

Some Preliminary Ideas about the Meaning of Inkatha Violence for Children Living in Alexandra

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For many children in South Africa the current violence being enacted between the ANC and Inkatha is simply an extension of the years of violent State repression. Most of them have never known more than brief periods of peace. The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the possible psychological consequences of this violent external world for children's internal psychological worlds.

To this end, the authors of this paper are involved in setting up a project to explore, amongst other aspects, the impact of the on-going, high levels of political violence on school children living in Alexandra township. This paper, is based on a very small pilot study aimed at examining the feasibility and precise nature of the intended work. Our intention here is not to present this as research findings, but rather to use our limited data on children in Alexandra and elsewhere to raise and illustrate some of the issues that we think might be important in examining this crucial area in more detail. The case material used in this paper was obtained through the analysis of a small number of children's drawings of Alexandra and a brief interview aimed at eliciting children's fantasies and feelings about the violence. This data was collected over a short period of time which coincided with one of the worst episodes of violence experienced in the township in which 23 people died and 53 were injured in a four day period (*The Star*,

15 August, 1991). Where possible, the mothers of these children were also interviewed to obtain additional, background information on the family's exposure and reaction to the violence. In order to assist with a process of comparison we also gathered similar drawings from a small number of children living in the white suburbs of Johannesburg in the same time period.

Background to Political Violence in South Africa

While it is not possible in this short paper to offer a comprehensive discussion of the political meaning of all the forms that political violence has taken in South Africa, it is important to briefly provide some background to the reasons for and the nature of the current violence. One of the prime features of political violence is that it is not just a series of random events, it is rather intimately linked to political developments, strategies and actions. It is these underlying factors which give political violence its unique form and which differentiates it from other kinds of violence or stress. It is also this political meaning of political violence which offers the framework through which the victims of violence make sense of the experiences they are exposed to and respond according to this understanding.

The expression of political conflict through violence is intimately bound to the history of apartheid in this country. Following the 1976 uprising in which symbolised massive resistance to the State, the Government adopted an approach which consisted partially of the introduction of superficial reforms under the banner of "total strategy" (Swilling and Phillips, 1989). The other aspect of this approach included enforcement of the strict law and order measures, aimed at quelling revolutionary activities, which characterised the 1980s. The reform moves however had the unintended consequence of heightening anger and frustration at what were seen simply as gestural rather than real changes and in 1984 the townships exploded with violence directed towards the black local authorities as the symbol of these. The State responded with the harsh repression of the mid to late 1980s including massive detentions, banning of organisations, forced removals, army occupations of townships and State support of death squads and vigilantes (Swilling and Phillips, 1989).

In February 1990 President F. W. de Klerk finally responded to the economic pressure of sanctions and the on-going resistance of progressive movements within and outside the country and made his dramatic announcement of political change. In the mood of optimism which swept the country it was felt that the violence characteristic of the 'Old South Africa' was over and that the 'New South Africa' would be one of peace. Against these sorts of expectations the spilling over of the violence enacted by Inkatha from Natal to the Reef which followed has seemed both unstoppable and inexplicable. Its apparent meaninglessness is however only due to the fact that the reasons for its occurrence are hidden within the historical past of apartheid rather than being evident in current political circumstances. As Simpson, Mokwena & Segal (1992) put it: "... it is the ghost of apartheid come back to haunt its creators". Amongst the hidden reasons they note for the present upsurge of political violence are the breakdown of organisational structures through the process of repression and social deprivation with its associated frustrations. The latter factor is elaborated by Vogelmann and Simpson who show that deprivation is not experienced simply as an absolute phenomenon, but rather is heightened by a process of comparison with those in South African society who have so much more. In addition to these factors

there are others such the iniquitous hostel system which serves as a breeding ground for violence as well as people's disappointed expectation that there would be major improvements in their living circumstances following the political shifts.

What is most evident from this short historical review of the forms of violence in South Africa is that while the current violence is often perceived on the outside as a new kind of phenomena, unrelated to the violence of apartheid, an examination of the causes reveals a continuity in the reasons, if not in overt form. This is more than just a historically interesting point, it is also important in understanding how it is that people who are the victims of violence experience the current violence. This violence is for them, not simply a random expression of ethnic conflicts as it is sometimes portrayed by the media. Instead, as our interviewees confirmed, it was perceived correctly as an extension and elaboration of the violence of apartheid. For these people are not dealing with some novel sort of stress (although obviously the forms have changed slightly). For the vast majority of people it is simply that the violence has never stopped.

Children and Political Violence: The current context

An increasingly large body of research is developing around the effects of political violence on children in South Africa. This literature examines the wide range of forms political violence has taken in this country from detention and harassment (Gibson 1988 ; Dawes, 1987; Straker, 1987; Skinner, 1986) to exposure to violent conflict (Dawes and Tredoux, 1989; Swartz and Levett, 1989). Due however to the recency of the Inkatha violence in the Transvaal, the effects of this particular occurrence has not yet been systematically studied. While we have argued that there is a continuity between this violence and State violence which is recognised by its victims, it is perhaps also important to examine the ways in which it differs from State violence in its overt form and the implications of this for the experiences of its victims. These differences, it must be noted however, are differences rather of degree than of kind.

Firstly, the perpetrators of current violence are not always easily identifiable. While most people will acknowledge that they regard Inkatha or the police as the perpetrators of this violence they cannot always be sure who these people are. While it is true to say that in the violence of the 1980s there was sometimes a hidden quality to the perpetrators of assassinations and of course informers functioned through their invisibility, by and large the major portion of the enemy were clearly identified through their positions in official State institutions such as army and police. In the current violence the lack of clear identifying features of the enemy creates extreme uncertainty and is an added source of stress. As Vasquez (1981) notes of the South American experience of repression: "It is known that when the events which are feared are mysterious, a feeling of anxiety is added to fear."(p.22) The mysterious nature of the enemy is exacerbated by media reports which label the perpetrators of aggression in a variety of forms including 'Inkatha' or 'Zulu' or 'balaclava clad men' or refer simply to 'black-on-black' violence, thus mystifying both the identity of perpetrators and the reasons for the conflict. All of this lack of clarity heightens levels of anxiety within the communities affected.

Secondly, while past State repression did create and exacerbate suspicion and divisions within communities, most notably between members of progressive

organisations and those thought to be collaborators, the current violence splits communities in a much more concerted sort of way. In previous violence the primary division was between township residents and State forces who operated from outside of it. In the current violence however, the primary division is between different groups who live within a single geographical area, even though these might be assisted by people brought in from outside or the police. In previous research the significance of high levels of social support as a major source of resilience amongst children has been strongly noted (Gibson, 1989). In the present violence, with greater division within a single community, it can be assumed that this important protective factor is less likely to be present. In turn, people will experience a greater sense of insecurity in the face of a threat to both personal and community integrity.

Thirdly, while obviously State violence has always had an element of unpredictability, the current violence is even more significantly unpredictable. A peaceful township can be transformed into a war zone in a matter of minutes. There is no clear pattern in the times at which violence might occur and no idea of the direction from which the attack might originate. This feature contributes to already high levels of tension in communities. Most particularly, people are forced to live with the constant possibility and fear of attack. Within the constraints of this lack of knowledge about the time and form of attacks, communities become ideal breeding grounds for rumours of violence, which, in themselves, become a further source of stress.

Finally, the sheer extent of visible violence in the current situation exceeds that of the State's repression. In the 1980s while there were many incidents of open warfare between residents' and State forces it was the more common State strategy to remove people from their home communities and to exercise the violence elsewhere as in the method of political detention. In the current situation however, the primary mode of expression is through open street confrontations which involve vast numbers of residents within their own home territory. At peak periods of the violence the death toll was at 50 people per day in the Transvaal townships over a period of eight days (*Daily Mail*, August 23, 1990). Besides the high numbers of those killed in the violence there are also the many more who have been injured and the even greater number who are likely to have been traumatised by witnessing the various massacres. This feature of current violence is likely to have two important psychological consequences. Firstly one could expect a larger group to be directly affected psychologically by the violence and secondly, located on home ground, is must be assumed to generate profound feelings of insecurity.

There are of course parallels between this violence and the more long-standing violence of the same type experienced in Natal. Here, violence has claimed the lives of high numbers of people, and particularly youth (Gultig and Hart, 1990). The research on this violence provides some additional insights into the current Transvaal violence. John (1990) captures the sheer extent and range of stressors to which refugees in the Natal war have been exposed including witnessing violence, losing loved ones, losing property and possessions as well as the complete disruption of normal community life. (Michelson, 1991) notes even higher levels of post-traumatic stress disorder amongst Natal refugees than was noted amongst other victims of violence in Crossroads (Dawes; 1989) and links this to the extreme and continuous nature of the trauma to which her sample had been exposed. While the kind of violence experienced in Natal and the kind experienced in the Transvaal has a similar dynamic and form, those studied in Natal however, differ from most of the Transvaal victims in that they were at the time of the research living as refugees outside of the

violated communities. While refugees face a whole set of traumatic conditions as a part of the refugee lifestyle, they do however experience a reduced threat of the re-enactment of the violence. It might be expected that this group would be more likely to be dealing with issues of what has already been lost, while the Transvaal group, are still coping with the anxiety of losing still more than they already have and with the realistic possibility of their own death or injury in current or future violence.

It needs also to be noted that of the current political violence in the Transvaal does not occur against the backdrop of an otherwise peaceful society. As Vogelmann and Simpson (1990) note, there is now a "culture of violence" which permeates the whole of society, resulting in increased crime rates, murder, rape, wife battery and child abuse. These are the so-called normal forms of violence which provide a backdrop to the more obviously political forms of violence and are perhaps even more prevalent in precisely those communities who also are currently experiencing the highest levels of political violence.

In terms of understanding the psychological effects of the current form of political violence then it is important to understand it as both an extension of previous forms of violence (in meaning as well as form) and an exacerbation of it. Its potential for resulting in psychological trauma is increased by a number of features. Firstly, as the continuation of violence enacted against communities which are already drained and battered by years of violence; secondly, by the lack of ability to clearly identify the enemy; thirdly, by its extreme division of communities; fourthly by its unpredictability; fifthly by its primary location within the home territory of its victims and finally by its insertion against a backdrop marked by an increase in a whole range of other forms of violence.

Political Violence in Alexandra

Much of the history of Alexandra township can be underwritten in the broader history of political violence in South Africa. It was targeted by the State in the 1980s for what residents called "the hearts and minds campaign" – the State's campaign to introduce reform as a means of stilling dissent (Jochelson, 1988). It was also a primary site of resistance to the State, standing out from other townships in terms of its proud tradition of unity and high levels of political awareness amongst its residents. Alexandra boasted a civic association committed to the ideals of the United Democratic Front and an organised network of street committees. As a consequence of this it was hard hit by the repression of the mid 1980s with high numbers detained in comparison with other townships.¹

In terms of current violence, Alexandra was amongst the last of the Transvaal townships to become subject to Inkatha violence. The violence erupted after the township's mayor (representative of the much hated black local authority structure) was threatened with the loss of his power by the inclusion of Alexandra under the Sandton municipal structures. He, in search of an alternative support base concerned about his own personal safety after threats had been made to local authorities in other areas, joined Inkatha and bussed other Inkatha members into the township to assist in his bid for power. The mayor also solicited support from the hostel dwellers in the township, telling them that under the new regime their dormitories would be turned into living units for the shack dwellers. Alexandra's strong unified political base had

been severely disrupted by years of harsh repression under the State of Emergency and more recently undermined by a massive influx of new residents from the rural areas. Thus this political unity could no longer serve as a protective factor against this sort of onslaught and a major split was entrenched within the township. Since then Alexandra residents have been subjected to numerous attacks from Inkatha and the so-called 'third force', the most well known of which was the night vigil attack in which at least 15 people were killed earlier this year (*Weekly Mail*, March 28-April 14, 1991). Contrary to the popular understanding which situates the conflict between Inkatha and the ANC, this was the only one of the Alexandra attacks directed specifically at ANC activists. All of the others have been directed more generally at township residents.²

In a small township like Alexandra it is inevitable that the violence should have become a part of the lives of all residents. The area opposite the Alexandra Health Clinic has become an Inkatha stronghold as are most of the hostels. During periods of violence, people are afraid to travel to and from work, particularly towards evening and on the weekends which are the times most likely for attacks to occur. The attacks are sporadic and unpredictable. They occur on the streets in which people live and work at times when they may be eating, sleeping or talking. At these times residents are forced to flee their homes and most often, the women and children seek refuge at the Alexandra Health Clinic. The tension is so high that there have been several reported incidents in which people have been injured while fleeing after rumours of attack.

In Alexandra this violence occurs not only after years of exposure to very high levels of State repression, but also on top of high levels of violent crime. Turton et al (–) point out the relative neglect of the importance of exposure to non-political violence in Alexandra. Their research suggests that exposure to violence was not significantly greater during periods of so-called 'unrest'. Furthermore they find that non-political forms of violence appear to be as psychologically distressing for township youth as exposure to political violence. Their study also calls attention to the high levels of material deprivation that characterise life in Alexandra. The extent and severity of the current violence however is beyond that experienced at any previous point in Alexandra's history and in spite of these findings, would probably constitute a more outstanding feature than earlier occurrences. In terms of our understanding of this violence, however, Turton *et al's* research is significant in terms of a recognition that we are talking about a community which is already distressed and depleted by violence and deprivation. This pre-existing condition of stress is a common feature of communities confronted with the present violence for both historical reasons and for reasons related to the increased potential for violence to erupt in circumstances marked by relative deprivation.

The Psychological Effects of Violence

It is widely accepted that the effects of high levels of political violence, such as those I have just described are traumatic for all people and most particularly traumatic for children. In DSM 111 terms the situation in Alexandra is composed of a whole range of events that would be likely to "evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost anyone." (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). In our brief research however, what was perhaps most striking is the extent to which those we spoke to minimised the implications of their own exposure to the violence.

As we explained the nature of our research to prospective interviewees we were told by many that they would not be appropriate respondents as they had "not been affected by the violence." These sorts of responses came from people who live and work in the township where just the previous evening violent clashes had occurred and the tension in the surrounding area was sufficient to create anxiety in the researchers during the interviews. From a respondent who agreed to talk to us in spite of her perceived lack of suitability, it became rapidly apparent that her conception of not being affected by the violence and the researchers conception of the same were vastly different. The way in which she had understood the question was whether she or members of her family had been physically injured in the violence. In this particular case, the women did in fact live closer to the outskirts of the violence although she worked in its midst. Her primary school child had fled school after an Inkatha attack and experienced a range of psychological problems as a consequence. She herself became tearful during the interview as she spoke about the violence. In the researchers terms she and her family had clearly been "affected" by the violence. In her own terms, however, she had experienced no ill effects.

It would be relatively easy on one level to attribute this sort of phenomenon to some simple semantic misunderstanding. On the other hand, it might also be attributable, as Swartz and Levett (1989) suggest, to the denial necessary to day to day coping. While the latter explanation almost certainly has some validity, it is perhaps only a part of the reason. The apparent lack of recognition of traumatising appears to us to capture a much more fundamental issue to do with the nature of the stress itself and the implications of this for people's construction of the meaning of trauma. Where an individual, or even a group experiences some kind of disastrous event, either directly or indirectly, we would expect that in the aftermath there would be, following initial concerns about safety and so on, a recognition of the psychological shock of the occurrence. It is, however, not simply the existence of the stressful event (or events) which is crucial to the recognition of psychological shock or trauma, but also two further necessary conditions. The first of these is that there should be an aftermath to the stress: a period in which people are both able to let down the extreme psychological defences that protected them in the middle of the danger and allow for the recognition of the shock of what has occurred. Secondly, there needs to be a group of un-traumatised people to serve as some point of comparison against which to judge the psychological effects of trauma on victims. Without these two additional factors, it becomes difficult to make the distinctions necessary to establish trauma as an entity which is different from normal life. In Alexandra, these two additional conditions for the recognition of trauma are inadequately met. The violence in more or less direct forms has been continuous since the mid-eighties and affects to a greater or lesser extent the whole community in this township which is located within two square kilometres and split off from surrounding white suburbia by the official and unofficial barriers of apartheid. The suggestion that people in Alexandra do not readily recognise their psychologically traumatised state seems to be supported by the fact that throughout the violence although there have been high numbers of patients presenting for assistance at the psychological services at the Alexandra Clinic, none of these have been for violence related trauma. This idea must however not be mistaken for the sort of argument that says that those who are exposed to violence are habituated to it or hardened to its traumatic effects. This is a different sort of claim altogether. Here we are rather suggesting that while people in Alexandra are being traumatised, the trauma is so far reaching and continuous that it is difficult to separate out from normal life. This does not mean however that individuals do not demonstrate symptoms of trauma or express feelings associated with trauma, but simply that they

do not recognise their own traumatised state to the same degree as perhaps those in less traumatic circumstances might do. In the illustrative example given above, it is only when the trauma is labelled from the outside that the Mother begins to cry.

In the small group of mothers we spoke to it was only with direct questioning that we were able to elicit a recognition of the traumatised state of their children. With our prompting the sorts of symptoms which were reported included exaggerated startle responses, eating difficulties, crying and misery, withdrawal, fear and most particularly, from younger children, separation anxiety in relation to the mother. These sorts of symptoms are consistent both local and international literature on the effects of political violence on children (Gibson, 1989). Not very surprisingly, the mothers appeared to have even more difficulty in identifying their own traumatised state than that of their children.

Children's Responses to Violence

With regard to the effects of political violence on children, a great deal of attention has been paid to the symptomatic responses of children and the sorts of events they have been exposed to. In keeping with shifts in the approach to child psychiatry (Garmerzy and Rutter; 1988) there has also been an increasing recognition of the factors that allow children to cope better or worse with these sorts of stressors through the cognitive process of appraisal. Amongst the important factors identified in relation to political violence are the developmental stage of the child, gender, perceived locus of control in addition to inter-personal factors such as political understanding and social support (Gibson, 1986).

The recognition of the importance of these sorts of factors in the process of traumatising, has shifted attention away from the external appearance of the stress and its effects towards the internal meaning of it for a particular child as well as the implications of this for their coping (Michelson, 1991). In keeping with this trend we are concerned in this paper with attempting to map out some of the unconscious meanings children may attribute to the current violence and the unconscious defences they may use to protect themselves against the knowledge of it. This focus is not intended to negate the very useful existing research on stress symptomatology in children, the identification of other mediating factors in the stress process, or the social psychological accounts of children's understanding of violence, but simply to provide a necessary complement to these sorts of studies. We do not of course intend to suggest that the dynamic processes occur outside or beyond of the sorts of issues that have already been addressed by other studies, but rather to draw out some additional sorts of concerns that deserve consideration.

In this paper we attempt to raise some of the themes that appeared to be reflected by the children's drawings and comments as well as others that may contribute to an understanding of the experience of this sort of violence from within the child's perspective. Our analysis is conducted from within a psychoanalytic perspective which allows for the use of drawings and open questions as a device for eliciting children's unconscious fantasies through the mechanism of projection. It is obviously not possible to offer a thorough analysis of a drawing in isolation from an understanding of the particular child's circumstances and dynamics, but as our intention here is simply to draw out some provisional theoretical ideas we have looked for general

trends rather than specific insights. We point out only possible interpretations based not simply on the limited data that we have available to us but rather on a broader theoretical understanding of the psychoanalytic meaning of violence for children.

Seeing the Violence and Denying it

A necessary precursor to the idea that children are psychologically affected by violence is the fact that they are aware of it. In other words, that it is a significant feature in their lives. There has been some debate about the extent to which children are aware of violence under circumstances similar to those occurring in our country. McWhirter (1983), a Northern Ireland researcher, has criticised the notion that children were overwhelmingly preoccupied with the political violence in their society. She argues that there was little evidence for this and noted how research had shown that most children were in fact able to recognise that car accidents were the primary cause of death rather than political violence. This suggested that children did not give undue priority to occurrences of violence in their society, but rather were able to interact with other less harmful features of their world. In our own country it appears that while this may be a possibility for white children living outside the primary conflict areas, it could not feasibly be the case for those living within the conflict area. A study conducted in Alexandra in the late 1980s however suggested that children in this community did view the political violence as an overwhelmingly significant feature of their lives. This was evidenced by nearly 70 % of the sample of children who spontaneously drew pictures of police or army perpetrated violence (Lab and Shmuckler, 1989). This is probably both a recognition of the extent of the actual violence as well as an indication of children's awareness of it. In current circumstances one would almost certainly expect the same, if not a greater, recognition of the violence considering that our data was being gathered during a period of extreme violence.

In the light of this it was not surprising to us that when children were asked to draw Alexandra, approximately half spontaneously drew scenes of violence and referred to it in their talk with us and written comments on their drawing. As one 15 year-old girl described the situation:

**They were fighting and killing Inkatha and the Xhosa
They were killing by axes, AK 47s People say uyisabe
(terrible) Alexandra. We are ducking bullets at 8.00 – they
start shooting people and doing nonsense.**

The more psychologically significant feature however is that some of the children did not talk about or include any features of violence. In contrast to the Northern Ireland research which suggests that this lack of significance attached to the violence is an appropriate recognition of its actual incidence, in midst of the extremity of current violence in South Africa, it can only represent a denial the violence of their world. Denial is recognised to be one of the more primitive defence mechanisms, engaged usually either by young children or by older children only in times of extreme stress. The exposure to violence which is likely to contain within it the confrontation with the possibility of death is sufficiently threatening to necessitate the retreat into an extreme defence such as denial. This has been noted as a prominent mode of coping in other

studies of the psychological effects of violence (Rofe and Lewin, 1981). Denial was evident to some degree or other in most of the pictures and comments of the children. It did however take on a variety of forms. There were those who spoke about the violence in their talk with us but did not include any features of violence in their pictures. For example in one case, an adolescent girl, her drawing depicted an ordered little village with the schools, clinics and shops clearly shown. Her discussion around the picture however included mention of the killing. Perhaps the issue here is that drawing is much more likely to elicit strong affective responses which at that time would have been experienced as overwhelmingly frightening.

A similar sort of explanation might also be used to account for the emptiness and rigidity of some of the pictures. These showed stereotypical stick figures, faces empty of facial features and houses empty of people. It was as if the children here were afraid to fill in the empty spaces of the page for fear of filling it with their fear and then, of course, having to confront this fear themselves. From yet another perspective the faces with no eyes or ears may represent the children's reluctance to see or hear what is happening around them. The denial was also expressed in more conscious forms. An adolescent girl drew flowers on the streets of Alexandra. "There are no flowers in Alex", she said, adding that she wanted to draw them anyway. This sort of denial is one which operates on a far more conscious level, almost as a waking daydream – a conscious desire on the part of the child for things to be different. Another child expressed what appeared to be this same wish for a different world in the gentle pastel shades she selected for her drawing which denied both the real and the symbolic shades of Alexandra.

In yet another, case, the denial occurs on almost all of these levels and more. This adolescent comments on her drawing of Alexandra:

In Alexandra there are great things ... they've built new schools, houses and streets.

There is no mention of the violence in her commentary and no sign of it in her drawing. This young girl says she would like to be a model when she finishes school and draws her picture with a road reaching off the edge of the page, perhaps reflecting graphically her escape out of the reality of the township and into a more pleasant fantasy world. The level of denial being exercised in this case becomes even more evident when on direct questioning, it appears that this girl personally knows two people who have been killed in violence in Alexandra. In terms of our understanding of the effects of political violence on children what is perhaps important is what sorts of dynamic qualities and circumstances would force a child to exercise the extreme defence of denial. One could hypothesise that this would have something to do with the degree of actual threat represented by the experience as well as the capacity within the child's internal world to hold and contain the anxiety through other good experiences and feelings. In this case the use of denial is probably most strongly associated with the recency of the actual occurrences of violence and the on-going threat to which these children were exposed. An acknowledgement of the full extent of this would have interfered with the children's ability to cope with their every-day activities. Even to have walked to the Clinic (which was where we have interviewed them) involved some degree of denial of the potential danger of which everyone, including the researchers, were aware.

Not surprisingly the white children we asked to draw a picture of the area they live in did not include in their drawings any features of violence. These children needed to be directly prompted into a discussion of the political violence while they spontaneously raised concerns about the vanishing ozone layer and included these environmental concerns within the drawings themselves. The reasons for this are not, we believe, related in any way to denial, but more probably to the way in which the different race groups in South Africa inhabit very different sorts of worlds, albeit within the same society. They did however mention fears around violent crime which might perhaps be viewed as both a reflection of the reality of a rising crime rate in South Africa as well as the displacement of an awareness of high levels of violence in the society as a whole.

Distancing

A variation of the theme of denial deserves particular consideration. What a number of the pictures and comments suggested, was that where children did recognise the occurrence of violence they used a technique of distancing to protect themselves from it. This distancing seemed to take the form of referring to the victims of the violence as if they were members of some other community. For example a 17 year old girl says:

What makes me sad is those people who are homeless and poverty stricken, those innocent people who are killed for no reason in our black locations.

While in this particular case the young girl in question lives on the outskirts of the township and therefore may be justified to some extent in her recognition that others are worse off than she, this distancing also appears to represent an attempt on her part to dis-identify with those more directly threatened.

Others in group of interviewees expressed this distancing through the more concrete image of geographical location. One person told us that she lived away from the violence and could not help us with our research. It appeared on questioning however that the distance of her home from the violent areas was only a matter of a few blocks. One child demonstrated a similar kind of distancing, but in this case as a wish rather than an actuality. She lives on 11th Avenue, a street fairly close to the hostels from where much of the violence emanates. Her picture however was, as she clearly told us, of 16th Avenue. This street, only a matter of five blocks from her home, seems to represent for her a possible sanctuary. From the outside, of course, this would appear to be still well within the danger area.

There has been a fair amount of debate in the literature on political violence about the extent to which the proximity of people to the incident of violence influences their reactions. One group of researchers emphasises that the closer one is to the violence or danger the more traumatised one is likely to be. Other researchers however suggest that those on the outskirts of violence can be as, if not more, traumatised than those in the direct firing line (cf. Gibson, 1986). In general however the significance of distance for the individuals experience of stress has only been dealt with in terms of its physical dimension. Our discussion perhaps raises some more

interesting questions about the psychological meaning of distance in this sort of situation. It suggests to us that the real distance of the individual from the violence may be less significant for their understanding of it than the distance they imagine themselves to be from it. This defensive structure then provides the framework through which they then, correctly or incorrectly, evaluate the threat that the violence poses to themselves. A matter of a few blocks of shacks becomes an experience of sufficient distance to allow for the person to continue to cope with their daily lives. The significance of this notion is also evident amongst white children whose apparent occupation of a different world to township children is less a geographical than a psychological question of distance.

Depression, Hopelessness and Anger

It would appear to be almost inevitable that experiences of violence should elicit anger which has been noted as quite possibly the most natural and adaptive response to an external threat to the self (Wortman, 1983). In terms of political violence this has also been acknowledged as an important factor in spurring victims of violence on to constructive political action which in turn assists them in coping (Gibson, 1986). This adaptability of an angry response has particularly been noted by theorists such as Fanon (1968) to be a powerful cleansing force in the face of repressive violence. While victims of repression often appeared to express their anger openly towards the State³ there appears to be significantly less anger expressed by the victims of Inkatha violence, where in Natal only 20% of youth interviewed in one study expressed anger while nearly half described their predominant feeling as one of hopelessness (Gultig and Hart, 1990). This apparent inhibition on expression of anger might be explained by the form of current violence where there is, as we have already pointed out, an elusive enemy. It is not entirely clear in the current violence with whom or about what one should be angry. This seeming lack of anger is however negated to some extent by the cycles of revenge appear to occur in response to the killing. Clearly the question of whether people are able to openly express anger in response to the current violence is debatable. From a psychoanalytic perspective however, it would seem doubtful that they did not, at least at some level, experience anger in response to the threat of violence which would activate unconscious feelings of aggression.

In our children's drawings there appeared however to be a marked absence of those features which one commonly associates with anger such as large figures, teeth or extreme pencil pressure. There were pictures that captured the horror of the violence, graphically portraying shooting and dead bodies. For the most part however, these appeared in pictures which did not appear to be otherwise remarkably aggressive (Burns and Kaufman). Rather these seemed to be represented in pictures that predominantly reflected themes of fear or helplessness with, in one example, a stick figure saying to Inkatha through a voice bubble: "Please don't kill us!" Only one child referred to Inkatha with anger as: "Zulu boys".

Rather than anger, the more common themes expressed in our pictures appeared to be around feelings of depression and hopelessness. Dynamically depression represents the introjection of anger, usually precipitated by a loss, which is unable to be expressed towards its true object. In the current violence, faced with a loss of safety, a loss of a sense of control over one's own life and environment and reality of the loss through death of members of the community it is not surprising that children

appear to experience feelings of depression and associated hopelessness about their future. Angry feelings, which are a part of this process, are introjected rather than openly expressed both due to the confusion about where this anger should be directed as well as the children's fear of their own aggressive impulses. This fear of one's own aggression is common dynamic feature of childhood, but must clearly be exacerbated by the reality of a society literally torn apart by violence.

The previously mentioned emptiness of some of the children's pictures suggested not only a denial of the violence but also the denial of life seen in depression. The deadness of these pictures is echoed in one of the children's comments on it: "In Alex there is no life." This is a reflection both of the real external circumstances as well as the "deadness" of the child's own internal world. Other features of the drawings suggesting depression were the selection of dark or muted shades in the drawings. One particular drawing was drawn only in pencil with dashes of red pen used to mark the blood that flowed from the numerous dead bodies that lay along the road. In the same drawing Inkatha was shown blocking all conceivable exits and on the street, none of the victims remained alive. Certainly this image of hopelessness seemed to also be shared by the adults and is clearly expressed in the words of a mother we interviewed: "I do not see anything that will make things better. Everyone was saying that when Mandela was released it will get better – but it just got worse, so I don't know how it can ever be made better." Even where children are too young, to comprehend the devastation of the violence, one would expect them to pick up and respond to their parents' depression (Gibson, 1986) thus generating a whole community which has lost hope. The significance of hope for allowing people to cope with the most adverse of circumstances cannot be underestimated. It represents the capacity to hold on to the possibility of something good even in the face of overwhelming badness. In Alexandra, the years of continuous violence, may have undermined this usually very resilient capacity which has also been injured by the abrupt raising of expectations of peace, followed by the increase in violence.

Powerlessness and the Need for Power

One of the strongest factors which allow people to cope with violent circumstances is the retention of some sense of personal power in the situation, however insignificant this might be (Perkel, 1990). Dawes and Tredoux (1989) note that in their research into the effects of the Crossroads violence on children they found a surprising number of children wishing to be policeman rather than comrades. They, working within a social psychological perspective, attribute this phenomenon to the children's capacity to recognise the police force's capacity to prevent violence and children's own desire to do so. From a psychoanalytic perspective however, this identification with the enemy has another meaning. It captures the child's need to harness the perceived power of the enemy by identifying with him. The feeling of extreme helplessness which is likely to be experienced in situations of violence leads the child to over (or perhaps correctly, in this case) estimate the power of the enemy. In order to cope with the tremendous anxiety this feeling of helplessness generates, the child recaptures his power through an identification with the aggressor. In the case of children this fear of powerlessness almost certainly becomes even more profound as they are faced, not only with the knowledge of their own powerlessness, but also with the powerlessness of the adults around them to stop the violence or adequately protect them. While this theme did not emerge pervasively in our own material, one child did

report that when she grew up she would like to be a "mayor". The identification with this particular position of power is most significant in terms of the present mayor's perceived role in initiating the violence in Alexandra.

Fearfulness and Longing for Safety

In the midst of violence children must be expected to feel afraid, not only for their own physical safety, but for the safety of those around them. Additionally, the fear is increased by turmoil around them, the experience that nothing around them is reliable and trustworthy. One mother described how her 11 year old daughter had fled her primary school with others in her class as Inkatha attacked the school. "They just all ran around crying and not knowing where to go. They jumped over the fences and dropped their books," the mother described. Another mother told us how after a similar experience her 12 year old son had not been able to eat and "jumped when he heard a sound." In the face of these kinds of experiences, it would be a very unusual child who did not experience some fear. This fearfulness seemed to be expressed in a number of different ways amongst those we spoke to. Amongst some there was a great deal of fear about even talking to us. One mother was very afraid that her political comments might be published somewhere and then Inkatha would take revenge on her. She requested information on our intentions and political credentials before agreeing to talk to us. As she put it: "In these times you must be careful. It is worse than before. Now the police will just walk into your house and kill you." She also spoke about the difficulties of riding, for example, on a taxi and not knowing if the people sitting beside you were your enemies or friends.

The children's drawings also seemed to suggest the children's fearfulness. In some cases the quality of the lines were light and sketchy, suggestive of anxiety. Figures were also drawn floating in what appeared to be mid-air, perhaps suggesting an insecure feeling of rootlessness, accentuated by, in one case, legs that could not have possibly allowed the individuals to stand. The feelings of fear also seemed to be expressed through the images expressing the compensatory desire for closeness with others. In a number of pictures the human figures were shown walking in pairs. In one case a young boy drew himself standing outside his house holding a dog on a leash, perhaps representing his desire for protection. In response to a question about what made him sad he replied that he was sad about people being killed and sad to see a lost child crying for his mother. According to his mother, this boy experienced a great deal of anxiety about his mother going to work in times of violence. It is clear that for this particular child, the fear of the violence is transformed into a compensatory need for his mother's protection and a consequent fear of her absence. While older children obviously did not demonstrate these anxieties around separation with the mother, some of them showed what appeared to be an interesting variation. A number said that they wanted to be good mothers when they grew up, perhaps transforming their own need to be protected into a desire to protect others.

A particular anxiety which perhaps deserves additional discussion was the anxiety around physical injury. Most of those that we interviewed were in fact adolescent girls who according to Ayalon (1983) experience the trauma of violence through a framework of appropriate developmental concerns. In adolescence, she notes, these concerns have to do with physical appearance and integrity. In all of these children's pictures the figures were drawn as stick figures, a stereotype of the physical body. It

is possible that this phenomenon can be partially explained through a reluctance on the part of this group to capture in the drawing the reality of the human body with all its frailty. This additional anxiety about physical injury is also supported by the number of children who said they wanted to be doctors or nurses when they grew up. The latter could, of course, also be understood as the desire to identify with high status professionals, but given the recency of the violence and the high number of injuries, it would appear more likely that this represents the children's attempt to cope with this anxiety about being physically hurt.

Restriction on Imagination

In South American literature on the effects of political violence on children, it is noted that in the face of political repression and associated trauma, children have been found to experience a decrease in the capacity to use symbolic processes (Bozzolo & Kordon; 1985). In this case they link it specifically to the difficulty of speaking openly in the context of repression and the way in which the constant hiding of things limited the capacity to think freely in the manner essential for the exercise of imagination. The association between knowing of politically dangerous information and knowing more generally is sometimes sufficiently strong to induce learning difficulties in the child. These sorts of constraints appear also to be operating in Alexandra. Referring to the high levels of suspicion in the community a mother told us that she felt unable to explain to her child what was happening in relation to the violence. She was worried about what would happen if her child went to school and repeated what she had said to another child whose father could be an Inkatha supporter. In that case, her family might become the next target of an attack which appears to her, given its usual unpredictability, to be initiated for such apparently harmless reasons. So she is constrained by silence. It is also likely that children will experience some restriction on their imaginative processes for other reasons such as the repression of affect, the significance of which for imagination is noted by educational psychologists (Jones, 1968). In the drawings by Alexandra children there appeared to be little evidence of imagination – they were stereotyped views of houses and figures appearing in most cases to be suitable to children of a far younger age than those who we interviewed. This is consistent with South American research which revealed the drawings of children who had been exposed to high levels of political violence to be often schematic, rigid and incomplete (CIMADE, 1981).

Conclusion

As an exploratory discussion, we hope this paper has raised a number of the important psychological constructs which need to be taken into account in developing an adequate understanding of the effects of violence on children. In general, in work in this area, there has been a distinct neglect of the internal meaning of violence for the child which needs to be redressed.

Notes:

¹ Interview with Alexandra political activist.

² Interview with Alexandra political activist.

³ These comments are based on our personal experience of working with victims of State repression.

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