him in a positive light. Later, he is adamant in claims that 'it is not the ANC, it is the MK you are fighting'. He regarded MK as a military force, not equated with the ANC as a political force: 'The MK is our business... don't get involved in the politics.' Chris underlines this with the statement (also employing the threefold emphasis) that 'insurgency warfare, revolutionary warfare, the armed struggle is unacceptable'.

The others are a little more vague. In hindsight, and in a somewhat ironical style, John claims: 'We were protecting our families, our friends, our country from terrorism. We were right in what we were doing. There was no question about that. It was keeping the *swart gevaar* at bay.' Later he gives more personal reasons: 'I wanted to go through that baptism of fire, to live the glory and that whole cliché of going up and fighting for your country.'

Along his various journeys, Johan gives a range of reasons, mostly in a minimalist language style: countering a 'terrorist base in Lesotho'; preventing the spread of 'unrest' and trouble in the Free State; and the 'terrorist' war with SWAPO as a 'serious threat' in the then South West Africa, depicted as a 'bloody war' and a case of 'kill or be killed'. Back in the Republic in the 1980s he cites reasons in these terms: 'contain the unrest and violence', 'protect them' (the government), to 'prevent the ANC and other organisations to take over by force', also to 'enforce law and order'. It is this relatively bureaucratic function that becomes his dominant motif.

For us it was important to maintain law and order, to protect our people.

I think that was the main drive for us as a Security Branch, to protect our people.

This ties in with his 'main driving factor' to enter policing in 1953 at the age of 16 as a 'way of serving the community'. Johan is silent on the question of police violence or excesses. He offers only two small hints. In describing the South West Africa situation as one of 'kill or be killed', in which usual forms of policing were not applicable, he says that 'the normal way of policing is non-existent in operations. This had a great effect on...the minds of policemen who were subjected to these circumstances'. Later, in reference to events in the mid-1980s, he says: 'We worked day and night to achieve our aim, and I think most of the incidents that occurred, flowed from that.' The euphemism 'incidents' assists in drawing a veil over police violence. Indeed, there is no direct mention of police violence throughout Johan's text, other than a vague note of 'members of the SAP...acting outside the ambit of the law'.

The account from Ann is the most vague about reasons for violence. She is mainly at pains to distance her role and the role of the NIS in general from both state policy and from violence. The issue of violence hardly enters her narrative. When violence is raised, it is dealt with in the form of euphemisms (things, abuses) and Ann makes four interlinked rhetorical moves.

- She did not know: 'Even I was horrified about some of the things that came out from the police and Vlakplaas.'
- Neither did the NIS know: 'things...that people did not know about in the NIS and I mean, I should have known. I was right there.'
- That violence was unacceptable: 'It just was not on, this abuse of state power or state authority.'
- That the NIS was not in any way a link in the chain leading to violence: 'We did not do that in the NIS. Bring me one example from the TRC of a NIS'

member that was involved in this sort of thing... I get angry when I was associated with that.'

Where she does say (rather little) about her own reasons for what she was doing, it is 'that we were making a positive contribution' and that 'I am one of those idealists who always feel you can make a difference'. Regarding a political motive, she says it involved 'trying to figure out what was it that made people cross that line between legitimate protest and revolution'.

Despite differences, there are also similarities in these accounts of reasons. While the standard accounts of fighting terrorism, communism, MK, the ANC and 'unrest' are present, to some extent the larger ideological grounds do not predominate. Strikingly, the term 'apartheid' is almost never uttered (Ann and Chris used it a few times, usually with some distaste). Most make active efforts to distinguish between and distance themselves from political and dominant ideological grounds. Rather, they are refracted in all instances through their own organisational positionings, as we shall argue later. All use distancing devices, euphemisms and/or minimalist language forms in depiction of state violence. While John is an exceptional case in reference to violence, even he manages a series of distancing devices. They include shifting footing regarding violence in action, such as the use of personal pronouns in some instances ('I saw', 'I witnessed', 'I heard' – implying that he didn't act or do), the use of collective pronouns when it came to action ('we would' work in shifts/keep the prisoners standing/ask the questions – implying diffusion of responsibility), and the use of euphemisms such as 'that kind of thing', 'that kind of group', 'that sort of thing' and 'other things'. Such distancing devices were common to all participants.

#### BREACHING SCRIPTS OR NORMS

A common device in narrative accounts is to set up implied scripts or norms and then to display agency in the form of dissent against the script/norm. All four of these participants, to varying degrees, evidence this device. Ann shows this most clearly, again using the threefold repetition to create emphasis: 'I was very vocal in things that I said', 'I always went over the limits', 'I never adhered to the limits'. In other passages she reinforces this, saying that she was 'opposed to current thinking', she was 'considered to be someone who has a brain', 'I was always controversial'. It works as follows. Ann allocates a considerable portion of her text to setting up others in the NIS as the norm, then showing how she is different from that dominant script. 'I think that for many civil servants the statement "apartheid is right" was the same statement that "God is good". It just is.' She sets up the normative others in the NIS as 'staunchly Afrikaner Nationalist which was foreign to me', as unthinking, as racist, as members of the *Broederbond*. She tempers her criticism somewhat by saying that 'it is not that they were insensitive or evil'. It was not that the whites in government 'refused to see what was happening, they couldn't see

what was happening. The old paradigm thing. It is a pure paradigm thing'. This repetitive contrasting of the other as blind, bigoted, narrow, unthinking and as the dominant norm, and herself as thinking, vocal in dissent and as trying to 'make a difference' becomes rather like a mantra in Ann's account. What narrative function does it serve? In our view it does two things. Firstly, it depicts the normative category in a negative light, contrasting with a positive view of herself. Secondly, it sets up the normative category for blame, without directly saying it. In the end, her own viewpoint, the enlightened one, did not prevail: 'maybe it was not worth it... Maybe I did not make much of a difference.' When things went wrong, the other normative group could be blamed; she was off the hook. Her one regret was not speaking out at a meeting with police Minister Jimmy Kruger, who ignored their recommendations and arbitrarily and unilaterally decided to ban a '*bona fide*' trade unionist. This is a 'significant event' in her story, and while ostensibly blaming herself, it really sets up the others for blame. They took the action; her error was simply that of not speaking out. It reinforces the narrative device of casting herself against the grain as the good person.

The same device of breaching the norm is evident in the narratives of the other three respondents. At the heart of his story, Chris repeatedly makes the argument that he was a 'maverick', he was regarded as being a 'fucking maverick', that he 'couldn't just go with the mainstream' and that he came from 'different sides of the line'. He sets up sharp distinctions between the military and the government, saying, 'I am seriously critical of the politicians of my time, as a soldier.' He is the good, orderly, controlled soldier while 'the government, the top structure really does not know what is going on on the ground'. Later, Chris also sets up differences between the military and the police, describing the former as controlled and the latter not. 'In the military you have this very strong hierarchal command and control structure' whereas for the police this 'strict command and control' system 'is not part of their culture'. This narrative device sets up two other parties, the police and the 'top structure' of politicians, for blame.

An anonymous Security Branch operative ironically uses the same narrative device, but reverses the direction. In his case, he described the screening process in the Security Branch as 'very stringent' and the command structure as 'strong' and 'very well disciplined'. It was only later in the P.W. Botha era, from the late 1970s when the military effectively took over – when the 'hunting season was declared open' and operatives were used as 'unguided missiles' and 'given a licence to do illegal things' – that violence from the state side escalated. And it did so because policemen started 'acting as...soldier[s]'. Here the blame is turned away from the police and onto the military and a militarised era of government under P.W. Botha.

While we won't go into fine details, both Johan and John use similar devices to achieve similar narrative effects. Johan talks of a number of reports he submitted that were not believed and of unheeded advice given to politicians. He also cites plans 'that actually came from the Defence Force were not feasible...and that is

why members of the SAP started acting outside the ambit of the law'. He turns the blame on the politicians and plans 'invented by various committees'. The demands from government and elsewhere made it almost unbearable for the police to deal with the situation. As a result, many of them 'decided to take some action, whatever the consequences may be'. Although his story is different, insofar as his acknowledgement of violence goes, John also uses this device of normative breaching. In Koevoet, he sets up a number of others as the norm and as 'our role models that we looked up to'. He uses another threefold repetition to emphasise the normative others: 'their teams were the most effective', 'they had the highest kill rate', 'they had the most contacts'. That was 'how your effectiveness was judged in Koevoet'. John repeatedly claims he is at odds with this script: 'I couldn't do it', 'I never got used to it', 'it wasn't part of my nature'. Nevertheless, in this case he cannot sustain his distance from the norm: 'I just followed what the others were doing', 'you just had to grin and bear it', 'I was...becoming part of that'. In succumbing to the norms, he spreads the burden of guilt. As with the others, he points also to the 'politicians [that] were really manipulating the whole scenario up there'.

There is another reason for the use of the norm-breaching narrative device. If people recount a story in which they merely march along in step with the script or the norm, painting pictures of themselves as simply normative dupes, then narratives tend to become relatively unbelievable, less plausible. We as the audience may tend to raise our eyebrows and sceptically suggest, 'Surely not.' The 'success' of a story lies in its plausibility to the audience. People want their stories to be accepted, to become successful narrative events. 'Tall stories' belong to a different genre, usually comedy or light entertainment. In the present context, narrators are likely to aim their stories at credibility. If, as Bruner (1991) suggests, 'trouble' is the engine of narratives, then the troublesome dissent shown by our participants here serves to enhance the credibility factor.

#### THEM AND US: VICTIM-BLAMING

If norm-breaching is a device for shifting blame upwards to politicians and sideways to other factions or other organisations, then yet another discursive strategy manages to shift the blame onto victims or enemies. We saw in Chapter 3 that it is a common enough move. How is it done? It is achieved through a comparison of us and them. In our theoretical model, it is a relational dynamic.

The quintessential version of this victim- or enemy-blaming appears with monotonous regularity in the account by Johan. Over and over again he refers to police circumstances as 'a difficult situation', a 'serious problem', 'difficult for us', 'we had problems', 'quite a problem', 'we had serious problems', 'we had to deal with hard realities', 'this caused a problem for the police'. In short, the 'us' of the police is couched in the passive voice. In contrast, the victims of police actions are repeatedly cast as the aggressors; they are couched in active terms. The UDF 'succeeded

in mobilising the masses, 'they started the necklacing', 'they killed more than 500 of our informers', 'they killed such a person immediately', they used children, 'they were found actively involved in promoting violence, unrest and other activities', 'they started driving out black policemen from the townships', 'they were involved in the most gruesome, dreadful murders'. It is the regular repetitions of these 'us' and 'them' contrasts that paint a persuasive moral and rhetorical picture of the police as merely reactive: 'we had to detain more than 40 000 persons.' It was not merely that 'they' were active; as in a classic children's game, 'they' were also the ones who 'started' it. Blame is neatly shifted onto the victim.

It is fairly standard rhetoric in victim-blaming to employ extreme case examples to draw sympathy from the audience. It is commonly used here. Chris claims that 'they' are 'killing and maiming indiscriminately'. Johan repeats the list of atrocities committed by them: 'assassinations, acts of sabotage, limpet mines, landmines and car bombs', and again with greater effect using the women and children angle: 'limpet mines, landmines and car bomb explosions in which defenceless people including women and children were killed or maimed'. The same line is taken by the anonymous Security Branch agent, who claims: 'I was involved in instances...where the freedom fighters cut open a lady's stomach, two youngsters at the age of four years and two years, they were slaughtered, not just cut, they were stabbed... like the one little three year old was twenty three times stabbed.' His response to this 'direct emotional impact': it took 'us three days, but we killed all eight of them'. The verisimilitude of the narrative is created through the use of tiny details.

In the latter examples, blame is reattributed through casting the victim as the aggressor. It can be done in other ways. Ann's narrative paints a different picture of the 'victims' of her spying activities. 'I must say that the NUSAS sort of crowd weren't people that anybody liked.' They were 'social misfits' who 'couldn't get a boyfriend or girlfriend', that is why 'they always gravitated towards politics'. 'They weren't particularly nice people...real scumbag types... Sort of real dirty...just trouble-making people. They weren't actually very good students or anything.' She goes on to deny their political credibilities: 'I don't know whether they had a cause... they just sort of belonged... they weren't committed to the struggle type thing.' She draws a picture of her 'victims' as rather ridiculous, worthy of contempt and humour. 'We laughed afterwards – but the only people who actually worked in the struggle were the agents. It was just totally ridiculous.' The identity construction is amplified by the contrast with her two police handlers with whom she had a 'very strong, trusting relationship'. 'They were ordinary, nice, absolutely Afrikaner guys, but very decent human beings.' By painting the enemy or the victim as a mixture of 'real scumbags' and as faintly ridiculous – 'I didn't think any of them were a danger to society...campus politics was a joke at that stage' – she is able to justify her own actions as quite reasonable ('I didn't send anybody to jail or detention or anything'), as well as shift blame onto victims who are treated as worthy of

contempt. In all of the cases described here, the construction of identity-politics and relational terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’ serve to shift some part of the blame onto the victims.

### CENTRAL ROLE OF THE ORGANISATION

In terms of accounts of their actions, their own organisations lie at the core. We have already seen the efforts to discredit actions of other organisations, which serve to bolster the legitimacy of their own organisation and their own personal and reasonable actions within that organisation. The legitimacy of their own actions and that of their organisations are closely intertwined. For Johan, the task of the organisation was to maintain ‘law and order’ and to ‘protect our people’. For Ann, her role and that of the NIS was to provide objective, reliable information to the government. ‘Discipline and doing the right thing was right.’ Their task was ‘always to objectively provide the policy-maker with reliable, trusted, whatever, intelligence’. When she speaks disparagingly about some members, it is because, in her view, they departed from the ‘right thing’. Fortunately for her, there were ‘a lot of thinking people in there who were really grappling’ with their proper work ‘...there were quite a few people who were thinking like me’.

For John, to some extent it was doing a job, to ‘go into the field and gather fresh information’ and to be ‘the most effective out of all the teams’. There was ‘quite a sense of camaraderie’ and the ‘main thing’ was that ‘whole *esprit de corps*, that we were an elite unit, a special force unit and that we were good at what we did’. The ‘kind of culture’ of the organisation, the ‘drinking and the *braaivleis*’ and the ‘male macho bravado’ propelled the process, since ‘like in any family, certain things are expected of you, so we just acted accordingly’. The organisation and ‘authority figures’ set the ‘traditions’, so it was ‘difficult to question any of that’. As a result of these organisational norms and dynamics ‘we just went ahead and did what we believed was right’. The anonymous Security Branch agent also emphasised the organisational imperatives of the Special Forces: ‘Your job is kill or get killed, but then the bottom line is I got an instruction and you don’t question military instructions.’ He described rituals of morning Bible readings before going out on ‘contact’ missions. On return, there were further rituals: ‘The first thing is, check your own people, how many killed, how many wounded. Secondly, do your head count’ of the enemy, to see if there were some still alive. If they were a threat, they would be shot.

All of the respondents use the term ‘professional’ as a yardstick, but it is a dominant theme in Chris’s narrative. He repeatedly describes the function of the military organisation as separate from the political. ‘This is our function, to do our job in such a way that the overall climate of stability is such that it is possible for the politicians...to find a political solution.’ He repeatedly asserts that the military and the political should be separate: ‘I never thought of myself as defending apartheid,

although I voted National Party.' Throughout his narrative, Chris's account of himself is intricately linked to the military organisation; the term 'professional' is used regularly.

I considered myself as being a professional and a very good soldier and I had international respect. I was well-trained... I was proud of the Defence Force that I served...in its professionalism, its command and control structures and the fact that it was, except for individuals...it was really apolitical as an organisation.

He provides lengthy accounts of differentiating the function of the military from the political realm and police functions. He also lectures on different kinds of soldiers, making it clear that in his terms the only proper kind, as he sees himself, was the 'military realist'. These military realists were 'first and foremost soldiers' who dealt with the situation 'from a military perspective' in terms of 'an apolitical approach'. For Chris, things went wrong if you muddled the political and military functions. He emphasises organisational structures, proper training, strong discipline and strict 'command and control' links. Again things went wrong, in his view, because the police were lacking in these organisational forms. He strongly believes that the military made a positive contribution to the establishment of a democratic Constitution. Because he regarded himself as a professional, 'a dedicated soldier', he was very hurt and upset by the accusations (in his view, never confirmed) against him when he was axed from the SADF.

In all these accounts, organisational factors loom large. All respondents mention some degree of pride and/or positive emotional attachment to their organisations and work. All accounts allude to certain organisational aims and ideals which purportedly guided their own actions. They recognise that these organisations may have departed from such aims and ideals, but attribute such aberrations to other factions or individuals who went beyond the 'professional' guidelines. Most draw quite firm lines of demarcation between organisational functions (at least in the ideal state of affairs), as well as distinguishing between organisational and political functions. Again, things went wrong, according to these versions, when organisational limits were transgressed. Across these narratives, organisational identities emerge as highly salient. We may note in passing that 'professional' grounds in narratives may also serve as warrants for excuses and deflection, in the form of 'I was only doing my job'. If job-based identities were clearly central in these stories, what about other strands of subjectivity?

## MASCULINITY

In the theoretical section, we argued that masculinity is often an ignored aspect in the chain of violence, yet it is clearly salient. What about here? On a surface reading, issues pertaining to masculinity do not readily leap off the pages of these accounts. That is not particularly surprising. Since we 'wear' our self-identities, we

often do not remark on obvious aspects of selfhood. Furthermore, particularly in the case of dominant subjectivities such as 'whiteness' or 'masculinity', they frequently go unnoticed, since they are so taken for granted. Yet some further digging into these narratives does throw up some nuggets.

First, in four narratives (including one from the anonymous Security Branch operative), the accounts themselves are couched in terms of a traditionally masculine form of language. There is a good deal of imagery in terms of 'careers', promotions, hard work, medals, success and rewards. There are repeated word-pictures of male bonding in the form of 'our guys', 'the guys in the trenches', *esprit de corps*, 'camaraderie', heavy drinking and loyalty. Hierarchical imagery is present in the form of 'hard men' that we 'looked up to', along with 'command and control' structures and 'following orders'. Their stories are told with relatively little expression of personal emotion. Women and families appear infrequently in these accounts (John is an exception) and, if they do, it is in the form of patriarchal images. Chris says that 'I will easily kill for my family, if anything or anybody comes too close to my family' – a picture of protective, but also possessive patriarchy. And not surprisingly, given the context, there are more than enough images of militarism and warfare, including weaponry, 'kill rates', 'tactics and operations', 'combatants', 'soldiers', 'conflict', 'fighting', 'targets' and 'power bases'. There are also minor references to heroes, flags, medals, country and glory.

Second, there appear to be two different manifestations of masculinity in these texts: a 'military-bureaucratic' form and what we could label as the 'action man' model. Somewhat akin to the Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros and Zimbardo (2002) findings, the 'bureaucratic' form emphasises rules, command and control, hierarchical structures, training, discipline, *esprit de corps* and clear delineation of organisational functions. Chris and Johan seem to come close to this 'ideal type'. On the other hand, there is the 'action man' or 'gung-ho'-type of masculinity, more at home in the bush, swashbuckling, revelling in 'contact' with the enemy and seeking excitement. John and the anonymous Security Branch operative seem closer to this type. John reports graphically on 'what I had been looking for', that is, 'contact with the enemy'. He describes it as 'what I had expected and it was more than that. It was madness actually, and at no time can I say that I wasn't scared'. He goes on to a vivid depiction of warfare as 'almost a sexual kind of stimulation. Not physical sexual, but mental sexual'. He also uses the metaphor of drug addiction: 'We became adrenaline junkies.' It involves a heady mixture of 'danger' and 'excitement': 'You are actually as high as a kite' in the situation 'where everything climaxes.' Illustrating that the two forms of masculinity may be mixed, Johan, while primarily the police bureaucrat, also reports excellence in school-day boxing and describes himself as 'quite a dangerous guy' that 'liked anything that borders to danger – danger of any type'.

We should caution against regarding these forms as essentialist. The story of John is illustrative. Far from being purely the gung-ho action man as depicted earlier, his

story is one of wrestling between two sides of himself – the boy who was brought up with guns and who found that shooting was ‘second nature to me’, and the boy who wished to go to art and ballet school or wanted to be a commercial artist. Later in his life, he returned to more artistic pursuits and by the end of his story, depressed, ‘persecuted and paranoid’ and with ‘my life shattered basically’, he is the complete antithesis of the gung-ho action man. Yet the adrenaline-seeking action man emerged under particular circumstances. Masculinity is not a state or a trait; it is a set of ideal typifications towards which males strive to position themselves under certain situations. As we suggested before, militaristic situations offer positionings in which hegemonic masculinity may take root. It appears from these stories that both a general climate of militarism and certain forms of masculinity – emphasising toughness, success (elite units, efficiency and high ‘kill rates’) and control (‘nothing personal’, ‘absolutely mechanical’, ‘instil fear into the enemy’, ‘command and control’ systems) – emerge as significant factors here.

### ENTITLEMENT

In the theoretical discussion in Chapter 3, we argued that the concept of entitlement might aid our understanding. Does it apply to these narratives? In our view, the case of John offers a prototypical example of the operation of entitlement. In his account of this ‘striking scene’, a SWAPO operative, already an enemy, ‘a veteran’ and an ‘excellent source of information’, fails to co-operate and shows resistance to interrogation: ‘He was denying everything.’ A challenge to a taken-for-granted position of superiority is what ignites a righteous fury. His account reports that he goes into this ‘uncontrollable fucking rage, and I remember thinking, “How dare you?”’ This phrase constitutes the embodiment of the sense of exaggerated entitlement. John then ripped the bandages off the captured SWAPO operative, symbolically a stripping away of any sense of caring that the medics may have bestowed on this victim, ‘pulled out my 9mm, put the barrel between his eyes, and...I executed him.’ Language minimises and distances the dreadful deed. ‘We floored one. We are all tired.’

Exaggerated entitlement involves a frustrated or challenged self: ‘I felt a lot of rage and frustration and it all seemed to blow in one instant.’ Entitlement is a relational concept; it implies comparison with others: ‘I kept comparing myself to others.’ Dangerous entitlement may involve a touch of buried shame. In this instance, there is a sense of shame as a powerful member of a ‘closed, elite unit’ who is being ‘denied’ or challenged by an underling. Another sense of shame is implied by his use of the word ‘coward’: ‘comparing myself to others...thinking that maybe I’m a coward’. Elsewhere he says he has to go back to the border and ‘prove myself in some way’. Cowardice in a militarised ‘elite unit’, which sets its standards of effectiveness by its ‘kill rate’ and has leaders that he ‘looks up to’, certainly involves a sense of shame. In Scheff’s (1994) theoretical account, he claims that shame buried in a sense of entitlement is a potent link in a chain towards violence.

There are two further ingredients. First, entitlement is more likely if one operates from a 'home' base, familiar territory. John describes the border as a place that felt 'familiar, safe and real', a place to 'prove himself'. Initially somewhat out of it, he increasingly became 'part of it', part of the 'culture of drinking' and the 'male macho bravado kind of culture'. It became his home base. Second, is the issue of power. In the moment of military contact, armed with powerful weapons in the hunt for enemy quarry, a moment (repeated for the sake of emphasis) of 'complete exhilaration, complete exhilaration', John says: 'You feel incredibly powerful at that time. It's really difficult to describe that moment.' Later he says: '...people were scared of us, they were in awe of us and we felt like we were hot shots. We felt we were something special.'

If John's account offers a graphic illustration of the workings of entitlement, what about the other narratives? While more subtle and less dramatic, there are nevertheless pointers in the same direction. First, there is the matter of pride. Most accounts suggest a sense of pride in their units, as persons to be reckoned with. The anonymous Security Branch operative says that 'it was a compliment to be engaged by the SB', not anybody could get in since 'the screening process was very stringent in the SB', but for 'every policeman it was their dream to join the SB', it was a 'very elite group', indeed the 'most elite group in the SA police at that stage'. Pride is also a strong motif in Chris's story. He describes himself as 'a very good soldier and I had international respect'; 'I was also decorated by two other countries... I was proud of the Defence Force that I served.' Later he says: 'I am an Afrikaner, I am Afrikaans-speaking, I am proud about it... I know who I am and I also know where I stand.' Elsewhere, as we have tried to show, he alludes to the relation between pride and shame. Describing a moment of intense pride 'at a very private parade where I was decorated' and at which other military personnel were 'very proud' of him, Chris goes on to say: 'In the game in which I am, the difference between praise and shame is a hair's width.' In a moment of reflection, Chris is also proud of his contribution to the war, which in his view gave rise to the current democratic Constitution: 'Ja, you know, I was a good soldier, I was a professional soldier, that is how I feel about myself.' In similar vein, Johan is proud of his achievements: 'I have no doubt in my mind that the SAP played a major role where the new dispensation was concerned.' Ann also mentions pride in her efforts to 'make a difference' and in service: 'We were making a positive contribution.'

Second, is the notion of enjoyment or pleasure in their work, in their organisation. All make some mention of this. Ann repeatedly says that 'I really enjoyed the job', 'few things give me greater excitement', 'it was mentally stimulating', 'I loved it. I absolutely lapped it up, because it was an intellectual exercise'. John, at various points, says: 'I liked being on the border'; 'we were right in what we were doing'. He also liked the 'whole *esprit de corps*, that we were an elite unit and that we were good at what we did'. The account of Johan is draped with descriptions of enjoyment of his work, as described earlier. This notion of enjoyment of work, even

excitement, adds a sense of agency to their narratives; they are active participants, not merely cogs in a wheel or responsive to instructions. While work enjoyment does not relate directly to entitlement to commit violence, in the case where the work involves elements of aggressive action and people say that they thoroughly enjoyed that work – with a tinge of excitement – then it constitutes a link in the chain. It certainly points against the idea that they were truculently acting out orders.

Third, is the issue of relationship to the ‘victims’ or the ‘enemy’. As discussed earlier, all of these accounts construct the ‘other’ as to some extent deserving their fate. In John’s account, reflecting on the practice of torture: ‘A part of me said, “No, they deserved it and it was the right thing to do.”’ We earlier described two ways in which the ‘other’ was regarded: either as a dangerous threat and initiator of violence, promoting a reactive sense of entitlement, or as contemptible, which warrants a disdainful entitlement. Either way, through these relational constructions ‘we’ are duty bound and righteously enabled to treat ‘them’ in less than palatable ways.

Fourth, is the question of intertwining of multiple subjectivities. We have already seen that organisational identities appear to be the most salient in these narratives. Yet other ideological subjectivities are humming away busily in the background. First, there is *nationalism*. While seemingly muted, all of our participants were involved with national institutions: the national police, the national military and the national intelligence agency. Pride in the organisation is simultaneously national pride. Nationalism in this case intertwines with whiteness, since apartheid was an ideology aimed at the interests of white domination. Second, there is *racism*. While ostensibly not a dominant theme (the current historical context places taboos on blatant expressions of racism), the issue and problems of ‘race’ are present in all accounts. Furthermore, racialisation is ‘done’ linguistically through the use of coded words. In the local context, reference to ‘unrest’, ‘terrorists’, the UDF, the ANC, SWAPO, or alternatively, state-aligned organisations, all constitute codifications for black and white forms of subjectivity. Individual names index a racialised referentiality. The very notion of ‘the struggle’ implies a conflict predominantly in racialised terms. All of our respondents in the state security system are clearly white. Racialised identities saturate these narratives. Third, there is the issue of *anti-communism* and its implied alternatives: Christian, western, capitalist. Although religious identities are lightly mentioned, they are there. Ann mentions her ‘very staunch’ Dutch Reformed upbringing (going to church twice on Sundays) and their family debates about who constitutes the Good Samaritan and that Calvinism was very strong among NIS members. Although she seems to distance herself from them, she does suggest adherence to a basic Christian belief in the following comparison: ‘I think for many civil servants the statement “Apartheid is right” was the same statement as “God is good”. It just *is*.’ John says he has to ask God to forgive him, ‘because I don’t think there is anyone else that can’. The anonymous Security Branch operative pointed to daily Christian Bible readings and

prayers ahead of ‘contact’ operations. Although he does not say it explicitly, Johan illustrates the power of God’s word in recounting the meeting at the black school, where 15 minutes of scripture reading calmed an angry crowd of students. The link between whiteness and a nominal Christianity is implied, as is a Christian identity in contrast to communism. Fourth, the notion of *Afrikaner identity* is pertinent in the accounts by Ann and Chris and implied in the other stories. And like racialised identities, it lurks more frequently through coded terms: individual names, the symbols of state power and certain organisations. Fifth, we have already described the pertinence of both *masculinity* and *militarism*. A number of stories discuss the increasingly intermingling functions of the police and the army, the shift to counter-insurgency warfare and escalations in the spirals of violence.

To illustrate that entitlement is not a fixed and essentialist state, but a relational position that can be changed and reconfigured, we return to the story of John. In the instance of his killing the SWAPO operative, he undergoes a dramatic change. It is the pivotal point in his narrative. Everything changes from this point. He ‘requested a transfer’ and left Koevoet. In the immediate aftermath of the killing, he describes it as a ‘huge shock to my system’. It is a traumatic event, showing symptoms of a dissociative defence.

...it was like an out-of-body experience. I was up above the whole scene...I was...looking down at myself and the team...and feeling detached from it and saying, ‘This is you, this is who you are, this is what you have done, and this is what you have become now. You are a murderer. You are a killer.’

In this moment of dissociative re-recognition, the sense of superior entitlement evaporates and it is not evidenced again in the remainder of his narrative.

That just changed my whole mind completely. I became aware, for the first time in years, how far I had gone and exactly what I was doing. It was a moment of complete clarity for me and I was filled with...self-loathing and disgust at myself and this feeling inside of me that I was a murderer... I felt very bad about that and I just wanted to run away.

Entitlement operates as a kind of psychological defence operation. When it is blown away, as in this dramatic moment of subjective repositioning, a person is laid open and exposed to a flooding of negative emotions, leading eventually in this case to what he describes as a ‘psychotic experience’.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

While all these factors resonate in unique ways in the different narratives, there is enough evidence across the stories to support the claim that

- various strands of ideological subjectivities do overlap, intersect, intermingle and reinforce each other, and contrast with depictions of the ‘other’;
- such relational combinations emanate in strong versions of entitlement.

In closing this section which analyses the narratives of state security personnel, we suggest a summary in terms of three dominant patterns. First, there is a sufficiently strong sense of agency in each case to warrant a claim that these people did what they did because they felt entitled to do so. Entitlement is driven by intersecting elements of dominant ideologies. Taking up positionings in ideological terms implies that people act in these ways because they want to; they believe in the instant of action that they are doing the right thing. Second, seen in their own terms, organisational commitments and a sense of professionalism play a key role in shaping their actions. Third, somewhat paradoxically, given our claim of strong agency, they evade direct responsibility. If we follow O'Connor's (1995) scheme of treating responsibility and agency as a continuum ranging from 'claiming' (I did it), through 'problematizing' (I really don't know) to 'deflecting' (We had to...; we ended up doing...), then our respondents predominantly evade responsibility through deflection. Clearly, we have one case of 'claiming' or full acknowledgement (John), but even in that account there are many examples of deflection. Deflection occurs in three different directions, using different narrative devices. The device of norm-breaching enables deflection of responsibility upwards (to politicians) or sideways – either to 'other' members of their own organisations, or to the influence of other organisations. Rhetorical devices such as 'passivisation' and 'victim-blaming' enable downward deflection, shifting responsibility onto victims or to hierarchically inferior 'others'. As we saw earlier, this may occur in two ways – seeing victims as the initiators of violence, or as contemptuous, thus deserving their fate.

All of these moves involve the notion of relational 'positioning' (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999), and positioning entails moral manoeuvres. Entitlement is one such position; morally it accounts for events in terms of justification. As in the Huggins et al. (2002) study, the major forms of justification were citing a just cause ('protecting our people') and professionalism (doing my job properly, in a professional manner). Deflection is another form of positioning, a way of casting the relationship between 'us' and 'them'. It accounts for events in terms of excuses, shifting blame onto others. These are the dominant positioning strategies in the narratives of state security personnel. Taken together, since narratives accrue to form wider cultural forms, they add up, sadly, to the most commonly used strategy: denial.

## LIBERATION MOVEMENT AND OTHER DISCOURSES

Earlier we described some general characteristics of narratives of those from the liberation movements and other groupings (SDUs, SPUs, township activists). In contrast to state security narratives, these were characterised by greater discontinuities and more direct talk of hardship, experiences of township violence or state security repression. They are draped with the language – sayings, slogans and aims – of African resistance movements, that is, discourses which, in the main, run

counter to those of dominant ideologies. They share three other characteristics. First, they are stories from people who were all very young (late teens or early twenties) when they got involved. Second, and unlike the state security versions, they all concede to involvement in violence and take responsibility to some extent. Third, in most cases (Vision is one exception) they express no regrets for their activities; they are rather proud of their contributions.

In the analysis that follows, we mainly draw on the five narratives and their full transcripts but, where useful, we also add in the voice of a senior ANC person, Ronnie Kasrils, who was interviewed for this project, but whose full story is not included, as well as the voices of young township activists interviewed by us and by Marks (2001).

#### NOT A PERPETRATOR: 'I WAS NEVER WRONG'

A number of these narratives challenge the notion that they could be regarded as 'perpetrators', arguing that they should not be in the same category as those who committed violence on behalf of the apartheid state. Shirley says that 'we were not...straight-down-the-line perpetrators'. She goes on to argue that

In war...there should be a different category because you are not a perpetrator. I don't feel that our detachment were part of perpetrating human rights violations. As a result of our actions there was an unfortunate accident, and a casualty, and somehow there should be a different way of categorising, because...it is not clear-cut in the way that the other applications have been clear-cut...We were not going for a soft target.

In the same vein, Letlapa claims that 'in a conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed...the murder committed by both cannot be put on the same level'. In Fanonesque style he argues that:

Where justice and liberation is the goal, that murder...amounts to medicine; and the perpetuation of injustice and oppression, that murder...amounts to disease. And you cannot treat disease and medicine on the same level.

Along a similar track, Luvuyo repeatedly says 'what I did in the past, it was never wrong'. If they would say that 'the perpetrators should apologise, then that would mean that the struggle was wrong'. He also maintained that: 'We never fight because we like to fight. We fought because we were oppressed... In order to voice out we had to reply on the bullet.' Young black activists in Marks' (2001) study also report that they did not desire violence or relish it. Violence was something tough, but it had to be done. The ANC claims that they did not want to resort to armed struggle. Ronnie Kasrils says: 'We have wanted peaceful change.' The ANC proposed talks at a national convention in 1961. Ronnie elaborates: 'So the one side wanted to tango (in other words, hold peaceful talks), but white South Africa didn't. I always remember knocking patiently on a closed door.' Shifting the focus

of argument somewhat, Jerry also claims he is not a perpetrator: 'A perpetrator is the person who is driving everything...the person pushing me to fight so he will gain. Not the person who is doing it, unless it is defined in another way.' In a graphic phrase, he says they were 'remote controlled'. An anonymous township activist says 'we were not thugs'. Clearly, neither the label nor the image of a perpetrator sits comfortably in these stories.

### REASONS

Most of the texts at some stage at least mention the greater and noble reasons for their participation. From the ANC side, following the 'turning point' of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, Ronnie expresses it in terms of a 'stand in support of freedom and dignity and equality and non-racism and social justice'. On this basis he says 'I plunged in without any second thoughts or any doubts... it was for a just cause'. From the PAC side, a township activist expresses 'our goal' and that 'is the land repossession'. He says that he was 'fighting for freedom' and 'fighting for liberation' and to 'make sure that this country is ungovernable'. Shirley describes it in terms of a 'passion for fighting for justice'. Letlapa states that 'my priority is justice for the sake of justice' and that 'my heart was in the struggle'; 'justice and liberation is the goal'. Scattered through these texts are terms and phrases such as 'oppressor' and 'oppressed', 'war of liberation', 'freedom' and 'struggle against apartheid' or against 'colonial' oppressors or 'settlers'.

Initially, the struggle was seen as against the state and its security forces. As Ronnie puts it, the 'objective would be blows against the symbols of the apartheid state', and Letlapa adds: 'Our cadres were told that you are being trained that you should attack or destroy the security forces'. Luvuyo also states that the initial 'aim was to attack the security forces, the government installations'. Both Letlapa and Luvuyo suggest that the 'struggle changed'. It 'deviated from its own course' (Luvuyo), with the recognition that apartheid is 'practised by the persons'. In a 'saying in our politics' attributed to 'our late hero Robert Sobukwe', he stated that 'you can't hate a *sjambok*...you are supposed to hate the person who is wielding the *sjambok*'. Therefore, as Luvuyo puts it, 'I should hate the person who is practising apartheid.' Arguing that the 'security forces SAP, SADF were also attacking our civilians' (Luvuyo), the PAC in particular said 'we should take the war into the white areas that they too should bury their dead' and to 'make the state think twice before they sponsor that violence'. This was not seen as hatred of whites. Luvuyo says: 'We were not killing the white people because we hate them. We hate what they did to us... what we were hating against white people is the oppression and the brutality that they did to us.'

These participants were all quite young when they became involved. Was it due to family influences? Both white participants claim to have had an early awareness of the hardships on the other sides of the colour line, of poverty, oppression and

discrimination. 'From a very early age, from the age of 11' Shirley accompanied her mother on nursing trips to squatter camps and says that 'that had a really deep impact' on her. Ronnie says that from around the age of seven he 'did formulate an understanding of race discrimination and a deep concern for what was happening'. Both also mention schooling influences. Shirley 'was educated in a convent. It was different... I got more understanding of global oppression; I left school understanding that'. Ronnie specifically mentions one history teacher who taught them about the French Revolution 'and the oppression that had taken place at that time'. For him that was a 'watershed' experience; a 'turning point' that 'opened my mind up to the world'. While others do not attribute family reasons, there are some early signs of stirring. Letlapa mentions that 'I was yearning for some life, but it was out of that village... My head was buzzing for things that one couldn't reach'. An anonymous activist claims an early awareness (shouting 'Black Power' to soldiers patrolling the streets) and at age 15 'I dreamed that let me liberate Azania'; one has to 'keep that dream' and also be aware that 'you have to struggle for your dreams'. From another angle, Jerry attributes his involvement in 'bad things' to the beatings meted out by his 'strictest' father: 'The behaviour of my father pushed me to do negative things.'

The protests in black schools and the general violence in townships threw the youngsters of the post-1984 generation directly into struggle mode. Luvuyo and Jerry mention the violence at schools, in the townships, and at the hands of the police. At funerals, the police 'will shoot tear gas, they will shoot some people, that also affected us a lot' (Luvuyo). Direct experience of state repression had its own influence. Shirley mentions how her own experience in detention made her '*bedonnerd*' (crazy) and 'more militant than ever'. Particular historical events made impressions: Ronnie was influenced by the Sharpeville shootings; Letlapa by the 1976 Soweto uprisings and the 1977 death of Steve Biko; Shirley by 'horrendous battles' against state 'officials' in the Hout Bay community; Luvuyo by 'atrocities' such as 'young children aged 13 or 14 which were killed by the state'. At various points there are mentions of the writings, teachings and principles of leading figures such as Sobukwe, Luthuli, Tambo, Mandela and Biko. Letlapa specifically mentions the writings of Sobukwe on the question of 'race', land, education, liberation and 'what we are fighting for' and from then on 'my heart was...in the PAC', a situation about which he later says: 'I do not regret [for] a single moment.'

Shirley provides an array of more personally-related reasons and motives for her engagement in armed struggle and for becoming an MK operative. In line with some others, she fully realised that such a turn would involve hardships and dangers, but she nevertheless persisted with this course of action. Discernible in her account are the following reasons: like her father, she had 'an interest in the military'. Her circumstances were such that military involvement was one of the few remaining options: 'My options were reduced, because of the amount of surveillance surrounding me.' She realised that peaceful means of resistance had

their limitations. 'People who fought tooth and nail unarmed, peacefully, were *donnered* up'; they were 'getting injured and psychologically damaged'. She felt 'responsible for doing more than just continually going down that same route'. Her direct experience of state repression and her period of detention, solitary confinement and interrogation had strengthened her resolve: 'now I have got steel in my bones'; 'I was more militant than ever'; 'All of those experiences turned me into a hard-core revolutionary, even if I had to kill or be killed.' She further argues that 'there is a certain make-up in a person, which 'knowing full well of the dangers', is nevertheless 'prepared to take risks' and to 'go out there' and 'work efficiently and properly', and is 'able to hold out'. She further states that 'I haven't sat back and left the work for others'. To that end she 'continued on the path of reaching the goal that my comrades had died for'. Being 'challenged as woman' also drove her to resist 'a limitation on my sex'.

If members of the liberation movements tend to give rather grand reasons in terms of a national-level liberation struggle, this was not the case for the two involved in battles between the IFP-aligned SPUs and the ANC-aligned SDUs. From the SPU side, Vision is not able to give clear reasons at all: 'I really can't tell...I don't know.' He claims that even the leaders were not clear: 'Even if you ask those leaders, they can't tell.' He believes that they were being used as 'ladders' by the IFP leaders. Earlier he says that 'we were pushed...the youngsters...[the elders] were pushing us'. Initially he (and Jerry) saw the conflict in terms of taxi organisations, the 'one dominated by the Zulu people...staying in the hostel', the other 'dominated by the township people'. Later it became more politically aligned and 'goes on to the ANC and the IFP violence'. Vision is the only one of the participants who fits the responsibility category described by O'Connor (1995) as 'problematizing', that is, unable to give any reason: 'I am not too sure about it... I was not too sure...what that thing would lead us to.' On the other side, as part of a Katlehong SDU, Jerry – who describes himself as 'very aggressive', 'I was feared', 'I was bad in some way' – is nevertheless rather more clear about reasons for involvement, namely 'to protect ourselves as community members from people who are from the hostel'. He is also more aware of national-level issues ('We want the ANC to succeed and ANC to win') and of events at political negotiations where the 'white ruling party...were also working with the IFP to move the ANC'. For Jerry as an ANC supporter, the IFP were the opponents. 'We wanted to demolish the hostels, so that there would be no one in the hostels who would be attacking the community. That was the main aim.' At the close of his story 'looking back at what I have done', Jerry says, 'I think I have done a lot for my community.' In the case of violence in the townships in the 1990s, reasons are more local and immediate.

It may be instructive to examine reasons for violence given by young ANC-supporting activists, as reported in the study by Marks (2001) in Diepkloof township, Soweto, in the period between the late 1980s and 1994. Their discourse was characterised by moral and political tones punctuated by a series of key words such

as a 'people's war', 'ungovernability', the 'community', 'targets' (people deserving of attack), 'comrades', 'youth' and 'correct' (actions of a high moral standing linked to the comrade identity). Marks gives six main reasons, emanating from local violence in day-to-day experience, and 'integrally linked' to the intertwined identities of 'youth' and 'comrade' (2001, p.115).

- Willing response to ANC calls: ungovernability, civil disobedience, end apartheid, thus violence against state institutions and state collaborators.
- Oppressive state: particularly activities of the police, arguing that police violence made them violent in reaction.
- Bloodshed necessary for liberation: they believed that violence was needed to remove bad things; apartheid viewed as a sickness or a 'disease' could only be purged through violence; they were aware of the decolonising process in other countries.
- Violence as necessary for real change: they were sceptical of slow negotiations and urged for immediate and thorough change.
- 'Youth' as defenders of the 'community': they felt they were in a rightful position to lead the struggle; hope was in their hands as the younger generation; they felt well positioned to defend the community against gangs, crime, Inkatha and the security forces.
- Holding moral high ground: mobilising, building unity and 'cleansing the community' of gangs, drugs, criminals and not 'correct' political foes.

Apart from violence targeted at direct agents of the apartheid state and those seen as in cahoots (vigilantes, Inkatha, Bantu education officials), as 'moral defenders' of the community, they also acted with violence against 'misdirected' members of their own organisations, and against ordinary people who offended the 'collective conscience' of the broader community (for example, people who broke ranks in boycott or stay-away calls). Marks argues that these organised youth had a 'strong sense of their own behaviour as upright, with a right to monitor the behaviour of others' (2001, p.95). Marks labels this a form of 'scrupulous violence'. As one young activist says, you need to 'speak to people in a language which they understand...so if it involves beating them up, that it okay...for the sake of the community and all' (cited in Marks, 2001, p.96).

### NORMATIVE BREACHES

Among the stories from the liberation movement side there are, like the state security stories, examples of the narrative device of breaching scripts, but here they appear to serve quite different functions. Among the apartheid security stories, norm-breaching served to open the way for blaming others, while in this case it functions mainly to show and give reasons for the direction their life paths took. Ronnie says that in his matric year 'I began to change from the norm of my peers' and to 'cut a long story short, it brought me culturally across the colour line'.

Shirley came into conflict with the script of the nursing profession since she 'didn't fit into the system'. She took them on and 'challenged them' and was eventually 'hauled over the coals because I wasn't fitting in'. Since she 'didn't want to be swallowed up', she left the health profession permanently.

In the story of Letlapa, norm-breaching is evident in his resistance to African traditionalism and tribalism. 'I felt that I should break ties with those *sangomas* and ancestors.' He defied the custom of male initiation rites and there 'was tension between me and the tribe', a 'clash was looming'. Eventually 'my father with the help of village men took me forcibly to the mountain where I completed that manhood thing'. In reaction he resorted to the church. He not only 'became a born-again Christian', he became 'a fanatic'. Then he started questioning the Christian scripts: 'What did God say about the poverty? What did He say about people with loads of food and those who hardly had [a] table?' He doubted his preachings, which 'were promising a world thereafter when people...were suffering in the world of today'. He resigned from the church and later set after a 'yearning for some life' beyond his village that eventually took him into the liberation movement. In these three examples, the normative breaches serve to point out turning points in their life histories and to show that they are capable of challenging the *status quo*.

There are other examples that on the surface look like normative breaches, but that turn out to be something different. In his story, Letlapa devotes a good deal of space to criticism of the PAC leadership, variously described as 'mediocre', 'corrupt', 'naïve', 'incompetent', 'did not measure up', showing a 'lack of vision' and even 'comic leadership'. However, he does not mention a break from the PAC policies or practices. Furthermore, in a brave move, he includes himself among those criticised. In talking about a number of things that the leadership should have done (for example, 'we should have demilitarised') he says: 'Now in all these things that APLA should have done, APLA high command and myself included, we never did.' In dramatic phrases to account for the errors, he says: 'So we are betrayers. We are traitors.' Instead of a breach to open the way for blaming others, he takes on and assumes responsibility.

In the two cases of the Katilehong SDU and SPU members, both Vision and Jerry point to others, elders and leaders, who 'pushed' them to fight. Nevertheless, in both cases, they do not challenge the script; they do what they are 'pushed' to do and commit violent deeds. In moments of sharp and insightful reflection, they recognise the role of influence. Jerry sees the leaders as the 'real' perpetrators: 'A perpetrator is the person who is driving everything...the person pushing me to fight,' while they (the foot soldiers) were 'remote controlled'. He wonders where the leaders are on the day of reckoning, but nevertheless ultimately takes responsibility on himself: 'At the end of the day you are going to account for yourself, and then that person will be nowhere.' Similarly, Vision reflects on the role of leaders' influence. In a wonderfully perceptive phrase, he admonishes them to 'mind their language'. He says: 'If they talk, they must understand that maybe something is going to affect us who are in

grassroots levels.' Nevertheless, like Jerry, he accepts responsibility for his actions: 'It is me that took the decision. It is my decision and it is my life.'

## ORGANISATIONS

As in the case of the state security personnel, the role of organisations in these narratives was central. But all these organisations are the very opposite of state structures. These organisations were aimed either at caring for the oppressed (advice offices), defending their communities (youth and civic bodies, SDUs and SPUs), actively opposing apartheid (UDE, ANC, PAC), or taking up an armed offensive against the military structures of the state (Poqo [the armed paramilitary wing of the PAC in the 1960s], APLA and MK). A notable aspect of this involvement is that people were all volunteers. As Ronnie puts it: 'Everything was done with an absolute pure commitment, as volunteers of the movement and of MK.' When he left for exile, he states: 'We didn't for a moment think that we were leaving South Africa to pursue a new career or a new life...we were convinced that we would take at the most five years.' An anonymous township activist says it was a 'sort of a sacrifice', but one that most in these stories were willing to make. He says that 'I am happy, I am pleased' to be the kind of person 'who is prepared to sacrifice his personal life for the benefit of the country'. Luvuyo says 'we were so keen to join the ranks of the liberation movement'. For him, joining APLA was a voluntary decision: 'It depends on the person himself.' Shirley says: 'My commitment was to serve in the military.' The very term 'volunteer' has a particular resonance in the history of the struggle. In preparation for the Congress of the People planned for 1955, the ANC called for 'Freedom Volunteers' to give impetus to the campaign, and to collect the people's demands for the Freedom Charter (Suttner & Cronin, 1986). They cite one of the veterans of that time: 'The volunteers were the people who were prepared to sacrifice on behalf of the liberation movement' (p.13).

Indeed, people did experience hardships and sacrifice on behalf of the organisations: 'blatant harassment' (Shirley), police brutality (Jerry), being 'on the run' (Letlapa), detention, torture, arrests, imprisonment, 'crowded camps'. Many were prepared to sacrifice their lives to protect the movement: 'People are not allowed to surrender' (Luvuyo). Even when they faced woeful administration and organisational problems, Letlapa says of the PAC: 'Its writings and its beliefs, its philosophy was always attracting me.' Despite the 'negative things', with reference to violence, Jerry contends 'I have done all that because of my organisation'. Despite knowing the potential dangers, people were willing to get involved: Shirley felt ready 'for the things that I feel I should do and I'm prepared to do'. Luvuyo saw himself as 'one who is willing to join the Army' [APLA]. Ronnie felt 'absolutely honoured' to be recruited.

Those who joined the liberation movement usually spent some time in formal training, but in the earlier days of activism they were to a 'great degree self-taught'

(Ronnie), or they 'learned through what we did' (Shirley), or in the case of township activists, they received only rudimentary instructions. There is no mention of even rudimentary training for those involved in the Katilehong violence. Where there was some training, it included both 'political and military classes', because as a young activist puts it, 'A gun has to be commanded by politics.' Shirley says she was trained in military intelligence and 'benefited from the course' she did. Letlapa has no regrets about his time in the PAC 'because for me the organisation has been something more than a university. I have learned a lot and I don't think what I've learned I could have obtained at any university anywhere'. In townships, some youth organisations were themselves sites for education (Marks, 2001). They taught appropriate political understandings and created their own form of sub-culture with disciplinary measures shaped by the common identity of the 'comrades'. Recruitment into youth organisations entailed undergoing a kind of informal political training.

Among these organisations, there is a strong sense of the collective. For Letlapa, 'this war of liberation is a collective endeavour'; 'if there was something wrong that I did, a lot of people should account for it'. That was his problem with the TRC amnesty procedures – they considered only individual applications. Shirley expressed the same angle: 'I was never a person on my own involved in the struggle; I was part of a detachment, and this is where the TRC was a bit short-sighted.' Ronnie refers to a spirit of *ubuntu* and repeatedly uses terms like 'integrity' to describe the positive values of the ANC. Luvuyo describes rituals before operations which involved 'singing songs' and a collective 'sharing of firearms' in order to boost morale and form 'a happy unit'. Vision talks of a small group of five friends who mostly operated together. A sense of collective identity and endeavour was also important for the township youth studied by Marks (2001).

Not surprisingly under the circumstances, secrecy was a key element in these organisations, since most of them were illegal. A young activist says that even his friend and comrade 'never knew' that he 'was a soldier'. Luvuyo explains that commanders did not discuss operational details 'for security'. Shirley describes her recruitment: 'This was all about secrecy and about being withdrawn, about pulling back, about keeping agendas,' and further described the experience of being in the underground as 'self-incarceration'.

There is a strong sense in all of these narratives of the organisation as the key vehicle for channelling, guiding and propelling action. It certainly involved self-directed, willing and voluntary actions on the part of individuals, but their commitment, sense of loyalty and shared collectivity rendered them prepared to take on dangerous activities in service of these organisations. Violence itself was usually committed under leadership guidelines by relatively small units in covert circumstances. Collective structures organised and channelled the activities.

## MASCULINITY

Again not surprisingly in a charged and militarised situation, masculinity worms its way through these stories. Both Vision and Luvuyo talk of wanting to be a 'hero'. Vision says that 'from the start I was seeing myself as a hero... carrying a 9mm or R1 rifle and I was thinking I was that hero'. Rather uncertain of his own motivation, he resorts again to the hero imagery: 'seeing other people carrying big guns and seeing them as heroes... and you think even one day myself I will be a hero'. Luvuyo reports a belief among African youth 'that by joining the army you will be a hero in our nation'. As a result they were keen to join so that 'we can be recognised or honoured as a hero'. Using different words, Ronnie describes a 'romantic element that appealed to me', seeing oneself as part of a liberation army and 'these evil rulers would have to pack their bags and flee and if they didn't we would put them in chains'.

Jerry, who describes himself as 'very aggressive', as 'bad in some way' and as being 'feared', responds to the 'hailing' (interpellation) of leaders as follows: 'Yes, I am brave, I will be the future leader, then let me fight.' An anonymous activist also expresses a hero wish: 'I dreamed of let me liberate Azania – let me be an example or a symbol of Azania.' Liberation of Azania would be achieved 'with the firing of the gun'. He repeatedly uses the image of himself as a soldier on a heroic mission. The general picture of masculinity here is slightly different from the two images of masculinity among the state security personnel, which we labelled as 'bureaucratic' and gung-ho 'action man'. The picture among this group is masculinity in the form of the 'warrior-hero' questing after a noble and visionary goal. As earlier, we suggest that masculinity comes in various guises; the warrior image certainly is not shy of violence in support of glorious ends.

In some insightful and reflective comments, Letlapa gives us some grasp of the relational links between leaders, males, militarism and youth. In a complex transcript passage, he argues that 'we [in the PAC] should have demilitarised'. He recognised a problem that 'there are people in the PAC leadership who believe that the gun is everything', whereas he, Letlapa, had consistently argued that the military should be in the service of greater political pursuits. He claims that once a slogan such as 'One Settler, One Bullet' was installed among militants, it was difficult to switch off. Some leaders would try to tone down the use of this slogan, but the 'militants would defy them'. Letlapa argues that 'we should have demilitarised, not only on the "One Settler, One Bullet" slogan, but on a lot of things'. For example: 'PAC students would go to student affairs wearing camouflage with a gun, etc. Now that we should have demilitarised.' In an evocative passage, he says they should have given more emphasis to implanting ideas in the youth, rather than weapons. They should have said

that a person who infiltrated pamphlets for the PAC was doing a more important thing than the one who used to infiltrate AK47s, because with those pamphlets you are implanting the seeds of ideas, whereas with the AKs you have to hide them until they get rusted.

In retrospect, he says, with useful insight, that ‘we should have valued the success of revolution, not by the amount of weapons that we had, but by the amount of understanding that we leave our people’. This is a rare and courageous admission that leadership could have done things differently; that militarised youth do not simply spring from nowhere.

We should comment briefly on the importance of ‘youth’ as an identity category and how it resonates both with masculinity and militancy. We have already seen how the category of ‘youth’ was a significant identity label for township youngsters, often intertwined with the more politicised identity of ‘comrade’ (Campbell, 1992; Marks, 2001). Youth is also pertinent in our interview material. Luvuyo says: ‘We are so young as you have noticed...so it is difficult to identify exactly that person is a soldier.’ For one township activist, his age (just 15) was pertinent when he reports his dream for liberation. He also comments with admiration on the other young soldiers: ‘...boys of 14 years and they were very special in their own units; they know how to carry out an operation’. The apparent independence of these boy soldiers also made an impression on him: ‘So no one planned for them. They planned for themselves.’ Letlapa was young (just 20 years old) when he joined the PAC. For both Vision and Jerry, their youthfulness was pertinent; both felt that their elders exploited the youth in ‘pushing’ them or cajoling them into violence. For Ronnie, his youthful enthusiasm and excitement was also significant.

I suddenly found myself plunged in at the deep end, assisting him [Rolie Arenstein – a leading left-wing activist] in his underground activity and as a result playing some role in clandestine activity, which, as a youngster of 20 or so,...with the ideas that I had been developing, I took to literally like a duck to water.

The ‘duck to water’ metaphor is useful in grasping these connections. Young males are drawn to militant calls for action. Both the militancy of leadership and the male youthfulness of the audience are important. It is the relation between the two that forms the bridge. As in Althusser’s (1971) notion of ideological interpellation, it requires two parties: one who does the ‘hailing’ or calling to arms, and another to see her- or himself recognised as a subject in that call. Wider calls from patriarchy intertwine with calls from specific militarised leadership to form a relational identity of young, masculine ‘warrior-heroes’. They take up these positions willingly, with enthusiasm, as ‘ducks to water’.

## ENTITLEMENT

As argued earlier, oppressed people may take up an armed struggle precisely because they are denied a sense of entitlement. The establishment of a form of healthy entitlement requires lengthy and complex historical processes – speeches, writings, organisation, mobilisation, construction of a historical movement – that need not detain us here. Both the ANC and PAC only turned to armed struggle in

1961 when all other avenues, peaceful and legal means of organising and resisting, had been closed down by the apartheid state. Development of a sense of equal-deservingness requires a set of ‘counter-discourses’ which argue against the *status quo*, against dominant ideologies which form the grounds for exclusion and marginalisation in the first place.

What are we claiming here? First, that struggle for those in a context of inequality requires a sense of deservingness, a sense of rightful equality; a moral position. Second, struggle is aimed at the enactment or achievement of the rightful equality; to bring it into being. Third, in the South African context, the struggle was inherently different from the two sides: oppressed people were striving for a position of *equality*, whereas oppressors aimed at the retention of *inequality* – for whites to maintain a form of superiority. The two cannot be equated. All of this is sufficiently obvious. It is put here to support a claim that the sense of ‘entitlement’, seen in a larger frame around the pivot point of power, cannot be the same for the two sides. As Shirley puts it: ‘What we did and what the enemy did are very, very different, and I think we need to be able to put things in perspective.’ For the situation of oppressed people, different terminology might be required. ‘Reactive entitlement’ may be one term, since it entails a reaction to a lack of rightful equality and justice. ‘Yearning entitlement’ may be another term, since it implies that it is a goal, a dream.

In relation to entitlement and violence, what are we arguing? Quite plainly that violence is committed with a sense of deservingness; of righteously deserving a place in a fully democratic society – a moral right to equality. It also implies a moral right to attack those who stand in the way of such righteous aims. As Shirley, in the transcript version, expresses it: ‘When I engaged in politics, I understood that there were two phases, the first was to get the democratic government empowered, the second was to transform the economy.’ Regarding the first phase she says: ‘That is where we were at; that is the war we engaged in.’

We are not claiming that other forms of influence were not at work, for instance, those suggested by the situationist lines of explanation. On the contrary, there seems ample evidence in these cases of the pervasive influence of leaders’ rhetoric and discursive sway (Letlapa describes it as ‘indoctrination’), as well as direct instructions (Luvuyo says ‘I was given a mission to eliminate the deceased’). In addition, we have emphasised the vital importance of organisational demands and dynamics – secrecy, collectivity, commitments, guidelines, purpose and principles. There are also factors emanating from on-the-ground, local and immediate circumstances, as the picture of the SDU/SPU battles indicates. Such factors all constitute the very stuff of the situationist line of understanding violence. They certainly form part of what seems to be operating in these cases.

What we are proposing here is that there is something more. In these texts there is also a picture of active agency, of actors who commit violence with a sense of purpose and entitlement. This could of course, in retrospect, be read simply as a set of

justifications. That remains a possibility. But it does not seem fully to catch the flavour of these texts. Participants' accounts carry a further sense of deservingness, of righteousness in their actions. We remind readers of the difference between insiders' and outsiders' accounts. For outsiders, or for victims, the acts are senseless or purposely vindictive. For insiders, for those who commit the acts, there are reasons. While we should caution against over-romanticising and/or being seduced by insiders' accounts, the exercise here is at least to listen to them.

What do we have in these accounts? They seem to differ from the accounts of state security people outlined earlier, and from respondents (also state security operatives) reported in research by Huggins et al. (2002). How do they differ? There is greater evidence of pride in activities (personal and organisational); there is greater claiming of responsibility; pride seems to be associated with larger moral concerns (for example, justice); there is less resort to deflection; and the notion of entitlement has a greater sense of the collective to it.

The subject-position of entitlement has to be inferred; it is not just there. We explore this idea further, but with two prior caveats. One is the current historical context. Given the ignominious departure of apartheid from the historical stage, it is easier for those on the anti-apartheid side to express positive sentiments. Secondly, there are some differences in the accounts of those formally in the liberation movement armies, in contrast to township activists. In the latter stories there is less mention of grand moral principles. Bearing these caveats in mind, we examine the notion of entitlement through two lenses, pride and accountability.

#### PRIDE

Almost all accounts provide some sense of pride in their activities and organisations. Since we have already seen their reasons, the focus here is more narrowly on ways of wording pride. Ronnie expresses pride in the ANC as an organisation: 'an extremely mature organisation', the 'integrity of the leadership', and the 'political integrity based on justice' in contrast to the 'indignity of apartheid'. He also verbalises pride in his own involvement: 'I participated in half a dozen or so armed actions myself', for which he was granted amnesty and in which he is 'very proud to have participated'. Shirley expresses pride in the general strength that the armed struggle 'gave the movement when we went into negotiations'. She is 'proud of our entire operation and proud of every single person for everything that was done'. This again resonates as a sense of pride in the collective, which she shares.

Luvuyo, using the threefold emphasis, describes the pride of the soldier:

He [the soldier] is proud in such a way that he has seen what he has fought for now. He has seen that our country is emancipated. Now he is proud because what he was doing was right.

There is no direct mention of pride in Letlapa's account, but it is implied in his use of the metaphor of violence on behalf of the oppressed as 'medicine'. More

pertinently, he says: 'I do not regret a single moment' in the PAC, which among other things 'empowered me to have an independent mandate', the notion of a critical voice. Through his experiences he claims: 'I regard myself as someone who is more liberated than most.'

Reflecting on these statements, what can be said? They do not appear to be claims of inflated or overblown egotism. The pride is not really personal (not 'I am top of the class'), but rather infused with more collective and larger moral concerns; pride in their part in a collective movement which involved violence against a feared foe. Furthermore, it is not pride in itself, but the implied lack of regret along with the other pieces in the puzzle – a willing, voluntary and committed sense of agency – that suggests a sense of entitlement. This picture is not the same as that among state security personnel.

The examples given are illustrative of a sense of entitlement against the state. What about the situation of horizontal violence, against their own people? Ironically, entitlement seems to operate even more pertinently. Among the organised youth reported by Marks (2001), taking themselves seriously as 'moral defenders of the community', they exerted 'discipline', often involving violence, against 'deviant' community members. Among her respondents, four had been actively involved in 'necklace' murders. Here are two of them: 'If someone don't want to listen, it was our strategy to show that we were serious' and 'people who have committed grave crimes deserve necklacing' (cited in Marks, 2001, p.99). In these cases, entitlement seems to be associated with victim-blaming. Against a background of poverty, chaotic schooling, unemployment, crime, local jostling for power and calls for 'ungovernability', the label of *impimpi*, traitor or 'sell-out' became lethal. Although the dynamics might be slightly different, a similar form of entitlement seems to be operative in our case of the township violence between the SDUs and the SPUs. Here, a number of identity positions – youth, economic (rival taxi organisations), ethnic (Zulu and Xhosa), spatial (hostel versus shack dwellers) and political (IFP versus ANC) – intertwine and coalesce into fierce intergroup conflict. Each side sees the other as a betrayer and a threat to their community. Heeding calls from leaders, fuelled with weapons and with patriarchal imagery of 'warrior-heroes', young men take on a sense of entitlement to kill as moral 'defenders of the community'. Both Vision and Jerry have no idea how many they killed. Less prompted by noble ideals, these men do report regrets. Vision says: 'Today, what is my gain? Nothing... I am questioning myself what was the gain of killing people?' To describe his situation he employs the useful metaphor of playing a game like football without knowing the rules. He concedes that 'what I was doing was very, very wrong'. Jerry also felt that many of the young people 'never enjoyed their childhood, because they carried guns at the early age'. Both of them feel let down by leaders at whose behest they committed the deeds. For Jerry, the source of masculine pride has shifted. 'I have noticed that I can be proud of being a fighter, but I will get nowhere... Now that I use my mouth as a tool to be successful and then I will be.'

## CLAIMING RESPONSIBILITY

In contrast to state security accounts, all respondents on this side of the power divide did, to varying degrees, take responsibility for their actions. There is less resort, in general, to the device of deflection. But how does 'claiming' link to a notion of entitlement? Only indirectly, as a piece of the puzzle, as part of a wider configuration. This configuration perhaps becomes clearer if we contrast the logic in accounts from the liberation movement and from the state security personnel. This also reveals two different kinds of entitlement. The contrasting narrative configurations seem to go roughly as follows:

- Liberation movement accounts: Yes, I did it (claiming); I was right in what I did (pride); it was our right to do so because apartheid was an unjust, oppressive system (collective or reactive entitlement). In this line of reasoning there is no need for further deflection.
- State security accounts: I am not saying directly what we did (evasion); if some things happened (euphemism) it was because of (i) the bidding of our political masters (deflection upwards), (ii) rogue elements, hotheads in our organisation or alternatively the incompetence of other organisations (deflection sideways), (iii) *they* started, *they* deserved it since they were uppity (deflection downwards, victim-blaming) and furthermore, I was entitled to act due to my professional role – to maintain law and order, keep the security system stable, protect our people (a sense of positional entitlement).

Although they also concede responsibility, the narratives of the SDU/SPU operatives differ from those of the liberation movement armies. In both cases they also deflect responsibility upwards, passing on blame to leaders who 'pushed' them into violence. If we follow O'Connor's (1995) scheme, then the account of Vision shows the use of three strategies in the same story:

- claiming ('It is me that took the decision'),
- problematising ('I don't know. I really can't tell... even the leaders, they can't tell'), and
- deflecting ('seeing other people with big guns and seeing them as heroes'; '...[the elders] were pushing us').

The narrative of SDU member Jerry also uses a range of strategies. We explore them further in the next section, which examines how violence is dealt with in stories.

## ON VIOLENCE

Although all liberation movement and township conflict stories do show evidence of claiming responsibility (not least in some cases because they were convicted of murder), when it comes to the depiction of actual violent deeds, then other accountability-shifting devices come into play. Letlapa does not speak directly of

violence he was involved in, other than giving orders. Ronnie's account also skirts round the acts. The story of Shirley claims the only casualty as an 'unfortunate accident' and 'a one in a million chance that something like that would happen'. When Luvuyo does describe the acts for which he was convicted (the double murder of a father and daughter in the Transkei), his account resorts to various deflecting devices. The victim is cast as the initiator: 'He was threatening our intelligence network.' The woman's death is cast as an accident: 'The daughter wasn't supposed to be killed.' Victim-blaming is used: 'The father tried to resist and the daughter also tried to make some funny tricks.' The passive voice is used: 'It happened that she was killed.' He resorts to justification: '...there were many young African daughters who were killed.'

The closer it comes to the actual direct issue of violent acts, the more people appear to shift accountability. This is neatly illustrated in the narrative of Jerry. In the Katlehong case, both protagonists describe numerous incidents of violence. Rhetorical devices are used to shape the picture of the grim deeds in Jerry's account. The others are depicted as the aggressors: 'They attacked us in a mob... we opened fire' and repeated: 'They were attacking...we started to shoot.' Incidents are described in the passive voice: 'that person will be burned by tyre'; 'eight or nine people were stoned, stabbed and burned'. Other people are implicated: 'My friend said, "You must be there. Let us fight" '; 'we chucked gas bottles'; 'we put petrol outside'. Euphemisms are used: 'I engaged myself in many things, in many activities.' The only times that Jerry uses the personal pronoun 'I' and the active voice directly in relation to 'bad' actions, these refer to lesser deeds: 'I throw some stones into the window'; 'I robbed people'. Excuses are given for the robbery: 'Most of us were drinking alcohol.' Finally, he uses upward deflection, passing the blame to his violent father and the unnamed leaders. Ultimately he is not, in his view, a perpetrator. By implication, he is a victim of leaders who were 'pushing me to fight'; they were the perpetrators. Interestingly, when away from the violence, back at school and doing well, Jerry powerfully recovers the use of the active voice in a four-line repetition for emphasis: 'I obtained position one'; '...I obtained position three'; '...and I passed my matric'; 'I was so determined'. When it comes to dealing directly with acts of violence, it appears that most people have an armoury of rhetorical tricks to evade and shift their own immediate personal accountability.

## RECONCILIATION, REFLECTION, SILENCES

How do people reflect on experiences such as these? As we have already seen, a number of them look back with pride or satisfaction, often couched in organisational terms. Even those in top positions in the military and the police expressed satisfaction in the role of their organisations. We have discussed the matter of shifting blame; despite 'claiming', most also manage to shift blame. What about other forms of reflection, perhaps remorse, shame, guilt, loss, asking for forgiveness?

Looking back, Eugene de Kock, commander of Vlakplaas, says: ‘...now, at the end of the day, I realise that I am actually a veteran of lost ideologies.’ He goes on to describe it as ‘a feeling of loss. We killed a lot of people, they killed some of ours. We fought for nothing, we fought each other basically eventually for nothing’ (cited in Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, pp.77–78).

### GUILT, REMORSE, FORGIVENESS, TRAUMA

Among our respondents, there are no consistent patterns in respect of emotional sequelae. From the ‘white’ side, Ann shows a modicum of guilt. Referring to whites who did nothing about the injustices of the past, she says ‘maybe each of us has guilt in that’. Both Katlehong residents seem to experience some degree of shame, guilt or contrition. Both also relate a measure of trauma, using the terms ‘cope’ or ‘coping’. Vision says that he is ‘struggling’, that the experience ‘hurt him’ and follows with a three-line repetition: ‘I think it is in my mind. I don’t think it will go. It will just stay.’ He reports being helped by a psychologist. Jerry says ‘we were traumatised’ and that the government should have done more ‘to heal someone that is traumatised’. A young activist refers to some sense of contrition, ‘killing someone, at the end of the day, is just not right’, as well as to sequelae: ‘One is still left with the trauma; you have killed.’ However, it is former security policeman John who reports the greatest degree of guilt, shame and trauma. He relates how he tried to raise money for street children to assuage his guilt.

It had a lot to do with the guilt that I felt about the things that I had done when I was in the police force. I still thought about those things and felt very guilty about all that... I really don’t know how to forgive myself... I don’t know how to live without guilt or remorse or self-recrimination... [these] negative things that seem to be a part of my make-up now as a result of my experiences – lack of confidence, lack of self-esteem, self-hate, self-destruction. I really don’t know... I don’t know who could forgive me and I think that is the hell that all of us are living through – all of us who have been involved in this kind of thing.

He also reports a range of symptoms: nightmares, flashbacks, problems in concentrating, feeling ‘persecuted and almost paranoid’, more and more ‘withdrawn and depressed’, until he experienced a psychotic breakdown in 1992. Years later he says: ‘Basically I don’t have anything to live for.’

Shirley reports a range of debilitating consequences. She was depressed; ‘it was like this black hole... I cried for a solid year’ in therapy. She took medication for a number of years and went through a second experience of therapy dealing with divorce, other experiences and the ‘bigger question of support for all survivors of gross human rights violations’. Her demobilisation from MK and the loss of her identity as a soldier was a difficult transition; there was no adequate debriefing. The refusal to accept her into the new military structures made her very angry; she

experienced it as a 'violation as a woman'. Her pursuit of the legal defamation case against apartheid Cabinet ministers was a gruelling and lonely task. While she was ultimately vindicated, she experienced the process as 'incredibly hard and unfair'. She feels somewhat abandoned by the former MK structures; 'the people who did the work have never been honoured'.

In retrospect, having recovered to a position where 'I can confidently hold on to who I am' and where she is 'more at peace', she is nevertheless somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand she feels that 'I have lost a lot'. On the other hand, she reflects that 'you have had a unique set of experiences and nobody can take that away from you'. There is little doubt that her road 'from outrage to depression' and to a more 'manageable form of outrage' and being more 'at peace' has been a tough and at times a lonely experience. As both protagonist-soldier who did her work 'with steel and absolute precision and dedication' and simultaneously a victim of state repression, she certainly took some hard knocks and some of the emotional scars are still in evidence. The conflict in South Africa took its toll on both victims and some protagonists.

A number of participants talk of remorse and apologies. Shirley reports 'that we obviously felt really remorseful' and that they 'met with the family and told them what happened'. The story of John shows considerable remorse, with images of 'funerals, graves and death' coming back to haunt him. A young activist shows remorse: 'Asking for forgiveness is not easy. It was not just saying, "I'm sorry"; I had to give a reason why I am sorry.' Vision says that the apology required is 'from inside', a personal, not a political apology. Jerry apparently apologised. Luvuyo is ambivalent: 'I don't...*ja*, I do sympathise with their families, but...' then provides a justification. He will not apologise to victims: 'I never apologised to them because...I had never done anything wrong.' From the remaining three state security personnel there is no evidence of any regret, which would fit their pattern of deflecting responsibility. However, both Letlapa and Johan from opposite sides report that their own people are experiencing negative consequences. 'They were drinking their lives away because they feel they are outcasts of the community' (Letlapa). 'Some people are completely disoriented, unable to deal with the present circumstances in a rational way' (Johan). Both of these senior leaders are involved in organisations aimed to help their former 'foot soldiers'.

Issues of asking for forgiveness also elicit an array of positionings. John does not feel he deserves forgiveness. As a result, while he assisted the TRC and submitted a written statement, 'a full confession', he did not apply for amnesty. 'Who can forgive me?... I don't think there is anyone else that can.' Perhaps his only possibility was to 'take it to a spiritual level...and ask God to forgive me'. Similarly, a young activist initially feels he was not worthy. On first meeting the parents of the deceased victim, he says: 'I felt that I didn't deserve to hold their hands.' Subsequently, he does ask for forgiveness from both the victim's family and the TRC, after which he says, 'I just felt free... I felt a burden being lifted from my

shoulders... Thanks to the TRC I left [my anger] there.' However, he claims a further challenge: 'To forgive yourself is the last line and it is a tough challenge.' This next step is the one John cannot reach: 'I really don't know how to forgive myself.'

Speaking as a victim, Shirley is ambivalent about forgiveness, since the 'people who have paid the price for the terrors of the past' are still 'hungry and homeless.' From the state security side, Chris also positions himself as a victim, relating to his axing from the military, and says: 'I will hate De Klerk for as long as I live.' No forgiveness there. Oddly, he turns events in asking the victims of apartheid to show forgiveness:

Unless the rest of the people can forgive the whites and dominance of the Afrikaner for apartheid, then...we have...got a long way to go to get to the point of good and objective nation-building.

The problem with Chris's stance is the issue of mutuality. As Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) suggests, for the victim to forgive there must be some 'sign' from the other that invites the victim's preparedness. A sign of this sort, such as remorse, is largely missing from the state security accounts we have here. If there is one remarkable act of forgiveness emerging from the TRC process, it is the most gracious acts of the Biehl parents in forgiving, so fully and truly, the murderers of their daughter (see Borraine, 2000). Since the act is so rare, it brightens the page. We should be grateful. And in this particular case, it opened the way for a genuine form of reconciliation.

#### ON RECONCILIATION

What do we really understand by the notion of reconciliation? In a valuable recent book, John de Gruchy (2002) has set the debates and issues pertinent to reconciliation in the South African context. For De Gruchy, reconciliation is a 'mutual attempt to heal and overcome enmities, build trust and relationships and develop a shared commitment to the common good' (p.15). It should be regarded primarily as 'an action, praxis and movement' (p.21) rather than as a set of ideas or religious dogma, although the latter have their places. A range of positions may be taken regarding the notion of reconciliation. At one end are those who regard the notion as immoral, since it potentially denies the past and present experiences of oppressed people. Two of our respondents take this stance. At the opposite end of the scale, De Gruchy argues that the notion of reconciliation is useful when the 'overcoming of hostility and enmity, often expressed through violence, demand that we find a solution' (p.25). Real reconciliation, he claims, 'implies a fundamental shift in personal and power relations between former enemies' (p.25). Neither purely speech nor purely action, it occurs through the 'interplay of speech, listening and action motivated by hope and love' (p.22). The way in which we speak is already an action.

While reconciliation is fundamentally about restoring justice, it goes beyond structural levels to include social healing, reclaiming of identities and the 'restoration of humanity' (p.25). De Gruchy suggests four interrelated ways of talking about reconciliation:

- A theological level, between God and humanity, promoting ideas of a shared life and language.
- An interpersonal level, between individuals; between victims and perpetrators.
- A social level, between alienated groups and communities.
- A political level, between divisions in the nation state, towards a sense of shared national belonging.

Reconciliation may occur separately in each of these ways, but only comes together when all four levels are interrelated. This view concurs with our stance of a relational framework. If violence is one form of relating, then reconciliation implies transcending old relational forms and creating new and different ways of relating at all levels.

Clearly enough, it involves a sequential process, movement through time akin to a journey, from 'estrangement to communion' (De Gruchy, 2002, p.28). Although it may have defining moments along the way, reconciliation as a 'final achievement, is always beyond our grasp' (p.28). Not least in South Africa, where prevailing social and economic disparities and inequalities (Terreblanche, 2002) suggest a long road ahead. There will inevitably be various stages and processes along the way. Bringing an end to violence and enabling peace is clearly a first phase. Willingness, including the political will to reshape, is another phase. The question of identity, the refashioning of new identities and the very identity of the nation, are all requisite issues. Then there is the question of meaning. Does the notion of reconciliation translate into other languages in the same way? Do various groups understand it in different ways? In contrast to academic or theological meaning, what do ordinary people mean by the term?

In another recent account of the issue of political reconciliation in the South African context, Villa-Vicencio (2003) describes it as a modest process; we should not set the moral bar too high in making demands on victims to forgive or upon protagonists to apologise. Some people are not ready to forgive, nor feel that there is anything to apologise for. These gestures or signs may certainly assist the process, but they are neither prerequisites nor necessities. Political reconciliation, for Villa-Vicencio, is likely to entail the following set of processes:

- The interruption of an established pattern of events, creating the possibility for a new path; a new form of co-existence.
- It is about memory; it requires a recognition of and a confrontation with the past.
- An acknowledgement of the truth of past suffering, of the kinds of violence that occurred.

- Understanding of the 'other', including attempts from victims to understand perpetrators; that some of them may also have been victims to varying extents.
- It is a process, it takes time to come to terms with the past, adjust to current realities; it is not linear, it may occur in fits and starts; particular opportunities must be seized.
- It requires time and space for mourning, anger and hurt, as well as for healing; victims require space for anger and mourning. Rituals and symbolic events may assist these processes.
- It includes reparations, both material and subjective, in order to recover a sense of humanity and worth.
- We need to learn to deal with conflict in a humane way; civility is at the heart of this process, a new way of learning to engage with strangers with a focus on collective interests, what we may engage in for mutual benefit.

He concedes that in the process of reconciliation, former victims are indeed asked to pay the highest price. But in reconciliation for survival, it is a price well worth it.

In discussion of reconciliation, participants in this study use a range of metaphors. There are spatial metaphors, involving building bridges (John), bridging gulfs (Letlapa) and 'closing the gap' (John, Vision). Committee metaphors involve sitting 'around tables' (John) and talking. Friendship metaphors are implied in pictures of taking hands (Chris). There are images from the construction industry, building bridges and building 'new foundations' (Letlapa). Economic metaphors are implied in the notion of investing (Chris) and of 'giving back' to those who 'paid the price' (Shirley). Dialogical metaphors imply a sense of mutuality in talking and understanding. Some make reference to temporal and sequential dimensions with phrases such as 'not overnight' (Chris), being 'patient with this generation' (Ann), 'premature unity' (Chris), getting 'to the point' where things might change, and putting 'the country back on the road' akin to a journey. All these word pictures are in line with De Gruchy's (2002) depiction of reconciliation; a concept constructed through a range of metaphors. There is one further aspect in line with De Gruchy's view: most of the respondents in different ways suggest the need for action. From opposite ends of the spectrum, Jerry says 'we need to do things', while Chris proposes 'let's develop this nation' and Shirley calls for a 'programme of action'.

Respondents here cover a wide range of themes around the topic of reconciliation, with different lines of emphasis: on education and youth; recovery of truth; counselling and healing trauma; tolerance and respect; dialogue, talk and better understanding. Are there any general patterns? We suggest there are three, perhaps rather dimly discernible but nevertheless present. The first is that despite some resistance to apologise or forgive (outlined earlier), some sharp criticism of the TRC process (Shirley, Letlapa, Luvuyo, Chris), and a dose or two of ambivalence and scepticism ('we are not sophisticated enough to live in harmony'; 'write off anybody over 40' – Ann), there seems nobody here who is actively opposed to the general notion of

reconciliation. They may be wary or ambivalent regarding one or another aspect, but appear in principle in favour of the idea. That seems like good news.

The second is that, with the exception of John, state security personnel appear to place far less emphasis than all the others on socio-economic correction. While John mentions ‘any amount of things that could help the disadvantaged people’, the others are rather more vague about education and general development of the oppressed. Indeed, both Ann and Chris are disparaging about affirmative action. Johan only mentions help to former police personnel. In contrast to the other side, it is the relative lack of emphasis, the silence about restorative justice, that marks the difference.

The third and rather surprising theme is the relative lack of direct discussion about racial divides. It is there from the black narratives, but in the form of coded language. Luvuyo says that ‘nothing has changed...things are still the same, except that there is a black man in the chair now’. A young activist talks of people ‘oppressed for more than three centuries; some still bearing that grudge inside them’. The message is that there is still a long way to go. There is rather more mention of racial reconciliation from the white narratives. It is presented in the form of parables, sweet little tales with a message. Chris tells of ‘very good racial harmony’ among his workforce in his small business, *Die Werf*, and illustrates it with a tale of all the workers co-operating to put out a fire with ‘this feeling to protect *Die Werf*’. Ann also presents various parables. In one tale, even her racist mother comes round and can no longer ‘see’ blackness. In another, the older white generation are written off as unable to change from their racist ways. In yet another tale, both black and white are portrayed as demonstrating amnesia about the past. A final message is more sceptical: she sees little tolerance in either ‘ANC ranks’ or ‘Afrikaner-Broederbond ranks’. Ann claims that it is ‘not in our national make-up...to live in harmony together’. Along similar lines, Chris says: ‘Don’t think we can become a rainbow nation overnight.’ What is the function of this rather mixed bag of parables? Ostensibly it is to portray the speakers in a positive light, as reasonable, balanced, tolerant white people who show a ‘respect for the differences’ (Chris). However, it is our interpretation that these narratives carry a tone similar to other instances of ‘white talk’ (Steyn, 2004), of paternalistic racialism, suggesting the persistence, albeit in more subtle ways, of white superiority. If this is the case (and some might disagree), then the real message from these parables of racial reconciliation is that, here too, we have a long way to go.

The remainder of the discourse around the topic of reconciliation seems to fall into three main themes. The first places emphasis on socio-economic development. ‘If you don’t have houses and education and all of these things, you’re not going to have reconciliation’ (Shirley). Along very similar lines Letlapa says:

To purge this nation of guilt we must try by all means to alleviate the pains that some communities are suffering from...they revolve around health, education, around sharing resources.

All the other black respondents make some mention of development and redistribution; some are partly critical of government as not doing enough. There are mentions of the lack of jobs, unemployment and continuing poverty and the vital need to address such problems.

The second theme centres on education and 'better understanding', a phrase that is repeated by various respondents. John emphasises 'building schools, community centres, education, adult literacy'. Letlapa talks of an 'open-air university' and 'training programmes'. Chris proposes a 'leadership academy', a kind of post-school training centre. Ann, Vision and Jerry all talk of youth development. Luvuyo stresses a better 'understanding of what caused their differences', as does Chris, who also recognises the process as a 'hell of a challenge'. To facilitate the 'building of bridges' towards better understanding, Letlapa suggest a 'strong civil society' and more informal meetings, 'something that really needs person to person, heart to heart'.

The third theme picks out a range of psychologically-oriented issues. There is some talk of counselling, rehabilitation and 'support' for healing trauma (Johan, Letlapa). Letlapa talks of 'alleviating pains' and 'changing perceptions'. A number talk of different ways of relating, with respect and with better understanding. There is silence, however, on new ways of relating in gender terms. Quite a few are aware of the need to change identities, to 'start to respect yourself' (Vision). A young PASO activist says he 'no longer sees settlers in South Africa'. Letlapa talks of the recovery of a truly African identity. Jerry sees himself as a changed person, no violence, only talk: 'I am grown-up now. I have matured.' It is John who speaks of identity transformation in the most poignant yet ultimately sad way. He recognised a fundamental identity change 'a long time ago on the border when I realised that the guy that was shooting at me was just a mirror image of myself'. Yet the solution is still elusive:

[I'm] trying to destroy that John who was a policeman and become...another John. It has left me being nothing, being nowhere and being nobody. I can't seem to find a replacement for that person.

Finally, there is the matter of the TRC, which we touch on only briefly. From the total of 10 participants (including Ronnie), seven had some form of interaction with the TRC. Only Ann and the two Katlehong youngsters did not. Three participants were sharply critical of the TRC (Shirley, Letlapa and Luvuyo); their reasons are in the texts. One was ambivalent: Chris acknowledged it as a 'good thing' in terms of opportunities for expression, but in practice as biased and employing 'double standards'. Two (Ronnie and John) had positive experiences of the TRC, which allowed them a sense of 'release, relief' (John) and of a 'burden being relieved'. There is no comment from Johan. Some recognise that the TRC did not provide any final solution, that 'there remains unfinished business' (Shirley). For Letlapa 'we should go far beyond the TRC act'. For Shirley, the TRC did not provide 'a logical conclusion of a process'.

What of the silences? We have mentioned the silence on gender issues. There is another large area of silence. From the senior personnel in apartheid state security (John excepted) there is little or no recognition of the wrongfulness of the past. There is little reflection on the notion that things could have been done differently. There is no acknowledgement of the enormous damage inflicted by apartheid, or of their own role in it. On the other side of the power divide, Letlapa does offer a considered reflection: he sees a number of things that could have been done differently. It opens a pathway of shared humanity. The silence from the state side of the fence mirrors the TRC process. There too the ideologues, the promoters, the pushers, the leaders of apartheid were nowhere to be found. This silence from the former apartheid state remains a festering sore.

There is a final point, small but not insignificant. Emerging from these narratives of 'those responsible', the protagonists in the theatre of violence, there is a pervasive sense of yearning to be fully integrated back into the social order and a yearning also to be understood. Luvuyo puts this into words: 'We want to integrate so that we can build up our lives afresh, so that we can rehabilitate ourselves.' The TRC recognised this, allowing a trade-off: truth for freedom to integrate into society. Not enough took that path. We see here in these stories a wish for meaningful reintegration, a wish for a shared sense of humanity. To understand and accept those who, in the past, we have regarded as the 'other' is to show our humanity. As Gobodo-Madikizela (2003, p.139) puts it: 'Our capacity for such empathy is a profound gift in this brutal world.'

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## 10 CONCLUSION

Oedipus was indeed the tyrant of Thebes. Or was he? To the ancient Greeks, up until the last two decades of the fifth century, the word *tyrant* was not a dirty word. *Tyrant* was a technical term; a *tyrannos* was a non-hereditary ruler, whereas a *basileus* (a king) was the opposite. In ancient Greek history there were some very good tyrants.

(Programme notes for Sophocles' play *Oedipus the Tyrant* presented by Kirstenbosch & Artscape, 26 November to 21 December 2003)

### OEDIPUS THE TYRANT

What follows is drawn from Sophocles in a 1947 translation (Sophocles, 429 BC/1947).

The people of the city of Thebes were afflicted and deeply troubled. Pestilence and problems brought their city to the brink of extinction. In their despair the citizens cry for light, and healing from their wretchedness. They lament; they offer up prayers for the healing of pain. They seek from their leader, Oedipus the Tyrant, to 'restore our city to life'. Oedipus, somewhat uncertain, asks them: 'What is the matter? Some fear? Something you desire?' The answer from the people of Thebes is that there is apparently:

...an unclean thing,  
Born and nursed on our soil, polluting our soil,  
Which must be driven away, not kept to destroy us.

More to the point, it is the past shedding of blood that is the cause of the city's perilous plight. To find purification, the people need to seek the truth, to find 'those responsible' for the death of their former hereditary king, Laius.

...the god's command  
Is that we bring the unknown killer to justice.

And where will such a responsible person or persons be found? One suggestion from the helpful god was that the problem, as well as the solution, lay right there, in their own midst.

Here – the god said. Seek, and ye shall find  
 Unsought goes undetected.

Unfortunately, as is often the case, there are no direct eyewitnesses to the dreadful deed or they are not materially of assistance:

All died, save one who fled from the scene in terror,  
 And had nothing to tell for certain...

Oedipus promises, as is the case with some good and proper leaders, to 'cut to the bone', to provide the truth:

I will start afresh; and bring everything into the light...  
 There is nothing I will not do...  
 You have prayed; and your prayers shall be answered  
 with help and release.

Oedipus the leader asks for some help and information to get to the bottom of the matter. Leaders need help to get to the truth. He seeks, perhaps for a commission of inquiry, or even better, a truth commission.

If any one of you know whose hand it was...  
 Let him declare it fully...  
 Or, if some alien is known to be the assassin  
 Declare it. The informer shall have his reward of me.

The leader recognised with sharp insight that people are rather unlikely to offer up information unless provided with rewards, perhaps something like amnesty, or in the Theban case, only a relatively mild dose of banishment –

As well as the thanks he will earn from all of you.

The people, as is often the case, say that they do not know anything; perhaps the god would know the truth. Here was another difficulty; apparently you cannot compel a god to speak. It is not quite the done thing. Or alternatively, gods have a habit of refusing to speak. Then possibly they should turn elsewhere for help; perhaps summon their aging and blind sage. In Thebes, his name was Teiresias. He was duly summoned. Ironically, in their afflicted land, it was perhaps only the blind who could see:

... In your heart, if not with the eye,  
 You see our city's condition: we look to you  
 As our only help and protector

They have consulted the blind seer since

The only way of deliverance from our plague  
 Is for us to find out the killers

In their anguish they beseech their one-person commission of inquiry who could potentially provide them with the truth:

... Come, save us all  
 Save all that is polluted by this death  
 We look to you

In the way of those who can potentially see the truth, the blind soothsayer is initially somewhat reluctant; speaking the truth might only get him into trouble. Former TRC commissioners might understand this awkward position.

... O, when wisdom brings no profit  
 To be wise is to suffer...I should never have come.

The blind prophet says he will remain silent: 'I will tell you nothing.' Oedipus the Tyrant berates him, but the wise man defends himself, saying he is just the messenger; perhaps the state should solve their own problems, find their own solutions:

Do not blame me; put your own house in order.

To which Oedipus the great leader replies:

Hear him! Such words – such insults to the state.

Oedipus turns the blame on the blind soothsayer. This is a fairly standard move in such situations; it is called denial. Deny your own sins, and deflect attention away from yourself by blaming the 'other'. Oedipus says:

I tell you I do believe *you* had a hand  
 In plotting, and all but doing this act.

In some frustration, the blind man Teiresias eventually spits out the dreadful truth of the matter. Turning and pointing directly at the great leader Oedipus, he says:

*You* are the cursed pollution of this land.

And goes on to exclaim, as truth-sayers often would say, with some sense of blessed relief:

I have escaped. The truth is my defence.

But people do not believe the truth so readily or easily. Oedipus and the people are aghast and highly sceptical. As a result Teiresias has to repeat himself:

I say that the killer you are seeking is yourself.

Oedipus is quite naturally incensed and outraged at such accusations against him. Great leaders of state usually are pretty offended if you point the finger at them as being the root and source of the afflictions of that state. Oedipus is livid and resorts to another standard tactic: bad-mouthing the unfortunate one-person truth commission:

Shameless and brainless, sightless sot!

The one-person truth commission gazes sightlessly at the hapless leader, who just cannot grasp the truth, and pities him:

You are to be pitied, uttering such taunts  
As all men's mouths must some day cast at you.

The brave and strong ruler of Thebes, like many such leaders, imagines that he is invulnerable and wags his finger sharply at the sage:

Living in perpetual night, you cannot harm  
Me, nor any man that sees the light.

Teiresias then admits that the truth alone will not bring resolution. The ultimate resolution to this problem lies in the hands of the gods. This move, in some parts of the (modern) world, is called 'passing the buck'. Teiresias says:

No, it is not for me to bring you down.  
That is in Apollo's hands, and he will do it.

Oedipus Rex, now thoroughly cornered and desperate, attempts a further move, wildly trying to pin the blame on another party, in this case one named Creon, who just happens to be the brother of his own wife Jocasta. He exclaims:

Creon! Was this trick his, then, if not yours?

The blind seer, now rather tired of these constant and repetitive evasions of the truth, says it once again, in a resigned sort of way:

Not Creon either. Your enemy is yourself.

Oedipus still refuses to believe it. He is now fixated on this new version of events, that it must after all have been Creon who was behind all of this. This is a version of conspiracy theory – there must be someone operating in secret behind the surface events; someone who is ultimately plotting to overthrow the state, and to usurp the power of the state from its rightful ruler. Oedipus feels deeply betrayed, and says as much:

Must Creon, so long my friend, my most trusted friend,  
Stalk me by stealth, and study to dispossess me  
Of the power this city has given me – freely given –  
Not of my own asking – setting this schemer on me,  
This pedlar of fraudulent magical tricks, with eyes  
Wide open for profit, but blind in prophecy?

Truth-sayers, as we all know, are not and should not be bound to political masters, nor should they be on the payroll of any other patrons. Truth-sayers are, and should be, independent; seeking neither profit nor power, but pursuit only in the path of truth itself. Teiresias wearily reminds his leader of this epistemological truism:

It is not you...whom I serve;  
 Nor am I bound to Creon's patronage.  
 You are pleased to mock my blindness. Have you eyes,  
 And do not see your own damnation? Eyes,  
 And cannot see what company you keep?

Oedipus has had more than enough. When one cannot bear the truth, the only final move is to dismiss the bearer of that truth. In a considerable state of anger, Oedipus does just this:

Shall I bear more of this? Out of my sight!  
 Go! Quickly, go! Back where you came from! Go!

Teiresias: I will. It was your wish brought you here, not mine.

Oedipus: Had I known what madness I was to listen to,  
 I would have spared myself the trouble.

Truth really should have the final say. Truth should be fearless. The blind prophet of Thebes shows both of these qualities. As he takes his leave of the arena, he does have the last words in this exchange; he shows his courage:

Thus to your face,  
 Fearful of nothing you can do to me:  
 The man for whom you have ordered hue and cry,  
 The killer...– that man is here.  
 Go in, and think on this  
 When you can prove me wrong, then call me blind

*Exeunt*

In the ancient Greek version of events, the truth eventually does come out, slowly, in bits and pieces. This outcome, from the perspective of some modern writers, is rather rare. The more common outcome, as Stanley Cohen (2001) reminds us, is a continued state of denial, a retreat into self-deception, or 'disavowal', which in psychoanalytic parlance refers to the unconscious rejection of an unbearable idea and its associated emotion. In Sophocles' view, the truth emerges, painfully, unevenly, in fits and starts and not without tragic consequences. With truth comes justice and a healing of the afflicted city-state. Oedipus tears his eyes out, presumably in symbolic form; in his blindness, like Teiresias he can now 'see' the truth. He is sent into banishment. Truth and justice have both been assuaged. But this, after all, even in ancient Greece, was only a play. What about our world and our times? Dare we hope for the triumph of truth, or of justice, or even more, for the healing of our own afflicted land?

## FROM 'PERPETRATOR' TO 'PROTAGONIST'

We have attempted to provide an understanding of protagonists in what we have termed the theatre or arena of violence; a dramaturgical framework. Recognising the troublesome nature of the subject matter, we approached it from four (or five, if we consider the analysis as another lens) different angles: a multi-perspectival frame. There are different approaches to that elusive abstraction commonly known as the 'truth'. With a focus on 'those responsible' for political violence, we looked at the issue from:

- an official, 'factual' or forensic angle (the TRC),
- a public discourse view (popular media portrayals) slanted through a historical viewfinder,
- wider academic and scholarly perspectives, and
- a storytelling or narrative angle.

A major issue which emerges from this study is that the usual term employed to signify those responsible – a 'perpetrator' – is itself quite problematic. Each of the lenses or epistemological positions throws up a different picture of this creature. For the TRC, it was an individual (and only an individual) who was prepared to say s/he had committed certain acts (specifically: killing, abduction, torture or severe ill-treatment; and only those acts) which each and severally constituted the 'gross violation of human rights' (The Act, 1995). Through the lens of the public media, such people appear in various guises veering between two extremes: either as a depraved monster or as a legitimate defender of the people (our boys on the border), with the whole gamut in between. In historical terms, the species was all but disappeared in the period between 1960 and 1990. Reappearing in 1990, they were quite literally in disguise (the Harms Commission).

If the dominant media stereotype portrays perpetrators as monsters, as 'Prime Evil', then the dominant academic image is the opposite. It paints them as ordinary people (gender ignored, but assumed as male) diligently under sway of modern bureaucratic compartmentalisation (the banality of evil thesis), or as obedient to authority and conforming to social pressures (the situationist thesis). No monsters here, just ordinary people under rather extraordinary circumstances. The moral message: we could all potentially become perpetrators, depending on the situation. There is a competing view: the perpetrator as a willing, even eager, executioner driven by strong negative emotions against the 'other'. The scholarly world presents us with antagonistic perspectives.

What picture do we get from narrative approaches, from stories told by those actually responsible for politically-related violence? First, there are only a few narrative studies. Second, they also paint competing pictures. On the one hand, is a picture of the perpetrator as a victim – of organisational routines, hierarchies, pressures and secrecy, and of dominant ideologies, as well as brutal initiation rites which instil the practice of obedience to authority (Haritos-Fatouros, 2003; Huggins,

Haritos-Fatouros & Zimbardo, 2002). These narrative studies support the situationist and ordinary person line of explanation. They also correct the erstwhile neglect of gender issues by placing emphasis on masculinity as an important ingredient. On the other hand, the South African storytelling studies by Marks (2001), Straker (1992) and Campbell (1992) throw up a different picture. While victims in one sense – of Bantu education, poverty and violence at the hands of both state security agents and older vigilante groups – they are also action-oriented moral crusaders in defence of their communities and in politically-minded offensive against the apartheid state and its allies. Once again, we have contrasting and competing pictures of those responsible for political violence. In these particular storytelling perspectives, differences are partly due to the different positions of protagonists across the dividing line of power: state security personnel on the one hand and resistance activists on the other.

Apart from the conflicting images from varying epistemological perspectives and different theoretical angles, the very label or category of a ‘perpetrator’ is more muddled, contested and problematic than a first glance would suggest. We described seven grey areas which challenge or disrupt the dominant binaries of victim-perpetrator and the triangular view of *dramatis personae*: perpetrator – ‘victim’ – bystander/observer. Moreover, in Chapter 4, we raise a number of moral quandaries or dilemmas in the study of those responsible for violence, which again dislodge the simple and tidy categories. Therefore a central component of the present study aims to problematise and disrupt the complacency of the very label and category of ‘perpetrator’.

What should be done? In the face of these competing images and explanations we carve out a ‘third space’ (Shotter, 1993; Soja, 1997) beyond, or perhaps better, *between* the theoretical antagonisms of situationism versus agency (willing killers); among the grey areas between category labels of victim/perpetrator/bystander. Rather than this being seen as an alternative position, it should be read as an attempt at synthesis. Instead of the oppositional pairing of ‘either-or’, it should be seen in terms of the inclusive pairing ‘both-and’ (Foster, 1999). We argue that those responsible for violence should be regarded as potentially both victim and perpetrator, as well as both subject to circumstances/influences and active initiators. Human activity, we suggest, occurs in the ‘third space’ between active positioning and the passive concept of being positioned. The theoretical concept of ‘subjectivity’ attempts to capture a ‘third space’ between the passive subject-of-the-Queen and the active agent as subject-of-a-sentence. While it may not be the most apt terminological move, we attempt to mark this conceptual ‘third space’ by a shift away from the troublesome label of ‘perpetrator’ and towards the more ambiguous and dramaturgical term of ‘protagonist’. Furthermore, not unlike Bourdieu (1998), we view protagonists as being located (a spatial metaphor) in a field, arena or a theatre of conflict.

## THE THEATRE OF CONFLICT

Conflict was never limited only to the local territory. It fanned out to the farthest regions. The London offices of the ANC were bombed and political assassinations occurred in many countries. The liberation movements were supported from far afield – mainly Sweden and Norway (for the ANC), but also the Netherlands, Austria, East Germany, India, the Soviet Union and China (Davis, 1987). The apartheid state took the conflict, often in clandestine manner, into then South West Africa and Angola from the mid-1960s (Steenkamp, 1989), into Mozambique (Hanlon, 1984) and into a wide range of other neighbouring states (Davies, O'Meara & Dlamini, 1984; Hanlon, 1986). The liberation movements were instructed and inspired by anti-colonial, Marxist and black liberation struggles elsewhere, including in the United States of America (Frederickson, 1995). They developed over long historical gestation periods of fluctuating emphases and fortunes (Lodge, 1983; Walshe, 1987) shaped by wider political currents.

Within the African continent, the arena of conflict can be depicted in terms of four main contexts, seen as concentric circles which may overlap and intersect (Foster, 1997a,b). The first context is the Cold War, after the Second World War, pitting the capitalist and Christian western nations against the communist East, across the Iron Curtain. The Cold War was significantly played out on battlefields across Africa, spawning a virulent form of anti-communism – notably in South Africa after the NP election victory in 1948 – while liberation movements embraced to varying extents some socialist ideals. The second context involved the anti-imperial and anti-colonial struggles across Africa in general, but particularly from the 1950s and 1960s in the neighbouring states Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Angola and Namibia. From the mid-1960s onwards, state security personnel cut their teeth in militarised operations in then Rhodesia and South West Africa. On the other side, liberation movements were partly sheltered by neighbouring territories in a rather unpredictable manner. The stories of participants in this volume bear out these border-crossing movements. The third context was the apartheid state and the liberation struggle in South Africa itself, in particular the shift to armed struggle from 1961. A catalogue of the numerous organisations, their roles, aims and alignments across the pivotal dividing lines of power is given by Davies et al. (1984). The final arena of conflict was the local, immediate context involving battles between taxi organisations, between generations, between locals and the security forces and struggles over day-to-day concerns; rent boycotts, stay-aways and strikes over wages, schooling crises and consumer boycotts, all fuelled by poverty along with legislated disadvantages and discriminations of every sort. Conflict manifested in various ways across different areas and regions, each tinged with its own nuances and local power struggles.

The notion of an arena of conflict implies certain characteristics. We pick out four main features. First, it is characterised by time-space co-ordinates and trajectories.

Earlier we emphasised the importance of historical timelines as well as more local and direct sequencing of dialogical relations, spirals of revenge, escalations in brutality; continuities and discontinuities. Put simply, different forms of violence emerge over different historical time periods. Time intersects with space; over time periods, violence becomes relocated to other spaces, directed against changing targets. For example, the pattern of MK sabotage attacks in the early 1960s differs markedly from the APLA attacks taken into white suburban areas in the 1990s. Violence as a field of activity is saturated by spatial dimensions: land, territory, East versus West, dividing lines of power, home bases, safe houses, buffer zones, borders and boundaries. The racist ideology of apartheid was obsessed with and riven through by spatial segregation and separation of black and white (Foster, 2000e). While the apartheid state sought to police and regulate through spatial divisions at macro levels (separate homelands or black 'states'), meso levels, in the form of separate residential areas, and micro levels (separate park benches, beaches, bank queues), the resistance movements sought to find 'spaces' for struggle, declaring some areas as liberated zones.

A second characteristic refers to the cluster of ideologies, beliefs, ideas and counter-discourses – the scripts of theatre – that are imported from outside, but are then forged, shaped, bent and adapted to the immediate arena. The dominant ideologies that sculpted the apartheid state – racism, nationalism, Christianity, patriarchy, militarism, colonialism, segregation – were all drawn from elsewhere, but remoulded and remixed through the cauldron of local history. Similarly for the liberation movements which drew on many currents of counter-discourses from anti-colonial and anti-racist movements elsewhere, but reshaped them to form the various ideals and strategies of resistance. In some instances, the same sources influenced both sides. Patriarchy is one, as we have seen; Christianity is another example. While certain strands of Christianity were used to forge the 'apartheid bible' (Loubser, 1987), the church was also involved in the struggle against apartheid. The figure of Archbishop Desmond Tutu is a ready illustration. The notable leadership figures of the ANC in the 1950s – Lambede, Mda, Tambo, Sisulu, Mandela, Luthuli – were all practising Christians, variably devout, and all 'were affiliated with missionary churches' (Frederickson, 1995, p.243). Liberation theology was a later development.

Third, although it appears incongruent in relation to violence, conflict situations are characterised by rules, norms, guidelines and constraints just as a theatrical production has its conventions. The rules prescribe certain targets and proscribe others, as was the case for MK. Township activists were guided by moral conventions which shaped the identity position of a 'comrade', constructing particular targets as legitimate. As we claimed earlier, even instances of 'spontaneous' crowd violence are guided by regularities, by tacit guidelines directing targets. In the narratives of our present respondents, there was quite a bit of talk about the appropriate rules and conventions for different agencies of the state security apparatus:

police, intelligence, military. Others talk of accidents, when things ‘went wrong’ and departed from the rules. However, as Billig (1996) reminds us, we are not only rule-following creatures. We break rules, we stretch them, we circumvent them. We also argue about rules and make new ones. The 1985 Kabwe Conference of the ANC involved just such debate and argument before emerging with a new guideline to permit ‘soft’ targets. Rules can be misunderstood and misinterpreted. All sides of the conflict reported such misinterpretations between leadership and supporters. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to see the field of violence as not characterised by complex and often tacit norms and conventions. It is the tacit conventions of patriarchy that suggest that men should be the purveyors of violence.

A fourth characteristic is that of a cast of actors, the *dramatis personae*. They have different roles, different identity positions. Only some actually commit deeds of violence, but they are aided and supported by others in the cast. Backstage, out of view, are others who make financial arrangements, write scripts, plan and direct. They might argue and debate about the correct interpretation of the text. There may be misunderstandings between front stage and backstage. Onstage actors may begin to play it their own way. Those backstage may deny knowledge of what their actors are really getting up to. The audience may be rapt with attention, or bored, distracted and indifferent. They may side with some actors and be critical of others. They may be confused and not really understand what is before their eyes. Things might go wrong. Despite the script, the staging, the pomp and uniforms, the lights might fail, the arena plunged into darkness, disarray. It might take a sharp critic, one bent after the truth, to point to the fiasco, to show that the emperor has no clothes, that the grandiloquent grandstanding was for nothing.

In our depiction of the South African arena of conflict, we sketch four different forms of violence: state-orchestrated; in support of the state; reactive or bi-directional; and lateral or horizontal, in which either side of the principal antagonists may act with violence toward their ‘own’ people. Some might argue that a further nuance may be required to capture the violence expressed by the Afrikaner right-wing groups. While initially in support of the apartheid state, directing violence against black people, after 1990 – in viewing negotiations as a betrayal of Afrikaner self-determination – they swung round and directed violence against the state. In our view, this would be an instance of horizontal or lateral conflict. Despite its multi-sidedness, it was always around the central axis of power resistance. As we said before, it was never an equal conflict. It took place precisely because of the lack of equality, the absence of democracy, the failure of the white rulers to heed the cries of the oppressed people. Perhaps if the white rulers had responded to the call for a national convention in 1961, many lives would have been spared; we would not be writing this book.

Perhaps we should say a few words about the nuances of terminology. The term ‘struggle’ came to be ‘owned’ by those involved on the side of the oppressed; it was

used in the collective sense of 'our struggle for liberation', abbreviated into the 'liberation struggle' and again to just 'the struggle'. The term should not be used glibly to refer to the actions of both sides similarly. It is not quite clear, particularly nowadays, what those on the apartheid side would call the conflict. From the late 1970s, the official parlance was a 'total strategy' against a 'total onslaught'. Euphemisms abounded: it was about 'security', about 'maintaining law and order', about maintaining 'stability' in the geographical 'sub-region', never about maintaining political dominance or white privilege. Even during their reign the very term 'apartheid' became an embarrassment for the white rulers; a series of bizarre euphemisms was employed to label the apartheid system: 'separate development', 'co-operative coexistence', 'co-operation and development', 'parallel development', 'multinational development', 'independent homelands', 'own affairs' and 'general affairs' (Omond, 1985). These terms act as modes of deflection, evasion of responsibility, denial of reality.

In contrast to the semiotic evasion of apartheid rulers, one is struck forcibly by the open and honest admission and the clarity of reasoning provided by Nelson Mandela in his famous courtroom statement from the dock in the Rivonia trial in 1964. He ends with these words:

I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die. (In Johns & Hunt Davis, 1991, p.133)

## THEORETICAL MATTERS

Once established that the object of inquiry is violence from a multi-sided perspective, some of the leading theoretical accounts fall into question. Both the banality thesis and the situationist version are better at understanding top-down forms of violence, from the side of the state and its security or repressive apparatus. While some elements may be useful (for example the emphasis on organisational dynamics and norms, and the notion of sequencing), these approaches do less well in accounting for bottom-up violence. For the bottom-up situation, some analysts (for example, Marks, 2001) draw on a mixture of social movement theories (not reviewed here), but these approaches, while important in understanding the contours of resistance movements, give less attention to issues of violence. Two other extreme versions sometimes appear to account for reactive violence. For those, as it were, in favour of the uprising, violence may be regarded in a Fanonesque celebratory fashion, along with a mystical idea of killing as a cleansing agent. For those against the liberation movement (as was the case with Le Bon, 1896), violence is accounted for in terms of pathology, as a form of 'deficiency' (sick), 'dysfunction' (mad) or 'deviance' (bad). We wish to steer clear of either of these extremes.

Taking cognisance of the problematic binaries of agency versus structure, of the 'individual' versus the 'collective', of the semiotic dualism in the concept of the 'subject', we draw on a range of theories (including social identity theory, social constructionism and new theorising on crowd action), along with situationism and Goldhagen's willing agency, in an attempt towards a new synthesis able to account for multi-directional violence. We call this a *relational* theory. It argues chiefly that violence is less the property of individual actors than it is an emergent (time-related) product of complex relations *between* people and collectives (space-related). To balance this structural emphasis, it simultaneously attempts to restore a sense of the active agency of actors through the concept of entitlement. A relational approach also implies two other characteristics of our relatedness to others: a power dimension which involves a hierarchical arrangement of the distribution of economic, social and symbolic capital, and a moral dimension which speaks to the legitimacy or illegitimacy of those power arrangements and refers to moral aims and ideals (Harré & Gillett, 1994; Tajfel, 1981).

The relational model sets out four sets of factors. Although the four elements are in common, they may differ in form on either side of the core axis of power.

#### IDEOLOGICAL FACTORS

These are factors in which the term 'ideology' refers to ideas, discourses and practices that produce and sustain relations of domination. From the social movements of resistance, there are counter-discourses which speak of alternative moral ideals, and propose different power relations. Ideological factors work to summon up and create a range of different identity-positionings for persons. Ideological factors also work to define and shape the image of the 'other'; the enemy. Particular subject-positions are taken up due to the relation between ideology (or counter-discourses) and concrete persons. Lastly, due to a process of 'ideological articulation' (Miles, 1989), different ideologies may overlap and reinforce each other. For instance, racism may resonate with nationalism to create a virulent form of xenophobia. Christian nationalism is another example of ideological articulation.

#### ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

These act as a conduit for ideological practices, provide their own demands and dynamics and provide the context for manufacturing particular identities. While organisations form the site of the normative pressures eliciting compliance (norms, conformity, obedience to authority, bureaucracy, rituals, habits, loyalties, commitment), they are also sites for mobilising resources (economic, communicational, cultural, political, symbolic). Organisations arrange for funding, pamphlets, memos, instructions, meetings, badges, uniforms, activities and weapons. The dynamics of organisations are likely to differ across the power divide, with greater

bureaucracy, compartmentalisation, formal roles and hierarchies and economic resources among state security groups; clearly, they have different aims and intentions. Organisations also constitute the vehicles for planning of tactical strategies, actions and operations, whether they be repressive or insurrectionary. Secrecy is a key ingredient in organisational steps towards violence. Insulated and separated from others (even families), living secret lives, enables a moral disengagement from usual social conventions and constraints, so facilitating the possibility of violence.

### SEQUENCING, SPIRALS AND DIALOGICAL VIOLENCE

The key proposal here is that people learn to do aggressive actions through sequential steps. Verbal denigrations may lead to physical acts. Temporal arrangements occur at both macro (historical) and micro levels; immediate sequels in interaction. Violence may escalate in spirals and cycles of revenge. Emotions from long-past events such as wars and grievances may surface in the present. Almost all violent acts are preceded by prior hostility and aggression. Memories form a potent fuel for this temporal dimension, which is not simply linear. It may also involve breaks, ruptures, new departures, continuities and discontinuities. It also entails relational or interactional sequencing between groups, as suggested by the concept of a 'dialogue of violence'. This suggests sequences of meaning, attributions, interpretations, misunderstandings, negotiations; talks break down, doors are closed, there are attributions of bad faith, violence ensues. As we have said before, violence is fundamentally an interactional and relational phenomenon. It emerges through sequences and spirals in which violence itself is a mode of dialogical interaction.

### AGENCY AND ENTITLEMENT

People commit acts of violence, we propose, not only because they are pressured to do so (which is undoubtedly the case), but also because they feel entitled to. This is an effort to restore agency, in contrast to theoretical accounts which treat protagonists in terms of victimhood. Entitlement ensues when a number of salient ideological subject-positionings intertwine, co-mingle, resonate and articulate in a volatile mix to create a sense of moral deservingness to commit violence. We have given examples in earlier chapters. It is an enabling device which permits actors to do otherwise indefensible acts with a sense of righteousness. It is a relational concept, since it also positions particular 'others' as deserving of their fate because they are 'uppity', transformed into the 'aggressors' or seen as a 'threat'. The form and the processes producing entitlement, we argue, are quite different across the dividing lines of power and inequality. To oversimplify, entitlement among the oppressed is driven by a sense of rightfully deserving *equality*, whereas for the oppressors it is shaped by a sense of deserving *superiority*. They are different forms and meanings of the concept. Nevertheless, we claim that entitlement is a key spur

towards violence. This component may be the most controversial aspect of our proposed relational model.

## UNDERSTANDING PROTAGONISTS

What is the picture that emerges from protagonists' own stories? How do they portray themselves and their positions in the theatre of violence? Do we emerge with any better understanding of the wellsprings of politically-oriented violence? For the purposes of this summary we divide the narratives into three clusters – those of the state security personnel, from members of the liberation movements and township activists – since the major lines of difference in accounts manifest across these clusters. We note further that the story of John falls into a category of its own. Although his story shows some elements in common with other state security people, he is the only one of the 11 cases we considered (including Ronnie and the anonymous Security Branch agent) who shows full acknowledgement ('claiming' that he did it, and that what he did was wrong) and is unable to find peace with himself as a consequence.

### SELF-PORTRAYALS

How do they portray themselves? Most significantly, across the board, none view themselves in terms of the category of 'perpetrator'. Even John, who concedes that 'I actually murdered somebody', shies away from the term. In reflective mode, viewing himself as a double person, he repeatedly describes the other John 'who was a policeman'. He only uses the term 'perpetrator' once in an abstract discussion of reconciliation as 'bridge building' between the 'previous perpetrators' and their 'former enemies'. All the other stories on the state security side evade mention of specific acts, and evidence a variety of different forms of deflection; there is, as it were, no need for the term. It is avoided; it is not applicable to them. In two cases, they become rather upset if there is a hint of their complicity. On the other side, particularly among those in the liberation movements, there is vehement resistance against the applicability of the label of 'perpetrator', as employed by the TRC, to their own actions. Among township activists, they see themselves as either involved in a just cause as moral and physical defenders of their communities or they deflect upwards; the leaders who cajoled them into acts were the real perpetrators. The label is not applicable to themselves. What is our response? We as outsiders could say that these are illustrations of denial, of post hoc justifications. They might well be. But if we really listen to these protagonists, they are, across the board, telling us that they did not fit that subject-position, that category, which we as outsiders like to call a 'perpetrator'.

Perhaps this is not altogether surprising. The label of perpetrator carries a good deal of moral opprobrium and aspersions. It casts those whom we attribute with

the category-label to the margins, or beyond the margins of our common sense of humanity. It might be fine for us but it is not so for them. It is not their story. To a person, the overall narratives show that they wished to be included, wished to be understood. If we listen and understand (some might not want to), we can feel and grasp an appropriate measure of empathy. As human beings, the empathy is warmed if there is a 'sign' from the other: a signal of remorse, a sign of some regret, a sign that it could have been done differently. It is regrettable that there are so few such signs from those (apart from John) of the state security side.

If they were not 'perpetrators' (reiterating our problematising of the label), then how did they see themselves? In general terms, across all narratives, they were active and willing agents, not people under coercion. There were of course other actors in the South African situation who were directly coerced. White male military conscripts faced heavy penalties if they failed to report for 'duty'. John comes closest to this scenario. He joined the police voluntarily, but as an alternative route to military conscription. He is the one later who has regrets. But even John was willing and actively seeking when he volunteered for a further stint on the border. Situational pressures, such as heeding calls from leaders, were clearly operative, but these stories show a willingness, as 'ducks to water', which resists any interpretation of coercion.

### THREE CLUSTERS OF ACCOUNTS

Apart from a broad sense of agency, how do they describe their actions? Here the accounts cluster into three groupings. State security personnel generally defined their actions in work- and organisation-related terms: being a professional and good soldier, maintaining law and order, doing their professional duty, trying to 'figure out' who would 'cross the line between legitimate protest and revolution'. They were often more clear about what they were against than what they were for, other than doing their professional duty, guided by their organisational mandates. In contrast, those in the liberation movements depict their actions more in terms of commitment, honour, sacrifice, facing hardships, with a strong sense of collective endeavour, a collective struggle. While clear enough what they were against – the apartheid system – they are also more forthright in what they were struggling for: freedom, liberation, justice, dignity, political equality. For those in the third category, the township activists, while aware of the bigger issues, their actions are framed in more local pursuits, defence of their own communities, moral crusaders shaped by their subject-positions of 'youth' and 'comrades' to clean up their communities from a range of wrongdoers, chiefly their own people who had gone astray. All three categories depict their own actions in moral terms. They know who and what they are against, but the moral configurations differ across the three clusters.

In their self-portrayals, are there influences from their period of growing up? No, not really in the sense of any notable dysfunctions or abnormalities that would

shape them into violent propensities, with the one possible exception of Jerry. In general they are pictures of ordinary people. But yes, quite profoundly, if one considers the materiality and experience of growing up in such a power-divided society (Burman & Reynolds, 1986; Dawes & Donald, 1994). For whites, the experience was of fairly normal schooling followed by some further training, then entry into careers. For black children, the experience was one of hardships, poverty, adversity, disrupted and poor schooling, and either witnessing or experiencing a good deal of violence, often at the hands of security police. Across the dividing line of apartheid, black and white, these were two different worlds. These separate worlds channelled our participants into different sides of the conflict. All participants do mention some youthful experience that shaped their life trajectories. Families, friends, schooling and influential contacts guided some into the security apparatus. For those whites who crossed the line into the resistance movement, there were notable influences from schooling, family, friends and youthful experiences that guided them into this unusual position. And among the oppressed people, their very hardships along with shining inspiration in the form of notable leadership figures, and direct experience of state security repression, led along the path towards organisational commitment. Resistance-oriented organisations themselves constituted a considerable site and vehicle for further political learning.

What we have then in terms of self-portraits is a picture of quite ordinary people, albeit as youth already profoundly shaped by engendered experiences across the separated lines of apartheid. Immediate and local influences of friends, family and role models, as well as in some cases the more distal and heroic calls from influential leaders (for those in the liberation movements), form the enabling and constraining devices that open pathways like ducks taking to water into particular organisations. All of the participants are, at a young age, embroiled in the organisations that carry their life trajectories into the arena of violence. The narratives paint self-portraits, in the main, of quite sensible, balanced, likeable, reasonable people shaped by their identity positions (male-female; black-white) in historical circumstances. They all provide moral grounds for their actions, and all resist self-ascription of the perpetrator label. For those who wish to see 'deviance, deficiency and dysfunction' (Griffin, 1993) as the root cause of political violence, they will not find it here. What they will find is difference; sharp differences between people along ideologically-powered divisions of gender, 'race', class – but principally across the dividing lines set out by the apartheid state. If these are relatively normal people, what do their narratives say about the tilt towards violence?

## ORGANISATIONAL AND IDEOLOGICAL ISSUES

Perhaps the most persistent factor which emerges from these stories is the power of positioning-in-organisations. Organisations, located at the intermediate level between the private sphere (family; interpersonal relations) and the public sphere

(the state), are in many respects the hallmark of modernity. And within modernity, state-oriented organisations, such as the military, police and intelligence (quasi-autonomous regions in principle under tutelage of the political organs of state), are the principal engines of violence, of the repressive arm of the state. When the state puts its 'engines of violence' to work against its citizenry, then alternative organisations emerge to counter state tyranny with reactive violence. It takes place through historical sequencing and shifting dialogical patterning. When dialogical connection breaks down entirely, there are only two pathways: complete subjugation or a turn towards reactive violence. Mandela's 1964 speech from the dock provides the clearest picture of the path taken by oppressed people in South Africa. This general picture is supported by our narratives. On the one side are the engines of violence of the apartheid state, on the other side a set of organisations set on reactive violence. That the overall pattern of violence escalates, changes shape and eventuates in multi-sided violence, reaching a peak in the early 1990s, is a secondary story.

Across the board here, the role of organisations, in and of themselves, is considerable. It is primarily organisational dynamics that shape and propel individuals' actions. The larger ideological factors, particularly those of racism, patriarchy, capitalism (or classism) and Afrikaner nationalism (alternatively Christian nationalism), are less directly operative in the narratives. It is not because they are not at work. Rather, they work to structure and order South African society. They resonate together to culminate in the more immediate ideological form: the apartheid state. They make their way into stories through coded terms, through the rhetorical device of synecdoche, which substitutes a part for the whole (Adams, Towns & Gavey, 1995) – the terms 'black' and 'white', 'MK' and 'SB' being sufficient to denote the whole system of oppression and exploitation. A brief word on class: it rarely makes its way into these narratives and when it does, it is also through the device of synecdoche using terms such as 'poverty', 'hardship' and 'suffering', partly because in the South African context class exploitation was largely, if not exclusively, synonymous with 'race'. Ideological factors, while apparently in the background, nevertheless hum their pervasive presence in these texts through the rhetorical device of synecdoche. It is the same with the counter-discourses from the oppressed side. Words and acronyms refer to whole clusters of ideas, principles, ideals and strategies of resistance movements. Part-words such as 'Mandela', 'Tambo', 'MK' and 'non-racialism' signify the whole Congress movement; 'Biko' or 'BC' denotes the black consciousness movement; while 'Sobukwe', 'APLA' and 'settler' signify the Africanist tendency of the Pan-Africanist movement. 'Comrade', 'SDU' and 'UDF' signify ANC alignments, while acronyms pointing to Azania make reference to BC and PAC affiliations. Acronyms for countless youth and student organisations which end in the letters CO (SASCO, SAYCO, SOSCO, SOYCO) signify Congress alliance, while those beginning with AZ or PA (AZASM, PASO) usually signal PAC alliance. Ideological and counter-ideological factors pervade these texts; they require decoding.

Ideological factors are also channelled through organisations themselves. They appear in organisations most frequently in the form of everyday artefacts: badges, uniforms, slogans, t-shirts, logos, handshakes, greeting rituals, eating rituals, drinking rituals (or taboos, as for youthful ‘comrades’), war cries (‘One Settler, One Bullet’), anthems and songs, supportive substances (alcohol and drugs for security force foot soldiers; *sangomas*, *muti* and alcohol for those in the SDU/SPU clashes), religious rituals (Bible-readings and officially-appointed clergy for the security forces; Tutu, Boesak and Muslim clerics who led funerals, marches and rallies for the UDF) along with flags, emblems, insignia and salutes (the ritual of saluting the national flag for the security forces; the raised clenched fist for the ANC). Even weaponry signified ritual organisational distinction: so-called ‘traditional weapons’ for the IFP; AK47s for the liberation movements; R1s, hand grenades and larger weaponry for the SADF; handguns, water cannons, tear gas, batons and *sjamboks* for the SAP. Both rallying cries, such as the ANC call of *Amandla* (power) and response *Awethu* (is ours), and the state call of *Ons vir jou Suid-Afrika*, as well as everyday sayings and terminology (‘terrorists’ to denote guerrilla enemies; ‘people’s power’, ‘ungovernability’ and ‘*impimpi*’ in the townships; ‘witches’ in the rural areas) are potent yet simple ways of channelling ideology. All of these everyday, readily understandable meaning-devices serve ideological functions of painting up the ideals and heroics of our own organisational alignment and simultaneously defining the enemy; with deadly consequences. Conspiracy rhetoric, which paints pictures of sinister, evil knots of mastermind schemers plotting behind the scenes in secret, is likely to escalate the sequencing to violence. The state use of ‘communist’, the township use of the term ‘*impimpi*’, and the rural area use of terms denoting witchcraft, all signal the workings of conspiracy rhetoric. Because they are seen as sinister, have considerable powers and operate with hidden hands, the images strike fear in everyday hearts and total elimination seems the apt response.

While organisational matters were pertinent in all stories, they operated differently across the three clusters. State security institutions were more bureaucratic, compartmentalised with formal hierarchies, national structures and paid careers; the majority of respondents spent their whole careers in these organisations. Although all drew firm distinctions between state policies and their own organisation’s mandate, they were paid servants of the apartheid state, with continuous career paths. The notion of professionalism typified their accounts, and this professionalism was also the principal warrant for their actions. State security organisations were organised into compartmentalised units of increased secrecy. Inside the SAP was the more elite and politically-oriented Security Branch, and inside the Security Branch even more secretive and militarised units, such as Koevoet or C1 (or C10; the code name changed in the 1990s). Inside these units were even more secret missions or ‘operations’, with code names such as Operation Zero-Zero, which blew up young activists with zero-timed hand grenades.

The military and intelligence organisations were also typified by sequentially more covert units such as the CCB and the DCC, and the ultra-secret chemical and

biological warfare programme, Project Coast, headed by Dr Wouter Basson (Burger & Gould, 2002). Although these covert units were structured in terms of shadowy networks that stretched across the country and reached into highest levels of the state through the State Security Council, the most deadly 'operations' were carried out by small units, usually only a handful of men. These covert units and operations were often lavishly funded, but nevertheless also resorted to illegal actions (for example, diamond smuggling) to supplement resources. At the furthest reaches, these covert operations were far less supervised and monitored, but operatives consistently argued that their acts were authorised from the top. The top political brass consistently maintained that they did not provide authorisation, that these were rogue elements. Take your pick. Over historical time and particularly through the 1980s, all sectors of the security apparatus, as well as the state in general, became steadily more militarised, suffused with the tactics and strategies of counter-insurgency warfare. Along with militarisation, secrecy and insularity come various forms of masculinity. The narratives show two forms of masculinity, a 'military-bureaucratic' form, characteristic of official and leadership structures, and a gung-ho 'action man' more typical of the ground-level operatives. Both of these ideal forms, which might also co-mingle, may be required in the convoluted path to violence.

By contrast, the liberation movement organisations were voluntary, less formal in structure and hierarchy and perhaps more driven by strongly committed persons expressing loftier ideals. Accounts showed positive sentiments of commitment to organisational goals and a strong spirit of collective endeavour. In contrast to state institutions, liberation movements were not viewed in terms of careers or paid jobs (though some may have been supported), but in terms of sacrifice and hardships for the just cause. The liberation movements were poorly resourced. Communication lines were long and insecure, often stretching halfway across Africa, and hampered by tight security and secrecy. Secrecy in this case took a different form; it was necessitated by the official status of organisations as banned, outlawed and illegal. In the stories, a number tell of direct experience of state repression, underscoring the real dangers and hardships they faced. Nonetheless, like state institutions, accounts suggest that the organisations themselves were a strong guide for individuals' actions. Organisations were the site for the development of political aims and ideals, strategies and tactics, normative guidelines and constraints, and the construction of particular identity positions. As with state institutions, resistance organisations became sequentially more militarised, progressively calling for more militant actions, changing tactics to include 'soft' targets, the precise meaning of which was a source of misinterpretations. With this militarisation comes a form of ideal-type masculinity we have called the 'warrior-hero', seeing violence as not necessarily desirable, but nevertheless necessary and the only viable strategy. Like the state security structures, acts of violence were most often undertaken by small mobile units under conditions of high secrecy and danger. For young warrior-heroes, this heady mix of action, danger, excitement, commitment and secrecy could be a potent lure.

For township activists, organisations were also important channels for their actions. Such structures seemed to be of two types, shaped by temporal sequencing; a shift from the 1980s into the 1990s. The ANC/UDF-aligned student and youth organisations in the 1980s were characterised by a strong sense of political consciousness and moral righteousness. Organisations formed the site for recruitment, mobilisation, campaigns and action. Showing at times only tenuous connections with national leadership structures, the youth organisations were largely self-initiated efforts. Although sharing the broader concerns with their parental bodies, their actions were far more directed towards local community concerns. With waves of leaders disappearing into detention, dwindling support under less experienced leadership and some political confusion in the negotiation period, youth organisations lost some of their coherence and direction; some actions were hijacked or infiltrated by youth with other agendas. Guns became more freely available and patterns of violence changed. The tempo of political animosity between the IFP and ANC escalated, both calling for militant units to defend their communities. These SDUs/SPUs were far more loosely organised, less fuelled by coherent political ideas, and criss-crossed by a range of other identity-politics, including criminal elements. They seemed mainly driven by cycles of revenge. They claimed to have been exploited by (in these accounts) rather shadowy leadership figures. Driven by local animosities, tenuous connection to political bodies and guided by very little training, these self-defence units became vehicles for the distribution of weapons more than anything else. Once again, violence was often committed by relatively small units of young men who imagined that wielding weapons of destruction would render them heroes. This resulted in unguided and vengeful cycles of lateral violence.

## RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTIONS

All narratives provide rich and sometimes contradictory accounts of participants' responsibility. As discussed earlier, only one account (John) offers full acknowledgement. From the remaining narratives a general pattern is clear. All respondents involved in the liberation movement and township conflict admitted to involvement in violence, taking responsibility, but also citing justifications. Those on the state security side generally evaded responsibility, using a number of rhetorical devices. If we use O'Connor's (1995) scheme of a continuum of agency which ranges from 'claiming' through 'problematizing' (or puzzling) to 'deflecting', then state security personnel primarily adopt the strategy of deflecting, while all the others position themselves as claiming, but also use some deflecting devices. Only one account, that of the SPU fighter Vision, adopts the strategy of problematizing, saying that he really didn't know what made him do it.

On the state security side, narratives employ three modes of deflection:

- passing prime responsibility upwards, to politicians;
- sideways, in claiming that it was other organisations, or other people in their own organisations, that were primarily accountable for the vaguely stated things that went wrong;
- downwards, with various forms of victim-blaming. To the limited extent that they take responsibility, it is provided with a professional or organisational warrant: 'I was doing my professional duty' as in 'maintaining law and order'.

By contrast, liberation movement narratives take responsibility, in some instances claiming pride in their actions, which are then justified in terms of the liberation struggle. Agency was also expressed in terms of a collective rather than a personal sense. The SDU/SPU agents also use the strategy of claiming, but in this case they also deflect upwards, that is, attribute blame to unnamed leaders who used them for fomenting violence. Despite claiming, when it actually came to direct expression of violent acts, almost all respondents employed a variety of rhetorical devices to minimise the significance of the act, evade direct reference or deflect away from their own personal agency and responsibility.

What functions are served by these different patterns of warranting? It serves the general function of presenting themselves as all quite reasonable people. Given the current historical juncture of the ignominious demise of apartheid and the moral 'victory' for the liberation movements in the form of political democracy, it would appear as rather unreasonable, even embarrassing, to state openly that what you did was in defence of the apartheid state. All state security personnel devote considerable narrative energy in shifting away from this position. (Some would say that this is an outright case of denial.) Instead, they present themselves as reasonable people by deflecting responsibility in all possible different directions, saying in effect that they were only doing their job: a professional warrant. On the other side, given the moral victory, those from the liberation movement are able to say 'yes I did it', then shift towards the more collective sense of agency, 'we are proud as a movement for what we have achieved'. We did what only reasonable people would have done, given our circumstances.

Those involved in township violence have less noble justifications at hand, other than defending their communities. The IFP supporters have even less justification, since they were in cahoots with the state, therefore the retreat into 'puzzlement' mode: 'I really don't know'. Given the sheer abundance of their violence, in order to appear as reasonable people, they evade responsibility by deflecting downward – victim-blaming, saying that the 'others' started it, 'we were only defending our people'. To appear as reasonable actors, people make reference to the 'field' or 'theatre' of prevailing moral circumstances. To present oneself as a reasonable person, one is taking up a moral position in a wider theatre of conditions. Finally, given the moral taboo against murder in almost all fields of human endeavour,

when it comes to describing actual accounts of violence, all of our participants employ deflecting devices.

## ENTITLEMENT AND IDEOLOGICAL SUBJECTIVITIES

Although participants are certainly 'ordinary' people, there is a considerable degree of evidence in the narratives that people also commit violence because of a sense of entitlement. Our argument is that ideological subjectivities combine, intertwine and articulate together to create subject positions of entitlement; and that entitlement is a key ingredient in the commission of violent acts. Put another way, people not only do violent deeds because they are pressured to do so (a passive construction of agency), although this may be part of the story, but also because they feel deserving to do so (an active depiction of agency); that it is their right to do so. Entitlement works in two dimensions. It constructs our own sense of righteous agency (I or us) and a sense of the 'other' (she/he or they) as deserving of this action. We suggest that entitlement is evident in all of the narratives, but that the form of entitlement differs across the power dimension of apartheid.

On the state security side, the intertwining ideologies of racism/classism (since they were almost synonymous), patriarchy, Christian nationalism or Afrikaner nationalism, the history of colonialism, and segregationism, all feed into apartheid mentality to create a sense of what we could call 'superior entitlement'. The general sense of this is contained in the phrase 'how dare you' resist. This was reinforced by religious dogmas supporting the idea that the apartheid nation was divinely ordained (Loubser, 1987; No Sizwe, 1979), while the increased militarisation of the state security forces (Grundy, 1988) pushed the legitimation of violence. The militarised security forces felt quite entitled to put down what they regarded as insurrection by any means possible. Particular 'others' were defined as deserving of their fate, notably those who were 'terrorists', 'communists', who fomented 'unrest', or who crossed the fine line between legitimate protesting and revolutionary action. These 'others' were depicted as deserving of their ill fate, either because they were a threat or because they were contemptible. The most significant aspect of righteousness was provided through an organisational warrant; their professional job entitled their actions. They voiced enjoyment of their jobs and pride in their organisations' activities. Some accounts emphasise the elite status of their units, as well as feeling 'powerful' and like 'hot shots'. As mentioned, particular forms of masculinity contribute to this superior entitlement.

On the other side, alternative discourses on race and class, various strands of African nationalism, black liberation and anti-colonialism, socialism and trade-union movements, as well as a militant form of masculinity in the image of the 'warrior-hero', all resonated to develop what we have called a sense of 'reactive entitlement'. Narratives told of voluntary agency, willingness and strong collective

sacrifice and commitment to righteous organisational aims – a struggle for equal rights, justice and democracy. Stories evidenced pride in the moral righteousness of their actions. Few reported regrets. Combining identity positions of ‘youth’, ‘comrades’, and masculine militancy (‘soldiers’, warrior-heroes), young males eagerly took to violence as moral crusaders and moral defenders of their communities. Here too they were aided and encouraged by religious leaders who preached the alternative messages that ‘apartheid is a heresy’ (see De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio, 1983) and of liberation or black theology (see Tlhagale & Mosala, 1986). Here too the calls from leaders for increased militancy (to render townships ‘ungovernable’, forward to ‘people’s power’ and ‘people’s justice’) both valorised the gun and escalated the legitimisation of violence as an appropriate means to a justified end. Here too ‘others’ – particularly the security forces and those who collaborated with the apartheid regime – were seen as deserving their fate. ‘People who have committed grave crimes deserve necklacing... there is nothing as effective as necklacing’ (cited in Marks, 2001). Although these forms manifest differently across the power divide, we claim there is sufficient evidence from these narratives to argue that a sense of moral deservingness, fuelled by ideological and counter-ideological rhetoric, is a significant trigger in the path towards political violence.

Taken overall, we think there is quite substantial evidence to support our proposed relational model of the dynamics of political violence. There is sufficient supportive material to suggest that ideological factors, organisational dynamics, temporal and dialogical relations, as well as identity positions and entitlements all resonate in particular local combinations. Clearly other factors are also at work. Ideologies emerge through and in defence of certain material conditions; people are mobilised through communication systems that require resources; acts of violence require the material resources of weaponry. Such aspects are less likely to make their way into the drama of narrative performances – they are implied, taken for granted, behind the scenes. They are still at work. The whole plot, the assemblage of actors and players, is stitched together across the central axis of power-resistance. From this centre stage of the web it spins out to the furthest reaches, the tragic or heroic minutiae of lost lives at the margins, never quite forgotten, but dimmed in memory as the curtain closes. We may not readily recall the sad death of George Mkomane on 13 February 1991 (see Chapter 1), but the general arena of political violence from the 1960s to the 1990s will leave an indelible mark on South African history and will shape the future. If the violence of apartheid and its resistance struggle has left ugly scars on our landscape (some may still argue that it had its values), a key question remains. Can the troubled and afflicted land be healed?

## TOWARDS RECONCILIATION?

In its wake, violence leaves the scars of trauma not only on victims and their close ones, but also on protagonists. As Oedipus was scarred, so do a number of the narratives here talk of trauma and loss; one in particular is a storyline of tragedy. Yet there is also some talk of contrition, of remorse, of requesting forgiveness. If reconciliation requires some sort of 'sign' towards mutuality, then these are encouraging signals. On the other hand, the relative lack of such signs from former state security personnel bodes less well. Certainly one cannot generalise from a handful of stories, but the lack of signals of wrongfulness from former rulers is not comforting. Is remorse a requirement for reconciliation? Not necessarily, but some sort of reflection that the past could have been done differently, that wrongs were committed, a gesture towards the 'other', certainly would help the process.

On the matter of reconciliation, these narratives present something of a mixed bag. There are conflicting views on the TRC as part of a healing process: some are positive, some are sharply critical, others are ambivalent. We all know that the TRC could not in itself stitch up the wounds of hundreds of years of division and conflict. But it may have been more valuable, particularly in recording victims' stories and in putting the spotlight on certain hitherto shrouded secrets, than some people are prepared to recognise (see Gibson, 2004). On a more positive note, none of the participants seem against the general idea of reconciliation. While there are sceptics and signals that it still has a long way to go, through their use of metaphors all accounts show that they understand the concept, even if they differ on what it requires. Redistribution of material resources is given far more emphasis in narratives from the oppressed side. If restorative justice is the kernel of reconciliation (De Gruchy, 2002), then the relative lack in state security accounts of the need for transformation of material resources and life-opportunities is indeed troublesome. Again we cannot generalise, but we note this concern. In terms of economic disparities and inequalities, we are still an afflicted land; there is still a long way to go. Nevertheless, there are enough positive signs of hope. If one modality of healing requires that protagonists of violence be fully reintegrated into society and shared humanity, then there are positive signs among these narratives. While reconciliation as a final achievement is always likely to be beyond our grasp, then the signs here indicate that we are positively on the right road even if there is a considerable route ahead. There is yet hope.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have provided a portrayal of one arena of political violence viewed from different vantage points in the audience. The various angles spotlight different scenes, differing *dramatis personae* across the dividing line of the proscenium arch. Is there a common perspective, a final truth? We doubt it if, 50 and more years

after, the Holocaust still throws up new angles, more arguments, different interpretations. Nevertheless, through the general theoretical framework which allows for differing emphases from the varying sides, we hope it shapes a fresh light on the stage.

Tyrannical rulers end their reign; their departures give us hope for a new peaceful, prosperous, equitable order. Creon says to Oedipus: 'Command no more. Obey. Your rule is ended.' And the partly-healed people of Thebes have the final say:

Then learn that mortal man must always look to his ending  
As none can be called happy until that day when he carries  
His happiness down to the grave in peace.

*EXEUNT*

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

|        |                                                    |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------|
| AC     | Amnesty Committee                                  |
| ANC    | African National Congress                          |
| ANCYL  | African National Congress Youth League             |
| APLA   | Azanian People's Liberation Army                   |
| ARM    | African Resistance Movement                        |
| Avstig | <i>Afrikaner Vryheidstigting</i>                   |
| AWB    | <i>Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging</i>                |
| AZAPO  | Azanian People's Organisation                      |
| AZASM  | Azanian Students' Movement                         |
| BBB    | <i>Blanke Bevrydingsbeweging</i>                   |
| BWB    | <i>Boereweerstandsbeweging</i>                     |
| BOSS   | Bureau of State Security                           |
| CCB    | Civil Co-operation Bureau                          |
| CLOWU  | Clothing Workers' Union                            |
| CODESA | Convention for a Democratic South Africa           |
| COSAS  | Congress of South African Students                 |
| COSATU | Congress of South African Trade Unions             |
| CP     | Conservative Party                                 |
| CYL    | Congress Youth League (also ANCYL)                 |
| DCC    | Directorate Covert Collections                     |
| DP     | Democratic Party                                   |
| FAK    | <i>Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge</i> |
| IFP    | Inkatha Freedom Party                              |
| IJR    | Institute for Justice and Reconciliation           |

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|       |                                                |
|-------|------------------------------------------------|
| IP    | Independent Party                              |
| JMC   | Joint Management Centres                       |
| MDM   | Mass Democratic Movement                       |
| MK    | <i>Umkhonto we Sizwe</i> (Spear of the Nation) |
| NGK   | <i>Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk</i>          |
| NGO   | Non-Governmental Organisation                  |
| NIA   | National Intelligence Agency                   |
| NIS   | National Intelligence Services                 |
| NP    | National Party                                 |
| NSMS  | National Security Management System            |
| NUSAS | National Union of South African Students       |
| PAC   | Pan-Africanist Congress                        |
| PASO  | Pan-Africanist Students' Organisation          |
| PFP   | Progressive Federal Party                      |
| SABC  | South African Broadcasting Corporation         |
| SACP  | South African Communist Party                  |
| SADF  | South African Defence Force                    |
| SANDF | South African National Defence Force           |
| SAP   | South African Party                            |
| SAP   | South African Police                           |
| SAPS  | South African Police Service                   |
| SASCO | South African Students' Congress               |
| SASO  | South African Students' Organisation           |
| SAYCO | South African Youth Congress                   |
| SOSCO | Soweto Students' Congress                      |
| SOYCO | Soweto Youth Congress                          |
| SB    | Security Branch                                |
| SDU   | Self-Defence Unit                              |
| SPU   | Self-Protection Unit                           |

|       |                                         |
|-------|-----------------------------------------|
| SSC   | State Security Council                  |
| SWAPO | South-West Africa People's Organisation |
| TRC   | Truth and Reconciliation Commission     |
| UDF   | United Democratic Front                 |
| UP    | United Party                            |



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## INDEX

- abduction(s) 3, 6, 9-10, 15-16, 37, 69, 240  
 abuse, sexual 69  
 adult literacy 148, 314  
 African National Congress (ANC) xii, 4, 6-7,  
 13-18, 20-21, 25-26, 30-33, 36-37, 39-  
 41, 43, 47, 49-50, 60, 67, 76, 82, 85, 86,  
 88, 105, 110, 116-120, 122, 131, 146,  
 150, 160, 162, 163, 165, 167-168, 192-  
 198, 200, 204-206, 208, 210, 212-213,  
 219-220, 230-231, 233-234, 239, 248,  
 252-254, 256, 263-264, 266-268, 278,  
 281, 293-294, 296-297, 299-300, 302,  
 305, 313, 323-325, 332-333, 335  
 African Resistance Movement (ARM) xii, 61  
 African traditionalism 298  
 Afrikaner nationalism 332, 337  
*Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging* (AWB) xii, 9-  
 10, 19, 45, 49-50, 53, 76, 248  
 AIDS 271  
*Amabutho* 76  
*Amadoda* 76  
 amnesty 3, 5-6, 8-12, 14-15, 18-19, 21-23, 25,  
 40, 46, 53, 100, 105-106, 125-126, 151,  
 171, 176, 206, 217, 221, 226, 236-239,  
 242, 248-252, 275, 304, 309, 317  
 applicant(s) 96, 125  
 application(s) 5, 15, 17, 41, 169, 206, 226,  
 239, 250  
 hearing(s) 53, 85, 86, 98, 100, 275  
 procedures 94, 300  
 process 98, 122-123, 226, 239  
 Amnesty Committee (AC) xii, 1, 3, 8, 10, 12-  
 13, 19, 21, 24-25, 124, 221, 226, 242,  
 248, 250, 275  
 Ann (pseudonym) 176-204, 276-282, 284-  
 285, 289-291, 308, 312-314  
 Anti-Terrorist Squad 129  
 apartheid 3, 4, 6-7, 9, 15-17, 19-20, 24, 42-44,  
 49, 67, 69-72, 78-81, 99, 101, 103, 155,  
 159, 162, 171, 173-174, 184, 188-189,  
 193, 199-200, 226-227, 230, 238, 244-  
 246, 276, 281, 285, 294, 297, 299, 303,  
 304, 306, 309-310, 315, 322, 324-325,  
 331-332, 336-338  
 crimes 49  
 government 226  
 regime 60, 107, 125, 338  
 security forces 238, 245, 246  
 state 71, 103, 244, 294, 303, 315, 322, 325,  
 331-332, 336  
 system 62, 276, 330  
 Apelgren, Greta 46  
 Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) xii,  
 6, 17-18, 41, 45-46, 64, 76, 86, 94, 96,  
 99-100, 102, 226, 227-228, 232-235,  
 237-248, 252, 298, 299, 324, 332  
 armed struggle 61, 114, 119, 161, 218, 234,  
 236, 237, 279, 295, 302, 304, 323  
 arson 16, 237  
 Ashley Kriel Unit 206, 215, 217  
*askari* 4, 15, 25, 47, 51, 60, 105  
 assassinations 37, 43, 70, 117, 151, 284  
 A-team 76, 88  
  
 Bantu Education 43, 240, 297, 322  
 Barnard, Ferdi 27, 37, 39, 45, 49, 50, 51, 52  
 Barnard, Niel 86  
 Basson, Wouter 27, 41, 46, 171, 200, 334  
 Bekebeke, Justice 17  
 Bellingan, Michael 251  
 Benzien, Jeffrey 48, 251  
 Berlin Wall 168  
 Bernstein, Hilda 35  
 Bezuidenhout, Ronald 37  
 Biehl, Amy 3, 18, 40, 46, 49, 51, 86, 310  
 Biko, Steve 3, 16, 25, 36, 72, 106, 182, 188,  
 205, 229, 295, 332  
 Bisho massacre 40, 60  
 Black Cats 76  
 black consciousness 70, 72, 106, 182, 332

- Boipatong  
 killers 50  
 massacre 39-40, 51  
 bombing 34-35, 40, 46, 51, 106, 206  
 Khotso House 34  
 Magoo's Bar 35, 46  
 Motherwell 51  
 Bopane, Stanza 16, 106  
 Bosch, André 122  
 Bosch, Izak 251  
 Botes, Pieter 37  
 Botha, Calla 37  
 Botha, P.W. 46, 113, 114, 116-117, 120-121,  
 166, 204, 226, 264, 282  
 boycotts 32-33, 62, 263, 273, 297, 323  
 consumer 263, 323  
 Brazilian torturers 74  
 Breytenbach, Jan 157, 204  
*Broederbond* 162, 186, 198, 204, 281, 313  
 Bunting, Brian 35  
 Bureau of State Security (BOSS) 36, 73, 184  
 bureaucracy 56, 73, 183, 190, 327, 328  
 Burger, Staal 37, 46  
 Buthelezi, Mangosuthu 5, 14, 86, 264, 273
- Calata, Fort 38  
 Calvinism 187, 290  
 capitalism 71, 208, 332  
 Chikane, Moses 35  
 Christian nationalism 71, 327, 332, 337  
 Christianity 291, 324  
 CIA 174, 213  
 Civil Co-operation Bureau (CCB) xii, 37, 73,  
 165, 171  
 classism 337  
 Clothing Worker's Union (CLOWU) xii, 206,  
 209, 210  
 Coetsee, Kobie 121-123, 206, 220  
 Coetzee, Dirk 37, 42, 51, 54, 200  
 Coetzee, Johan 37, 116  
 Cold War 164, 167, 323  
 colonialism 71, 233, 324, 337  
 communism 74, 78-79, 109, 128, 132, 162-  
 163, 167-168, 278, 281, 291  
 conflict, political viii, 94, 96-97, 99, 323  
 Congress of South African Students (COSAS)  
 xii, 105, 150  
 Congress of South African Trade Unions  
 (COSATU) xii, 106, 162, 253
- Conradie, Frans 135, 137  
 Conservative Party (CP) xii, 5, 10, 19  
 conspiracy 78, 319  
 ideology 78  
 mentality 78  
 theory 319  
 constitution, interim 6, 8, 40, 174, 286, 289  
 constructionism 327  
 Convention for a Democratic South Africa  
 (CODESA) xii, 38, 146, 264, 273  
 Cornelius, Quentin 64  
 Criminal Law Amendment Act 30  
 Criminal Procedures Act 25  
 Cronjé, Jan 105  
 Cronwright, Maj. Anthony 35  
 crossover agents 3, 64  
 Croucus 217  
*Cry Freedom* 106  
 Cuna, J.A. 39
- De Jager, Chris 8, 10  
 De Klerk, F.W. 5, 37, 38, 40, 43, 53, 86, 120,  
 121-123, 151, 166, 168, 169, 171, 173,  
 204, 226, 234, 237, 245, 263, 264, 310  
 De Kock, Eugene 3, 15, 25, 27, 37, 41-43, 47,  
 49-50, 52-53, 73, 87, 89, 135, 137, 199,  
 251, 308  
 De Villiers, Dawie 121  
 death marches 59  
 death squad(s) 8, 36, 37, 60, 70  
 decolonisation 67  
 Deegan, John 64, 103, 126-149, 276-283, 285,  
 287, 288-292, 308-310, 312, 313-314,  
 329-330, 335,  
 dehumanisation 57  
 deindividualism 80  
 Delmas treason trial 35  
 Demobilisation Integration Special Pension  
 and Political Prisoners Committee 241  
 democracy 20, 22, 180, 199, 336, 338  
 Democratic Party (DP) xii, 163, 186  
 denial 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 199, 200, 292,  
 318, 320, 326, 329, 336  
 implicatory 83  
 interpretative 83  
 literal 83  
 depression 48, 126, 138, 142, 220, 225, 309  
 Derby-Lewis, Clive 5, 40, 43, 46, 48  
 Desai, Barney 36

- Desai, Siraj 218  
detention 4, 39, 70, 117, 182, 206, 209, 210,  
215, 217, 219-220, 240, 251, 277, 284,  
296, 299, 335  
Dingane trap 235  
Dingane 252  
Directorate Covert Collection (DCC) 39, 73,  
151  
disclosure 93-94, 170  
discourse analysis 275  
discrimination 277  
domination 3  
‘Dr Death’ 27  
Du Plessis, Lourens 41  
Du Toit, Heinrich 156  
Du Toit, Wahl 251  
Dutch Reformed Church 176
- Early Learning Centre 46  
Ebrahim, Ebrahim 35  
egotism 70, 305  
Eichmann, Adolf 55  
entitlement 68-70, 72, 79, 277, 288-292, 302-  
306, 327, 337-338  
Erasmus, Gerrit 251  
Erasmus, Paul 128, 251  
Esau, June 49  
essentialism 66  
ethnicity 28  
European Commission on Human Rights 26  
Evans, Gavin 47  
Ex-Political Prisoners’ and Torture Survivors’  
Committee 206, 221-222
- factionalism 232  
First, Ruth 35  
forced removals 43, 240  
forgiveness 95, 148, 173, 223, 268, 307, 309,  
310  
Forsyth, Olivia 74  
Freedom Charter 30, 72, 299  
Freikorps 74  
French Revolution 295
- gangsterism 6  
gatekeepers 96-97, 99  
Geldenhuis, Jannie 165  
gender 6, 17, 20, 28, 70, 74, 277  
genocide 58, 60, 77
- Goldstone Commission 39, 41  
Goldstone, Justice Richard 38  
Goniwe, Matthew 38  
Gqomfa, Luyanda 226  
Green Berets 76  
Griebenaauw 210  
gross human rights violations 1, 3, 7, 8, 14,  
20, 24-25, 29, 35, 43, 47, 71, 85-86, 97,  
99, 253, 278, 293, 308, 321  
Grosskopf, Hein 45, 53, 61  
Group Areas Act 207  
guerrilla war 279  
Gunn, Shirley 206-225, 276, 277, 293-295,  
298-300, 303, 307, 309-310, 312-314
- Hammond, George 251  
Hani, Chris 5, 19, 40, 43, 48, 54, 110, 214, 220,  
222  
Hanton, Larry 251  
Harms Commission 37, 128  
Harms, Justice 51  
Harnden, Joy 74  
Haroon, Imam 36  
Harré, Rom 90  
Harris, John 34  
Hassan Mall 8  
hazing 73  
Heidelberg Tavern 64, 235-236, 252  
hit squad(s) 37, 40, 128, 146  
Hitler 54, 240  
Hlongwane, Israel 41  
Holocaust 55-59, 90, 340  
Holomisa, Bantu 43  
human rights violations 1, 3, 7, 8, 14, 16, 20,  
24-25, 29, 35, 43, 47, 71, 85-86, 97, 99,  
151, 170, 176, 206, 226, 240, 253, 278,  
293, 308, 321  
Human Rights Day 9  
Human Rights Media Centre 221, 224-225  
Human Rights Violations hearing 206
- ideology 71, 327  
illegal gatherings 34  
illegal immigration 109  
*impimpis* 62, 79, 333  
individualism 66  
*Indunas* 255, 257  
informer(s) 3-4, 17, 62, 64, 113, 117-118, 120,  
128-129

- Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) xii, 4-5, 14, 16, 18, 21, 26, 32-33, 36, 38-41, 60, 76, 86, 88, 253, 254, 258, 260, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 273, 296-297, 305, 333, 336
- Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) xii, 96, 98, 102
- Intelligence Service(s) 94, 183, 193, 195, 198, 201
- Internal Security Act 32, 150, 251
- interrogation (s) 133, 134, 135, 137, 210, 288, 296
- intimidation 118, 129
- Jack the Ripper 54
- Jeremy Rabkin Centre 214
- Jerry (pseudonym) 261-273, 276, 294, 295, 296, 298-299, 301-302, 305-308, 311-312, 314, 331
- Jonas, Bongani 219
- Jonathan, Leabua 109, 110
- Joseph, Helen 30
- Kabwe Conference 119, 325
- Kasrils, Eleanor 61
- Kasrils, Ronnie 25, 45, 61, 86, 214, 293
- Kathrada 30-31
- Kekes, John 91
- Khampepe, Sisi 8
- Khotso House bombing 34, 106, 206
- Khulumani Support Group 206
- Khulumani* 251
- kidnapping 41
- killing 3, 6, 9, 11, 15-17, 20, 25, 33, 38-40, 51, 59, 61, 85, 147, 159, 233, 242, 253-254, 256, 267, 279, 291, 326
- King Williams Town Golf Club attack 226
- Koevoet 40, 48, 64, 73, 103, 113-114, 126, 135-139, 141, 147, 150, 167, 278, 283, 291, 333
- Kok, Jacob 251
- Kotze, Hendrik 251
- Kriel, Ashley 215, 251
- Kriel, Hernus 41
- Kruger, Jimmy 31, 191, 205, 282
- Kulman, Luvuyo 242-251, 293-295, 299-304, 307, 309, 312-315
- Labour desk 190, 192
- labour migration 273
- labour strikes 273
- Lambede 324
- land repossession 294
- landmines 117-118, 284
- Le Bon 80, 82
- Le Grange, Louis 53, 116
- Lekota, 'Terror' 35
- Letlapa, Happy 41
- liberation movement(s) 4, 45, 61, 94, 99, 103, 194, 218, 240, 244-245, 277-278, 292, 296-299, 304, 306, 323, 326, 329-330, 333-336
- limpet mines 117-118, 160, 217, 284
- Luthuli 30, 295, 324
- Maarman, Skuse 17
- Madikizela-Mandela, Winnie 4, 27, 43, 47
- Magoo's Bar bombing 35, 46
- Maharaj, Mac 150
- Makwetu, Clarence 236
- Malan, Magnus 37, 41, 50, 121, 226, 236, 249, 251
- Malatji, Paris 35
- Mamasela, Joe 4, 37, 43, 47-51, 54
- Mampe, B. 31
- Mandela, Nelson 8, 30-31, 33, 39-40, 51, 120, 146, 203, 234, 241, 264, 295, 324, 326, 332
- Marxism 168
- masculinity 71, 74-77, 81, 287-288, 291, 301-302, 322, 334, 337
- hegemonic 74-76
- Masondo, Andrew 85, 86
- Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) xiii, 211
- Matthee, Serg. K.J. 35
- Mbali, Herbert 110, 150
- Mbambo, Romeo 41
- Mbeki, Thabo 1, 5, 9, 43, 53, 88, 192
- Mbokodo* 76, 88
- McBride, Robert 34, 45-46
- McCarter, Frank 251
- Mda 324
- Mdlalose, Frank 14
- media ix, 7, 12, 22-23, 27-28, 30-31, 33, 35-36, 42-46, 52, 55, 64, 85, 92, 118, 185, 217, 236, 321, 354
- black 36
- restrictions 185
- popular 44, 52, 55, 321
- Meiring, Georg 163, 165, 169
- Mentz, Wouter 48

- Meyer, Roelf 121  
Mhauri, Sicelo 38  
migrant labour laws 5  
migratory labour systems 43, 240  
militancy 302  
militarism 71-72, 74, 287-288, 291, 301, 324  
military conscription 208  
Military Intelligence 73, 100, 151, 156, 158, 169, 181, 199  
Mitchell, Brian 25, 39, 51  
Mkhumbuzi, Bassie 48  
Mkize, Gcina 41  
Mkomane, George 9-10, 338  
Mkonto, Sparrow 38  
modernisation 55  
Molefe, Popo 35  
Motherwell bombing 51  
Motshabi, Paul 53  
Moumbaris group 110, 150  
Mpahlwa, Siphon 222  
Mpetha, Oscar 52  
Mphahlele, Letlapa 5, 25, 43, 49, 103, 226-241, 276, 293-295, 298-304, 306, 309, 312-315  
Mudge, Dirk 113  
*muti* 255  
Mxenge, Griffiths 37  
My Lai massacres 57
- Narkedien, Zahrah 54  
narrative(s) viii, ix, 22-24, 95, 100, 102-104, 177, 275-277, 281-284, 286-287, 289-292, 297, 322, 329-332, 334-338  
analysis 275  
approach viii, ix  
device(s) 282, 292, 297  
studies 322  
National Intelligence Agency (NIA) xiii, 186, 190, 194, 198-199  
National Intelligence Services (NIS) xiii, 4, 96, 99, 168, 176, 178-180, 182-183, 185-200, 202, 204-205, 217, 278, 280-281, 285  
National Management System (NMS) 73, 119, 121  
National Party (NP) xiii, 5, 29-30, 44, 65, 79, 86, 99, 122, 154, 159-164, 179, 186, 193-194, 196, 204, 264, 286, 323  
National Peace Accord 36, 38, 260, 270  
National Security Council 121  
nationalism 290, 324, 327  
Nazi 55, 59, 74, 78, 90, 240  
Ndlozi, George 86  
Ndzima, John 53  
necklacing 338  
‘necklace’ killings 33, 61  
‘necklace’ murders 4-5, 33, 56, 305  
*Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK) xiii  
Neethling, Lothar 37  
Nel, Frans 45  
New Unity Movement 231  
Ngcakula, Charles 214  
Ngoepe, Bernard 8  
Ngqulunga, Brian 37  
Ngubane, Ben 14  
Ngudle, Looksmart 31  
Niehaus, Carl 25, 45, 54  
Nobel Peace Prize 40  
Nofemela, Butana Almond 36-37, 47  
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) xiii, 91, 224  
Nonxuba, Sichumiso Lester 252  
NUSAS 179, 181-184, 188, 205, 284  
Nyanda, Siphwiwe 150
- objectification 52  
Oedipus 316-320, 339, 340  
Omar, Dullah 46  
Operation Great Storm 17  
Operation Koevoet 135  
Operation Vula 26, 122, 150  
Operation Zero- Zero 333  
oppression 3-4, 70, 179, 216, 245-246, 249, 277, 293-295, 332  
oral history 224
- Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) xiii, 4-5, 7, 14, 17-18, 21, 25, 35, 40, 43, 46, 49, 60-61, 76, 86, 226, 230-238, 240-241, 244, 248-250, 252, 294-295, 298-302, 305, 332  
Pan-Africanist Students’ Organisation (PASO) xiii, 17-18, 314, 332  
passivisation 292  
pass laws 8, 43, 240  
patriarchy 71-72, 81, 287, 324, 332, 337  
perpetrator(s) viii, ix, x, 1-14, 16-17, 21-25, 27-29, 33-36, 40, 42-47, 49-50, 52-54, 58-64, 66, 69, 72-73, 80, 83-85, 87, 89-

- 93, 97, 99, 101, 115, 148, 250, 264, 269, 293-294, 298, 307, 311-312, 321-322, 329-331
- Phama, Michael 41
- Phama, Sabelo 232
- Pokela, John Nyati 232-233, 252
- police 8, 31, 35, 146, 210, 299
- brutality 8, 299
  - harassment 210
  - repression 146
  - shootings 31
  - violence 35, 280
- political assassinations 70
- political conflict viii, 94, 96-97
- political violence viii, x, 17, 25, 42, 53, 55, 58-60, 62, 65-68, 77, 79, 87, 101, 263, 321-322, 329, 338-339
- Pollock, Gary 41, 48
- positivism 24, 90-91
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder 48, 126, 143, 147, 278
- post-modernism 22
- post-structuralism 22
- poverty 3, 11, 294, 305, 314, 322-323, 331-332
- Prime Evil 4, 27, 50, 321
- Proclamation AG 9 115
- Project Coast 73, 334
- Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 1
- Public Safety Act 30
- Quattro camp 85-86, 88, 200
- racialisation 277, 290
- racism 4, 10, 17, 35, 69, 71, 177, 184, 196, 202, 277, 324, 332, 337
- Rape Crisis 91
- rape 69, 83
- reconciliation 95, 148, 171, 223, 238, 260, 268, 310-313, 329, 339
- Reconnaissance Commando 156, 204
- relational approach 92-93
- religion 28
- Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee 206
- reparations 148, 222-223, 312
- rituals 75
- Rivonia trial 31, 35, 326
- Robben Island 252
- robbery 267, 307
- routinisation 57
- Ruiterweg* 162, 204
- Sabotage Act 30
- sabotage 117, 284
- Sachs, Albie 35, 52
- Salie, Aneez 206, 212, 215-217, 221
- sanctions 217
- sangomas* 228, 255, 277,
- Schoeman, Hendrik 121
- Schoon, Willem 37, 251
- Second World War 55, 107, 178, 207, 323
- secrecy 73, 75-77, 79, 81, 84, 209, 300, 303, 321, 328, 333-334
- Section 29 of the Internal Security Act 209, 217, 251
- Security Branch (SB) xiii, 98, 105-106, 109-110, 112, 115, 118-119, 124-126, 128-133, 135, 139, 141-142, 146, 150, 278, 282, 284-285, 287, 289-290, 333
- security police 45, 47, 50, 60, 94, 99, 122, 181, 206, 218, 331
- segregation 324
- segregationism 337
- Seipei, Stompie 50
- Self-Defence Unit (SDU) xiii, 4, 16, 26, 62, 72, 77, 82, 86, 99, 253, 257, 260, 263, 265-266, 292, 296, 298-299, 303, 305-306, 332-333, 335-336
- Self-Protection Unit (SPU) xiv, 4, 6, 62, 77, 99, 257, 260, 292, 296, 298-299, 303, 305-306, 333, 335-336
- sexism 71
- sexual abuse 69
- Shaka 247, 252
- Sharpeville day 214
- Sharpeville massacre 9, 30, 294-295
- 'Sharpeville Six' 17
- Shell House 34, 40
- Sibeko, David 231
- Sisulu 30-31, 324
- situationism 56, 58-60, 91, 322, 327
- Slippers, Hendrik Johannes 9
- Slovo, Joe 61, 198, 205
- Smit, Basie 41
- Smuts 152, 155
- snowball sampling method 96

- Snyders, Petrus 251  
 Snyman, Harold 41  
 Sobukwe, Robert 231, 252, 294-295, 332  
 social-constructionism 22  
 socialism 337  
 South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) xiii, 53, 147  
 South African Communist Party (SACP) xiii, 7, 30, 40, 162-163, 195, 205, 231, 253  
 South African Council of Churches 106, 206  
 South African Defence Force (SADF) xiii, 15, 18, 33, 38, 43, 74, 86, 151, 160, 170, 204, 206, 235, 245, 251, 257, 286, 333  
 South African Institute of Race Relations 40  
 South African National Defence Force (SANDF) xiii, 218-219, 226, 233, 250, 257  
 South African Student's Congress (SASCO) xiii, 205, 332  
 South-West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) xiv, 64, 112-114, 115, 117, 131, 135-136, 139, 250, 280, 288, 290-291  
 Soweto uprising 111, 117, 295  
 Special Services Battalion 174  
 spies 4-3, 16, 62, 64, 74  
 SRC 179, 181-182, 204  
 St James Church 40, 48-49, 226, 235-236, 252  
   massacre 40, 48-49  
 Stalin 54  
 Stassen, Piet 137  
 state of emergency 116, 119  
 State Security Council (SSC) xiv, 73, 166, 334  
 stay-aways 62, 273, 323  
 Steyn Commission 151  
 Steyn, Pierre 204  
 storytelling viii, ix, 84, 275, 321-322  
 strikes 33, 62, 323  
 Struwig, Lt. Andries 35  
 Strydom, Barend 27, 35, 45-47, 51  
 Suppression of Communism Act 30  
 surveillance 128, 210-211, 278  
 Suzman, Helen 31  
*swart gevaar* 34, 133, 280  
 Tambo, Oliver Reginald 30, 50, 216, 295, 324, 332  
 taxi violence 4-5, 262-263  
 Terre'Blanche, Eugene 45, 47, 49, 51, 53  
 Terrorism Act 30  
 terrorism 32, 34-35, 46, 128, 132, 159, 237, 278-281  
 Terrorist Investigation Unit 73  
 'third force' 36, 39-41, 50, 121, 146, 151, 168, 171, 253  
 Thirion, Chris 151-175, 276, 279, 281-282, 284-287, 289, 291, 310, 312-314  
 Three Million gang 76, 88  
 Toaster gang 76, 88  
 torture 4-3, 6, 8, 15, 16, 32-33, 39, 60, 69-70, 75-76, 85-86, 106, 132-133, 200, 217, 222, 224, 279, 299  
 tourism 136, 272  
 township activists 329, 330, 335  
 township violence 93, 292, 335  
 trade union federation 106  
 trade union movements 337  
 trade union(s) 18, 36, 60, 191, 218  
 treason trials 35  
 tribalism 230, 232, 298  
 Trust Feed killings 25, 38-39  
 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)  
   ix, xiv, 1-9, 11-20-23, 25, 27, 29, 32-33, 49-50, 53, 64-65, 73, 85-89, 92, 94-102-103, 105, 107, 117, 123-126, 129, 147-148, 151, 168-171, 176, 199, 202, 206, 217, 221, 223, 226, 238-243, 248-249, 252-253, 258, 268, 275-276, 280, 300, 309-310, 312, 314-315, 317-319, 321, 329, 339  
   TRC Report 1-2, 5, 8-20, 22-24, 64, 66, 68, 73  
   Amnesty Committee (AC) xii, 1, 3, 8, 10, 12-13, 19, 21, 24-25, 124, 221, 226, 242, 248, 250, 275  
 truth viii, 1-2, 6, 10-11, 22-25, 84, 89-90, 102, 147-148, 158, 163, 185, 188, 198, 201-203, 238, 311-312, 315-321, 325, 339  
 Tsafendas, Dimitri 34  
 Tshikalange, David 'Spyker' 37  
*tsotsis* 67, 230  
 Tutu, Desmond 170, 238, 241, 252, 324, 333  
 Tutu, Trevor 249, 252  
 ubuntu 300  
*Ulibambe Lingashone* 200-201  
*Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) xiii, 15-16, 26, 31-32, 36, 39, 53, 74, 76, 86, 94, 96, 99, 105-106, 110, 111, 117, 159-160, 162,

- 206, 211, 218, 223, 234, 251, 279, 281, 295, 308-309, 324, 332
- United Democratic Front (UDF) xiv, 16-18, 32-33, 35, 38-39, 60, 67, 86-87, 116, 120, 196, 253, 273, 283, 290, 299, 332-333, 335
- United Nations 7, 9, 238, 252
- United Party (UP) xiv, 152, 154, 176
- 'Upington 26' 17
- Van der Merwe, Johan Velde 105-125, 107, 206, 276, 279-280, 282, 283, 284, 286, 289, 291, 309, 313, 314
- Van der Westhuizen, Joffel 41
- Van Heerden, Andries 251
- Van Loggerenberg 165
- Van Niekerk, Marius 147
- Van Rensburg, Hans 41
- Van Sly 35
- Van Wyk, 'Spyker' 35
- Van Zyl, 'Slang' 37, 46, 224
- Venter, Rina 206, 220
- Vermeulen, Nicolaas 251
- Verwoed 34
- victim(s) viii, ix, 2-4, 8, 12-14, 17, 21-24, 27, 31, 34, 42, 47, 49-50, 52, 54-55, 57-58, 60, 62-66, 68-69, 71, 75, 83-84, 87, 89-82, 102, 147-148, 206, 223, 248-249, 269, 283-285, 288, 290, 304, 307, 309-312, 321-322, 336, 339
- victim-blaming 292, 306-307, 336
- vigilantes 72, 75, 322
- Viljoen, Constand 86, 160-161, 226
- violence viii, x, 1, 3-8, 18, 24, 27, 29-31, 33, 35-36, 38-39, 40-41, 44, 56-61, 63-64, 69-72, 74-76, 78-79, 85, 87, 89, 91-99, 101-102, 112, 116, 118, 120-121, 124, 147, 151, 165, 233, 237, 253, 254-256, 258, 262, 263, 267, 269, 270, 271, 275-278, 280-284, 286, 288-296, 299, 301-307, 311, 314-315, 321-322, 324-326, 328-329, 331-339
- bi-directional 60-61
- criminal 67-68
- crowd 56, 62, 80-81
- gender dynamics in 74
- horizontal 60-61
- 'lateral' 70
- mass 57, 68, 77
- police 35, 280
- political 42, 53, 55, 58-60, 62, 65-68, 77, 79, 87, 101, 263, 322, 329, 338-339
- public 35, 38
- security-force 92
- spontaneous 73, 79-80, 82, 87
- taxi 262-263
- township 93, 292, 305, 336
- train 34
- 'tribal' 254
- witchcraft related crowd 81
- Vision (pseudonym) 254-260, 271-272, 293, 296, 298, 300-302, 305, 306, 308, 309, 312, 314
- Visser, Maj. 35
- Vlakplaas 6, 15, 37, 41-42, 47-50, 60, 73, 76, 87, 198-199, 217, 280, 308
- Vlok, Adriaan 38, 106, 117, 123, 206, 220, 221
- Vorster, John 166
- Vrye Weekblad* 37, 39, 40
- Walus, Janusz 5, 40, 43, 48
- Webb, Eddie 37
- Webster, Gordon 34
- Weekly Mail* 37
- Wessels, Leon 65
- Willemse, Douw 251
- Winter, Eric 41
- Winter, Gordon 36
- Wit Wolwe* 34, 76
- witchcraft 5-6, 19-20, 22, 61, 79, 81, 333
- related crowd violence 81
- related killings 61
- Witdoeke* 60, 76, 88
- Woods, Donald 36
- World Trade Centre 40
- World* 36
- Youth Day 53
- Zeelie, Charles 251
- Zero Zero 105
- Zionism 273
- Zokwe, Sithembile 106
- Zulu India 136
- Zulu Yanky 136
- Zulu, Enoch 35
- Zulu, Prince Gideon 41