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Leave your green trousers in the cupboards. Take care about your yellow scarf. And eat so well that you're in trouble with your wife. South Africa's war was a "civil war" in the dictionary sense, but of the twelve or so ethnic/linguistic/cultural communities in the country only one was in serious war with itself. This was the Zulus, and what a war that was. Think of it: in Lebanon your enemy had a different religion. In Ireland he had a different stream of the same religion. In Cyprus or Sri Lanka he lived the other side of the country. In Zululand he was your dad, or son or uncle or neighbour. Unbelievably, the echo of that awful period is inaudible now. How much of that denotes marvellous reconciliation and how much denotes bad hearing, heaven knows

Blood River at Sleepy Hollow

*In the townships of Pietermaritzburg you choose your words like you choose your funeral, says **Khaba Mkhize**. With remarkable care.*

What is actually happening to the lives of the ordinary people of Maritzburg? That is the question the editor of *Frontline* asked me to answer. My first thought was: “To live in this place is to endure the torture of having to dutifully answer such questions as yours, while all around is pain.”

No-one has ever been interested in Maritzburg. People have called us “Sleepy Hollow”. Now we are suddenly in the spotlight, Every day queries flood in from diplomats and journalists, from around the country and around the world. To live in Maritzburg is to every day and night live and sleep death; think death, talk death, dream death. When we greet each other we find it difficult to know whether or not to say “I’m alright”. What’s “alright” when we are swimming in blood? You feel guilty to say “alright”. You refer instead to the latest violence in your immediate area.

BLOOD RIVER AT SLEEPY HOLLOW

Over Christmas I took my family to Soweto for a breakaway. On arrival at Joburg's Jan Smuts airport, I impressed upon my host for heaven's sake never to introduce me as one who hailed from Maritzburg. I needed this break.

Sometimes it worked. But when my hometown identity leaked out I would be asked the same bothering question: "What are you fighting about there? Here our fight is against Bantu education, rent increases, councils and evictions."

Yesterday, as I was knocking off, a man was waiting for me. He pleaded earnestly: "I know, Mkhize, you know many contacts. Can you organise me a baby's hand (a gun)?"

He explained: "It is dangerous to walk at night. Look, today I will be knocking off at 8.00pm and how safe will I be? Where I stay (in a tribal area which is now under the control of the amaQabane, the comrades) you meet someone at night who greets you '*Qabane, Qabane heyta!*'"

"Whatever you do, you may receive a bullet hole. Some people who are not comrades now masquerade as comrades. But if you deny you are a qabane, then you are in trouble if the strangers are in fact comrades. To be silent is also dangerous, because either side interprets that as insolence. To say nothing is futile. It means you are impimpi (an informer) for the other group."

There is nothing as important and sacred as a funeral of a loved one. The unrest has seen to it that this last rite has been trampled upon. The mourners can be ambushed by the group which killed the person they are mourning. People are now scared to bury their neighbours or friends because there is a possibility of not returning home in one piece. This has happened on many occasions despite the fact that police are supposed to be policing the funerals.

The solemn spirit has also been polluted by the emergency regulations regarding unrest-related funerals.

Gone are the days when people conducted their funerals in the cultural norm, with hundreds of neighbours, relatives and friends from around and afar. Regulations demand that they are conducted during working days.

For every 10 funerals taking place in one particular area seven are unrest-

related. Bosses are tired of giving a half day off to their employees who want to bury people who are special to them.

It is customary for representatives from the neighbourhood, church, affiliate organisations, family, in-laws, and so forth to talk about the deceased during funeral services. Now, only an ordained minister is allowed to talk.

Before the violence destabilised Maritzburg there had never been a funeral starting at 8am, undertakers tell me. Now, to allocate policemen to escort the processions, the police commissioner gives the bereaved family a laid-down time for the commencement, usually 8 and 11 in the morning and 2pm. The funeral must be concluded in three hours regardless of how long the route takes to the cemetery.

I was at a funeral of an Edendale tycoon whose five and a half grand casket (GST excluded) had to fly into the grave because time was expiring. Family members will never forget the day.

This trend in funerals has helped reduce the statistics of reported unrest deaths. Those families who are in a position not to report a death as unrest-related but merely as a result of a mugging or quarrel, do so without any qualms.

By telling a lie many people have been able to bury their loved ones in a customary and memorable (positively) manner. Telling the truth disorganises one's funeral, people explain.

Last Saturday, my colleague Percy Khumalo was at a wedding which came to an abrupt and premature end because a group of comrades became suspicious of a bus bringing the bride's party from Umbumbulu, south of Durban. They feared vigilantes.

Said one comrade: "We are tired of buses coming from Durban with invaders." Comrades disrupted the proceedings inside the church. The Minister pleaded with them, but in the meantime one of the wedding guests had pulled a knife. The comrades demanded that he be punished.

At this point the riot police arrived, and escorted the bus away. The traditional "umabo" ceremony (presentation of gifts by the families) became a slap-

dash rush, and guests left in haste.

A friend, Jazzman Ntombela of Ashdown, was married last month. He transported friends and relatives to Newcastle for the occasion. "How can I risk having the wedding at home in these times?" He is not the only one to have looked outside the capital for safety.

And recently, in a pro-Qabane township, Sobantu, one of the energetic wedding dance songs stated "no girl will marry a Theleweni (vigilante)."

A woman is in my office. She speaks to Inkatha's Central Committee member, Mr Ben Jele, over the telephone, crying uncontrollably.

Then she asks me: "Please can you dial Ulundi and put me through to Ndunankulu (Inkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi)."

I suggest some local Inkatha officers, but she is scared to report her problem to them.

"I live in Mpumuza with my five children. Men come at night and harrass us. They come from the area under Induna Vilakazi and claim they are Inkatha members. They demand that my children go with them to chop off the heads of amaQabane and raid the ANC." She is a card-carrying member (233041) of Inkatha, who joined the movement in 1982.

There have also been people who claim that the comrades have forced them out of certain areas which are under their jurisdiction if they did not join their ranks. However, explained some mothers and grandmothers recently, "these kids had protected us from outside interference". Harrassment is reported from both camps and people in between are sick and tired.

When the war started in 1985, it was "political". It was between boycott forces linked to the UDF and anti-boycott forces linked to Inkatha. Now it is a matter of names. Two words have become paramount: *AmaQabane* (comrades) and *oTheleweni* (vigilantes). The political essence has evaporated and now it is a war for boundaries and territories. The Qabane side includes non-Inkatha people, whether UDF or not. The amaQabane are proud of that name, unless they are in an area with strange faces. Inkatha sympathisers strongly resent the term Theleweni, which means "those who drive you over a cliff."

Some families have split when sons and daughters opt for the AmaQabane fold, leaving their parents. In some cases parents could not stand to have their children go to the amaQabane “refugee camps”, and they have converted in order to keep their children at home. In the past, we in Natal have seen our schools flooded by panic applications from Transvalers, after the bouts of trouble in Soweto. Now the flow is reversed. Natal parents try to get their children into schools in Johannesburg or elsewhere. Some Kwa-Zulu schools openly shut their doors to students believed to be AmaQabane sympathisers. In addition, Pretoria-controlled schools have this year introduced a new rule cutting down classes to a maximum of 31 students. Students who failed last year and should be repeating are now displaced.

The social life of the average person has changed. People outside have difficulty grasping this.

Look at Mr Average Worker. He thanks God that he returned home in one piece. When he wakes up in the morning he pleads with the Lord that it will be a safe day for him and his family.

Getting dressed is now a time-consuming job. Gone are the days when he would dress according to the weather. Now he must take account of where he is going to be.

Yellow garments invite questions as to whether you are a qabane supporter; khaki does the opposite. Black berets or skirts risk attracting the attention of anti-Inkatha forces, and balaclavas do the opposite. A youth with permed hair must stay strictly in Qabane territory, or he is in grave danger.

Green and gold are the colours of both camps. So Mr. Ordinary keeps his green trousers at the back of the cupboard. They will suggest he is political, and either side might think he is with the other.

The long-standing habit by some men of carrying sticks has vanished, because a carrier is viewed as a member of the vigilante group.

A person must be careful of his language. If he speaks deep Zulu while he is in comrade territory, he will attract suspicion. If words of tsotsitaal or Johannesburg Zulu slip out while he is in Inkatha territory, the same suspicion.

Mr Average Smoker no longer puffs in peace on his way to work. Comrades have banned smoking in buses. Notices urging no smoking had been displayed in bus fleets around Maritzburg for years but no one heeded. “Now these kids have done what authorities with the law in their hands have failed to do”, is the public’s general comment.

The comrades have argued that “polluting the air of our parents is disrespectful”. The disciplinary campaign includes meting out punishment to all those who are disrespectful towards their elders, as well as to thieves and other “wrongdoers”.

The new system of punishment is “modelling”. This is where a person is stripped naked and forced to parade, confessing his or her offence. There are heated arguments about “modelling”. Some elders are strongly for it. They say it has helped clean up crime. Mphethwa who runs a location shop says for the first time in five years he is not losing sleep: “confidence has been brought back by the comrades to us businessmen.” Another man had a swift investigation conducted on his behalf by the comrades after his shop was burgled.

“These boys brought back my goods,” he smiled.

Defenders of modelling admit it is humiliating but say it is better than the necklace. A comrade argues: “Modelling the offender acts as a rehabilitating exercise to deter crime.” Others dislike modelling but accept it as an anti-crime measure. Inkatha supporters tend to be totally opposed to nudity, and are very angry about “modelling”.

Inkatha officials have told me that modelling is bringing them new supporters. They say Inkatha is being asked to stop the amaQabane’s immoral punishment, and some people are turning to them for help.

A senior security police officer has admitted that the comrades helped fixing neglected infrastructure and tried to stamp out crime. But he said that modelling was not merely intended to punish offenders but “to model the mind of the offender,” which could be interpreted as stripping naked the old conventional mentality in the head so as to redress it with revolution.

Mr Average Soccer Fan: The Wadley stadium in Edendale has become dan-

gerous. The area is comrade territory. Go to watch a match, you might find yourself caught in the crossfire. It is the same story at Ashdown Stadium which was under the jurisdiction of Inkatha until November 3 last year when it was captured by comrades and painted with graffiti christening it Zambia. (On January 3 1, Inkatha unsuccessfully tried to recapture “Zambia”. The following day many Inkatha families packed their bags and sought refuge elsewhere.)

The two Imbali stadiums are not safe either as the territory is now called Ulundi and is a stronghold of Inkatha. I may be mistaken for a comrade and so the only soccer I now watch without fear is on the box.

Mr Average Boss: There is no way of establishing whether there are genuine reasons for absenteeism or not. There have been genuine cases where workers have been prevented from coming to work or clocking in on time. Loafers and lazy workers are taking advantage

Mr Average Onlooker: Now you are just a stranger, because pasting your eyes on a person may be tantamount to asking for trouble. Suspicion of strangers is clear to see. The only thing you look at without feeling threatened is the names painted on walls. Names are given to particular areas – Maputo, Moscow, Cuba, Angola, Libya, Tanzania as well as some ideological inconsistencies – Zaire, Garankuwa and Iraq.

Ms Average Chatterer: You must know what area you are in before you chat carelessly because in some areas you can get killed for calling Chief Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi “uMntwana” (Prince). You are required to call him “Gatsha”. Whereas there are places where you can be killed for using that name. It is considered disrespectful.

Ms Average Nurse: To wear the white uniform in certain areas is no longer safe. There have been allegations by comrades that injured colleagues have been ill-treated at Edendale Hospital.

The hospital belongs to the KwaZulu Government, and comrades allege that Inkatha patients get preferential treatment.

Ashdown residents now go to Northdale hospital. This hospital is on the other side of town or about 20 kms from Ashdown - and mainly caters for Asi-

atics and Coloureds.

Mr Average Transport Operator: I have sold my three buses and shelved my licences. When a client hired a bus I would find that I had provided transport to somebody's enemy and accusations would be levelled at me that I support so-and-so.

Some kombi taxis have been set on fire or damaged because they were spotted carrying members of a political party.

One lady boarded a taxi from Durban to Maritzburg, when a man shouted "this kombi will only transport amaQabane".

A taxi owner in Imbali was questioned as to why his kombi was not on the road during a day when a stayaway had been called by Cosatu and the UDF. He saved his skin by persuading his questioners that the vehicle had broken down.

Mr Average Shop Owner: He finds himself in a dilemma when fighting takes place nearby because victims run into his place for protection. At one time he opened his door when a man ran into his shop, and locked him in the store-room. He had to explain why he was protecting the man. "I would have provided shelter for you if it had happened that you were the victims."

A supermarket owner had his Edendale business premises gutted because he had hosted an Imbali relative belonging to Inkatha in his home.

At Sweetwaters, local businessmen had a tough time deciding whether or not to contribute towards a comrade-run venture to repair a road. Some tried to compromise by giving transport and food. But in the end many people were happy to see the road in usable condition.

Mr Average Pastor: He has to think twice before burying a Qabane or an Inkatha supporter because he may be accused of taking sides. He has to be careful of what he says at a funeral service since everybody is given labels by the political language they speak.

Even in church services, great caution is taken because members of the church belong to opposing parties. To speak is to meet suspicion from one or the other.

A Methodist minister says: “Congregations are dwindling. People are terribly scared of coming to church. What can be done?”

Mr Average Policeman has to be careful because each party claims that there are policemen siding with the other party. The manner of investigating political crimes is under suspicious scrutiny by the public as well as the feuding parties.

A policeman received death threats because the person he had arrested in connection with a shooting incident was seen in the township the following day.

There is dissatisfaction with the police’s failure to impose order. Many people maintain that until about six months ago the boot was mainly on Inkatha’s foot. Then for a few months the amaQabane were on the ascendant and Inkatha was being driven back. Now it appears that Inkatha is regrouping again to stamp its authority in Maritzburg, while there are widespread complaints of police inaction.

Community members often prefer the army, who they say are impartial and make efforts to befriend the population. It is common that people call for the army to be dispatched in force, and take over control. Womenfolk of Ashdown have formally petitioned the government to send in the army.

Mr Average Journalist does not take evening telephone calls. His children do. Only when he is satisfied that the caller is genuine can the children admit he is at home. After midnight the receiver is taken off the hook.

Mr Journalist must satisfy each camp that he is not a propagandist for the other. He may also collapse from the strain of meeting the spate of demands. People do not understand the stress and the tightrope. He loses friends. His wife is angry that he no longer eats the supper she has prepared – every day he is taken to glamorous restaurants for hefty free lunches, by guys from all over the world on fact-finding visits.

Every Christmas in its eight-year existence, my newspaper, the *Echo* has had a flood of requests from creches, schools and clubs to take pictures of festivities and Nativity plays. Last year there was not one request.

BLOOD RIVER AT SLEEPY HOLLOW

In the middle of January we had a week of peace. People saw hope; an indication that we could after all record an entire week without the moon dropping on our notorious Sleepy Hollow. People hoped. But one week was all it was.

People feel that grudges and revenge must now be shed. We must imbibe the expensive education of the blood rivers.

Before the spiral of violence political groups had underrated one another, but after the Beirut-like death toll it would be foolish for anyone to say that group so-and-so “is a weakling and of no consequence in a confrontation”.

All political parties in our midst, Azapo as well as Inkatha and the UDF, and the supporters of the banned ANC should have by now learnt that killing each other has not brought us Uhuru. Using our brains is a better option. The better man will win at the end of the day, after using his strategy to win the minds and hearts of the masses rather than the coercion which alienates them.