



WAR ZONE: Medics carry a victim to safety in Tokoza.

PATRICK DE NOIRMONT, Southlight

Living in the shadow

WHEN I heard that my niece Eunice had died the first thought that crossed my mind was: what about her children? The rest of my family focused on the cause of her death – we were told it was poisoning – but I couldn't stop thinking about how young she was, that at the tender age of 32 her life had been snatched away from her.

It was when I started thinking about her funeral, and how I would get there, that I woke up to reality. The first time that I had to travel from Durban to Newcastle by taxi was a nightmare.

In the first place, one has to be careful when travelling by taxi not to touch on any issue that may sound political, lest you say something wrong about either the ANC or the Inkatha Freedom Party. So, passengers who would normally be very chatty in an effort to kill time, clam up.

More serious was the sudden realisation that I might not reach my destination. I woke up to this possibility when I saw that, for the first 20 kilometres or so, passengers were vigilantly looking out of the windows – for snipers, I realised with a shock.

So, faced with the necessity of travelling to Richards Bay for my cousin's funeral, I was once more gripped with fear about what might happen to me on the way. Once I had got over that fear, through a process of reasoning, another fear gripped me.

Eunice was my sister's child, so my mother and all my brothers and sisters would be at the funeral. What if we were attacked? I was cold with fear. (Touch wood, nothing happened.)

They say there is nothing so fearful as fear itself. This is how blacks have to live – in the shadow of death, fearing that someone somewhere is coming for them. They do not know why. They do not know when, or how.

Nomavenda Mathiane writes about violence from the (relative) safety of the suburbs



They wonder: is there a pattern that they may perhaps study and so avoid being attacked?

Some people think that those of us who have moved to town have fled from the violence and that we are safe in the suburbs. The truth is that, while we may live in town, we spend a great deal of our lives in the townships.

Our relatives are in the townships; we still go to church in the townships; our children have their friends in the townships and they go there frequently. Many black people who have moved to the suburbs spend half the night lying awake waiting for the children to get back from the townships.

I can tell you, at that time of the night, the last sound you want to hear is the shrill of the telephone. When you hear the sound of a motor-car engine on the driveway you heave a sign of relief: he is back home; you pull up the blankets and sleep.

For some time I used to think I was the only one in the house who feared being attacked. Then I discovered that my children had also given it a great deal of thought.

It happened like this. One day I asked the little one what she would do if we were attacked. To my amazement, she said the first thing she would do would be to turn the

electricity main switch off. Why? I asked. Because a stranger would find it difficult to find us in the house if it was dark, as he wouldn't know the geography.

It is a terrible indictment of our times that small children must plan for escape from attack. And for the average adult citizen, to lie awake at night fearing

attack, wondering when or how the killers will come, I think is to die a death worse than dying.

The two incidents that I've mentioned are minor compared to what others have to go through: people who travel daily by train; people who live in shacks; some of the people living in hostels who are not part of the crowds that run amok in the townships, killing people.

Sometimes, as violence continues to snuff out the lives of ordinary people, I get angry and find myself asking: is it not perhaps because ordinary people are vulnerable and not insulated as political leaders are? If the leaders were exposed to danger as people in the shacks and trains are, would solutions have been found by now?

Black leaders are forever complaining that the government does not act promptly to protect black people, but the same can be said about them. They drag their feet when it comes to dealing with violence. They continue to play into the killers' hands by continuing to pull asunder when they ought to be uniting.

The truth of the matter is that, whether we can point to a third force or not, it is Africans who are dying and nobody else. What will it take for the politicians to come together to

put an end to the bloodshed?

Another problem is the question of the wrong people in the peace structures. Or perhaps it's that South Africans have become too influenced by Hollywood actors! The point is that on the day that the National Peace Accord was signed, one would have thought it was some kind of Hollywood awards day. A stranger to the city certainly would not have known that the people gathered at the Carlton Hotel, dressed to the nines, were there about peace.

This is quite apart from the fact that, even while the Peace Accord was being signed, there were people brandishing dangerous weapons outside the building. Not only that: what was the outcome (apart from giving police a blank cheque to do as they please in the black areas without supervision from any party other than the government)?

Now, two years later, the same people com-

plain about the fact that the police are not impartial. What's new about that? Is it only now that the police have become partisan?

As if this were not enough, the people in the peace structures have again copied the American way of doing things by producing a song about the need for peace. Couldn't that money have been put to better use?

We know blacks like singing but couldn't that money have been used to improve the quality of life of the people whose lives have been shattered by violence? Couldn't that money have been used to finance projects such as the one started by the Rev Dandala, who is working with hostel residents and has succeeded in calling a truce between warring factions?

Sometimes when I lie awake at night I find my thoughts turning to what Mahatma Gandhi said to a Hindu man distraught about the violence he had committed against

Muslims. Gandhi said that, as a penance and a means to find peace within himself, the Hindu man should find a Muslim child orphaned by the violence and raise that child as his own.

However, there was a further condition, Gandhi said: the Hindu man was to make sure that the child was raised as a Muslim.

Well, you might say, we can't apply that here: it's too much of a tall order to expect an ANC man to raise an Inkatha child as his own, and not make that child over into an ANC child.

But, is it such a tall order? Maybe this is something for politicians to ponder. How different are they, after all, the ANC person and the Inkatha person? They are both black; they both claim to be against apartheid. Just a thought.

Nomavenda Mathiane is a journalist currently with Capital Radio in Durban.

Peace needs more blacks

Sobantu Xayiya gives a view on the composition of the peace structures

THE National Peace Accord is endeavouring to restore normality in strife-torn areas. However, despite leaders of warring factions shaking hands, exchanging smiles, posing for the press and pledging to observe codes of conduct, violence continues unabated.

I think some honest introspection on the part of the National Peace Secretariat would be worthwhile at this stage, particularly a review of its regional and local structures. Emphasis should be placed on appropriate personnel.

Regional and local structures seem to be teeming with white personnel. This is most obvious during marches. I don't think this staffing situation is helpful to the peace process, rather that it might complicate our problems.

The objectives of the accord will not be achieved only by monitoring marches. There are codes of conduct that await urgent implementation in the ravaged communities. This requires more than mere observation, it calls for active participation by members of the communities concerned.

They must get the opportunity to go through the painful process of political tolerance. Painful because former political

adversaries have to come to terms with their differences and accept them. We should remember that not long ago the violence was classified along traditional apartheid stereotypes - black on black, Zulu vs Xhosa, migrants vs urbanites - which shielded the forces that benefited from its perpetration.

Deploying large contingents of white peace-keeping personnel in the townships reinforces the traditional interpretation that it is black people fighting among themselves and that white formulae are therefore needed to deal with it. The last thing people in these areas need is a liberal paternalistic approach to their plight.

The white peace personnel are not in touch with the daily problems in the townships. This, coupled with the inevitable communication hiccups, means that the Peace Accord structures might become toothless statistic gatherers. Allowing the people in affected areas to control the process would

be a step in the right direction. The people need a chance to discover themselves, and the Peace Accord needs a boost.

A dispute resolution committee member in the Western Cape confirmed to me that white businessmen dominated in local structures. He said the peace structures were not taken seriously by local organisations. When the structures were being formed, he said, there were national pressures on the civics in particular and that they consequently missed out on most of the deliberations.

However, the Peace Secretariat can still make an effort to draw some of these people into its ranks. The pledge to work towards democracy and peace should be reflected in its structures. Before it can venture out and solve conflict in the community, it should at least have dealt with obvious contradictions on its doorstep.

Sobantu Xayiya is a freelance journalist based in Cape Town.



TOO WHITE? Monitors at work in Tokoza.

PAUL VELASCO, Southlight