

'Large parts of South Africa are in a semi-war situation. The meaning of liberalism and tolerance in that context is very different from an ideal sense'

people and motivate them to actually engage in violence? I would be very suspicious and sceptical that slogans in fact do that.

What you need to focus on far more are the day-to-day dynamics in which self-defence units and so on are strategising around the ways they'll defend townships, or the way hostel dwellers are strategising on how they'll protect themselves or whatever.

What happens at funerals is far more a reflection of what is happening on the ground than a contributory factor. That would be my guess, anyway. The only way to really tell would be to undertake some very detailed micro study.

But at the moment, certainly in the Western Cape, it would seem that slogans are being used to vindicate people's actions. People are chanting them and acting on them.

I'd have more problems with a slogan like "One settler, one bullet", than "Kill the boer, kill the farmer" because the symbolism in the slogan is very different. Certainly I'd have a problem with political leaders using that slogan because it's saying that my political party is going to condone certain forms of action which follow on from this.

In the case of the PAC, I'd say that the use of the slogan "One settler, one bullet" by political leaders at rallies is probably far less important than the fact that, on a day-to-day basis, PAC leaders are saying to followers, in statements, not in slogans, "go ahead and take action". This is rooted in the PAC's understanding of the struggle.

If we want to know why PAC-aligned youths are attacking whites trying to go into townships, I don't think it's because PAC leaders mouth "One settler, one bullet". I think it's because the PAC articulates a view of the struggle in which violence plays an important part.

The ANC view of the struggle, while ambiguous, has tended to vary according to different parts of the ANC in different parts of the country. In general it has been one in which morality has been recognised in almost Christian, bourgeois terms, if you want to put it that way. It has a much deeper hold and I think that is a key reason why it permeates through to the ANC support base.

You can take another example - a counter-

example which is quite illustrative - which is the Inkatha Freedom Party. Inkatha goes around all the time complaining that it doesn't use these vicious slogans and that it's a very upright party - and it doesn't use slogans. But if you want a single case of where a political party has been instrumental in fomenting violence as a result of what's been said at rallies and in meetings, I would argue that it was when the IFP tried to expand its support base and organise on the Reef from mid-1990. There was a great deal of violence.

In June, July, August 1990 there was a whole series of rallies and at those rallies there were no slogans, as far as I'm aware. But the IFP said two things. Firstly, it told supporters they had experiences of being ostracised or intimidated in the past. Secondly, it basically said that the ANC and its allies were out to get you and unless you did something about it, things would go from bad to worse.

That was a statement, an analysis of the situation, not a slogan. The direct result was that when people from IFP rallies went back to the hostels, they barricaded themselves in and started slaughtering anybody who wasn't an Inkatha supporter. Now that's a prime example of the way in which analysis and argument, which resonate with the way in which the supporters see the world anyway, are in certain cases much more dangerous than slogans taken out of context.

I'm sure that if you looked at, for example, racist violence by whites, you'd find a similar thing: systematic violence perpetrated from a basis of racist language and concepts, but which you couldn't trace to particular slogans or particular buzz words.

Do you think that youth today are often ignorant of the context from which slogans originated and that often their use of slogans is expedient? They invoke political language but there is no fresh analysis of changing conditions or circumstances?

I think there is a problem. In the mid-1980s those who would have been described as youths who had a penchant for direct action would have understood this action in ways drawn from the liberation struggle,

Fear is blinding us

Danish student Henrik Poulsen gives his first impressions of South Africa.

I ARRIVED in South Africa early in September, on a bright sunny day. From my window in the plane I could see the green fields and characteristic mountains around Cape Town, and my expectations about my five-month stay intensified. I had a feeling of coming to a country at peace with itself, even though I knew that it was not true.

But already in the airport that feeling disappeared. The very first news I was told was that a white woman had been killed in the township the day before.

I did not take much notice at the time because I knew that South Africa was experiencing a lot of violence. But after only a few hours I was almost transformed into a nervous wreck. All the whites I met were talking about the murder with fear in their voices. Everybody seemed to be in shock. Later that day I saw a newspaper story about the murder that took up three full pages. Since then the one-sided and inadequate newspaper reporting has become one of the most irritating aspects of being in South Africa. Sometimes I have a feeling of knowing more about South Africa from reading the Danish newspapers.

I think I got what could be called culture shock. I come from Denmark, a very, very peaceful country. You don't have to worry about where you go, and unless you are a woman you can walk alone, even at night. Now suddenly I found myself wondering all the time where it was safe to go. I always ask at least three or four people if it would be safe.

For a while this meant I did not go anywhere, but soon I was forced by those around me to go to more "insecure" areas. Today I have already achieved several things I wanted to achieve; I have been on a short visit to some of the townships and I attended an ANC mass meeting in Elsie's River. So in a way one can

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thus deepening the country's economic crises.

In a country of only 4.5 million people almost 900 000 are either unemployed or work in the informal sector. The minimum wage is about \$60 a month. Even the middle class has been severely affected – university lecturers earn about \$300 per month (less than R1 000). I was told about a medical doctor who has to work as a taxi driver part-time to supplement his income.

More than two thirds of the Nicaraguan economy is in the informal sector. People sell anything from fruit to car parts in the streets. Everything appears to be informal – dollars can be freely exchanged on the streets for cordobas (the Nicaraguan currency) at the black market rate. The streets are littered with dollairos (informal foreign exchange dealers).

And these are not the only things on sale on the streets – at night we observed hundreds of young girls barely in their teens selling sex to escape from poverty. Our Nicaraguan colleague explained that this phenomenon has only just sprung up since the new government came to power.

However, in the midst of the poverty there is a significant visibility of a monied class. They drive around in new American and Japanese cars and four-wheel drive vans brought in tax-free by returning exiles.

Nicaragua's economic problems lie both in the unequal balance of power in the global economy and the economic policies of the new Chamorro government. The declining terms of trade for its principal imports, its large debt repayments, and its reliance on foreign aid make it both vulnerable to the

major global powers (mainly the USA) and perpetuates its dependence on these powers. The pro-American Chamorro government began to implement the notorious structural adjustment programmes in an attempt to attract international aid and loans from USAID, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

These economic policies have caused great hardship among the majority of the people.

Having lost the election, the Sandinistas (FSLN) decided to form a complex alliance with the government to prevent the right wing from imposing its policies. Furthermore it recognised that the major global institutions would not direct much needed foreign resources into a country that is not stable. Nicaragua needed foreign exchange and the flow of foreign resources to rebuild the economy. The fact that the Sandinistas still had full control of the army, headed by Humberto Ortega (the brother of the former president), did not help to build US confidence in Nicaragua. The mainstream in the FSLN decided to maintain its alliance with the Chamorro government despite its tough economic policies.

The FSLN found itself having to support these economic policies, or at least not stand vigorously opposed. The devaluation of its currency, the reduction in social expenditure, the increase in interest rates and drastic reduction of the army from 80 000 to 15 000 by Humberto Ortega caused large scale unemployment. Public and private sector workers were retrenched, and the poor became poorer as their wage levels fell and prices increased.

The crisis has sparked a furious debate within the FSLN and has resulted in wide scale resistance. Workers, peasants and their trade unions which were formerly linked to

'Nicaragua's greatest hope is the will of its people to continue the struggle for human dignity'

the FSLN, declared their independence from the party and have been engaged in strikes against their employers. While we were in Managua over 300 retrenched sugar workers were camping outside the parliament building.

The party is divided between those who argue the importance of maintaining stability and keeping the right wing away from power and those who argue that the FSLN should become a real opposition party and break its alliance with the government.

Daniel Ortega, when we met him, was acutely aware of these contradictions. He argued that the FSLN could easily take political and military power. However, they would run the real risk of losing all the gains of the revolution and the United States would have the pretext to intervene directly, together with the right wing, and turn the country to civil war once again.

Ortega argued that the FSLN needed to strike a balance between maintaining its opposition to the policies of the government (by supporting the demands of the mass organisations) and maintaining stability in the country.

Caught in this myriad of contradictions, the society continues to struggle to survive, but there is some hope for the future in all this. Nicaragua's greatest hope is the persistent and unrelenting will of its people to continue the struggle for human dignity.

As we boarded the plane to return and I took one more glimpse at the city, the many smiling faces, new friendships and images of a wartorn country flashed by. I began to understand that although the Sandinistas lost the elections in February 1990, the army that defeated the pro-USA Somoza regime was still in power. Also, just as in Vietnam (where the United States still imposes a trade embargo and crippling economic sanctions), and in Cuba (which has been under a continuing US embargo since Fidel Castro overthrew the US-imposed dictatorship there in 1959), the US security establishment will not rest until they have defeated the Sandinistas. They never forgive or forget those who defeat them.

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say I got over my culture shock.

I find it very problematic that there is so much fear about the violence, but there is every reason to be scared. The level of violence here is far beyond what I am used to.

The problem with the violence is that it separates people, and this is happening at a time when South Africans more than ever before need to be talking to each other and getting to know each other.

It is therefore a little frustrating to work for Idasa, which has as one of its aims to further contact between sections of the population. What is the use of it all when the "ordinary" white South African is sitting behind locked doors?

Another deeply frustrating feature is the apparently complete lack of concern on the part of most whites about the way the majority of black people are forced to live in squatter camps that are not worthy of animals. How can there be peace in this country when most people are not allowed to live a decent life? How is it possible to sleep peacefully in a good bed when one knows that less than 30 kilometres away hundreds of thousands of people live on a rubbish dump?

My first month in South Africa coincided with peace month, and there has been a lot of talk about peace. But talk is not enough to create peace. Unless South Africans start to take care of each other there will be no peace. There is still a very long way to go.

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