



Dan Roodt

# ADAPT AND DIE

## SOUTH AFRICA'S NEW MOTTO

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During the time of National Party reforms in the seventies and eighties, the cliché “adapt or die” used to do the rounds. Nowadays, given the highest murder rate in the world, this should be modified slightly to read, “adapt *and* die”. For the endemic social violence in South Africa is probably incurable.

Optimists think that violent crime can be solved through better policing, more efficient courts and more secure prisons. Even assuming that such improvements were possible under conditions of hard-core affirmative action, it must be admitted that criminal justice treats the symptom and not the cause of social violence. The Department of Correctional Services, for one, has lost 496 out of 500 former Deputy Directors since 1994, representing most of the intellectual capital in the department. Newcomers may learn their job properly, or they may not, but they have to be flown to overseas countries to find out how prisons work as most of those previously involved in managing our prisons are no longer there.

South Africa used to have a problem of political violence. It was not as bad as elsewhere in Africa, but for some reason elicited hysterical international condemnation. However, actors in political violence are mostly driven by some sort of creed or belief system. Whether such a person is a communist, an anarchist, a neo-Nazi or an ethnic or religious guerilla fighter, he is usually amenable to persuasion or compromise. Even a group of Muslim suicide bombers might declare peace if they were given a territory in which to set up an Islamic theocracy, governed only by themselves and not subject to any outside influence.

In the same way, South Africa's so-called liberation movements who were at one time fanatically convinced of the need for violent and bloody revolution, laid down arms and bombs upon being told that F.W. de Klerk would surrender power unconditionally. Solving political violence is often intractable, but not impossible.

Not so social violence. Endemic crime, the breakdown of the social fabric, a sense of drift regarding norms of good conduct, point to a far deeper problem. The freedom fighter or urban terrorist is ultimately rational, despite a value system that normal society

might find idiosyncratic.

But what is “normal society”? It is only the sum-total of behaviours prevalent in any given society at any given time. The Aztecs, infamously, practised daily human sacrifice to appease their sun god. It might revolt many of us today, but to them it was entirely normal. South Africa currently sacrifices about 87 humans per day to violent crime, or 32 000 per year. Those are only the ones who actually die. Scores of others are injured, maimed, traumatised, robbed, raped, burgled and so on.

In any suburb today an entire history of murders, hijackings, and other violent events can be written, if only the locals were narcissistic enough to consider their own history worth recording for posterity. On the other hand, social violence lacks the charm and grandeur of political violence as it is usually not committed in the interest of some glamorous cause like national liberation or world revolution but simply to acquire some hapless person's BMW or rape his wife because she happened to be inside.

However, some time ago a Johannesburg newspaper engaged in chronicling some local history in the suburbs of Westdene and Lakefield in Benoni. Nearly every resident had a story to tell, an entire litany of mayhem. Mr. John Gee miraculously survived a shot through the eye, but now feels traumatised. His wife says, “One lives in fear in one's own home. One does not sleep. One prays for protection, yet only more fears come.”

But who are the authors of South Africa's social violence? Even asking this question presents one with a sense of discomfort, because most violent criminals in South Africa are young black men between the ages of 16 and 36. As one surgeon who had stitched together at least three child rape victims, two of whom were infants, said recently, “Probably white men commit such acts too; it is just that no-one in South Africa has come across such a case.”

Of course, it would be preposterous to say that all young black men are prone to violence. Judging from our daily experiences in crime-torn South Africa, however, a sub-section of that population, large enough to cause more havoc than even a well-equipped guerilla

army of a few thousand men, has taken up practices such as heists, hold-ups, murders, sexual violence exacted upon women and children, and so on.

Explanations for such deviancy are manifold. The ubiquitous answer of it being due to apartheid might have been satisfying if other African societies never subject to group areas and a homeland system did not display similar traits. The Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone come to mind. There is a whole nature/nurture debate around black violence, except that no adherent of the “nature” side would publicly admit to being one, for fear of being branded a racist. Even though mainstream American cancer research has conclusively shown that black men have higher levels of testosterone than their white counterparts, few would hazard the notion that this might be linked to their greater propensity for violent crime.

America has a gargantuan prison population of two million, over half of which consists of African-Americans. This is despite their minority status in the USA, comprising only 12% of an overall population amounting to 290 million. South Africa could neither afford nor succeed, given the dire state of our criminal justice system, in jailing a similar number of black male offenders. Currently, only 10% of murderers in South Africa get arrested and only 6% are convicted. Any murderer therefore has a 94% chance of getting away with it.

If by some miracle all serious criminals in the country had to be caught and imprisoned, the prison population would surely treble or quadruple from the present 200 000, which is already high by world standards. Not only is such an improvement inconceivable under current conditions, but it would also be politically unpopular with the ruling ANC who would be incarcerating large numbers of young black males who are mostly its own supporters at the polls. Few whites, if any, commit violent crime and there are only 3 900 of

them in prison, mostly for white-collar offences such as fraud or insider trading on the stock exchange.

All that remains in the world’s most violent society, is precisely to adapt and die. Twice as many South Africans of all races now die of murder than of road accidents - even though the road accident rate is also the highest in the world, surpassing that of Turkey. Crime extends to trade in driver’s licences, so that a large number of drivers use so-called “bought licences”, hardly a contribution to road safety.

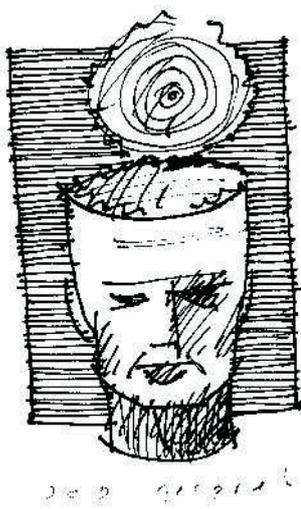
There are some people naive enough to think that “something can be done about crime” in South Africa, mostly opposition politicians who dream about diverting funds from arms procurement to policing, but this would be futile. There are already three times as many private security personnel as state-employed policemen, and even they do not succeed in containing what has become Africa’s only peacetime killing field.

“I killed them because they were white.” These famous words were spoken last year by William Kekana, who participated in one of the most horrendous incidents in which the entire family of Mr. Clifford Rawstorne was wiped out, consisting of his fiancée, baby, as well as his own mother. Even this massacre of an entire family would not have made headlines, were it not for the fact that one year-old Kayla was executed on her very first birthday with a shot in the head. Needless to say, the two adult women were first raped before being killed. Both William Kekana and his accomplice, Charles Fido Baloyi, fell into the high-risk group of young black (and Coloured) males who commit almost all violent crime in the country.

South Africa actually has a Minister of Safety and Security, which to some might seem like an example of absurd humour. His Excellency Mr. Charles Nqakula, whose official résumé proudly states that he was once “a waiter and wine steward”, has immortalised himself by euphemistically stating that there was no real crime problem in South Africa, except that it was “a little on the high side”.

All in all, South Africa has got remarkably used to its new-found status as the crime capital of the world. The high-rise districts of Hillbrow and Berea in Johannesburg have been officially designated by Interpol as having the highest murder rate in the world, that is, 600 people per 100 000 population members per annum. Consider for a moment that such a figure represents 12 times the rate found in inner-city ghettos in the United States, often seen as no-go zones by many Americans.

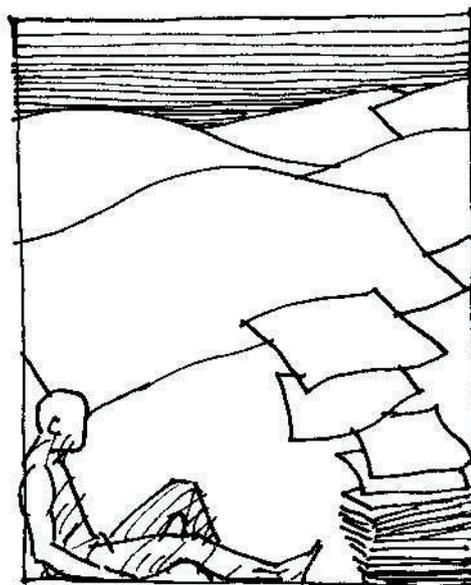
One British immigrant to South Africa who has survived three car hijackings, refuses to emigrate,



stating that he is now accustomed to having Kalachnikovs pointed at him from point-blank range. Everyone knows a relative or friend who has been killed or at least subjected to some form of violent crime, and no South African can remotely imagine a society where people do not live behind razor wire, electrified fences, high walls, burglar bars and similar decorative props.

Outsiders might find our lifestyle bizarre, but many pundits in South Africa consider our society to be much more “normal” now than at any time in the past, which was tarnished by ethnic separation albeit without the present large-scale violence. At the height of segregation and apartheid under Hendrik Verwoerd, South Africa was almost as peaceful as Switzerland but she was immoral. Today we are the apotheosis of racial morality and political correctness, yet as violent as the Congo or Liberia. Surprisingly, however, our economy continues to function amid the carnage. No economist has ever studied this as far as I know, but not only is crime our biggest industry - bigger than gold-mining or manufacturing - it also stimulates consumption as stolen goods are replaced; it is a boon to the insurance and security industries and ultimately makes surgeons and undertakers rich. The government earns billions of rands in Value-Added Tax on stolent goods being replaced with new ones. So crime pays. News about killings or shoot-outs no longer elicits the slightest surprise. It is part of our daily existence, and one assumes the lethal risks attending to something as simple as going shopping or driving to work. My wife, for example, has twice been to the local shopping centre where in the one instance a shoot-out was taking place in the parking area so that she had to hide between the cars with our 18 month-old son in her arms; in the second case an armed robbery had just taken place with the robbers casually strolling by with their guns and their loot.

Everyone knows someone who has been killed, raped or maimed. Just this week, the wife of a friend and former literary editor of *Die Burger*, François Smith, was stabbed to death with a screwdriver in their home in Wellington, near Cape Town. Her murderer was a 16-year-old squatter camp resident whose race was omitted by the press but presumably few, if any whites, reside in his particular squatter camp which is dedicated to black Africans. Lisbé Smuts-Smith was a well-known academic and head of the Afrikaans literature department at the University of Cape Town. Just two weeks ago, another UCT academic, mathematician Brian Hahn, was attacked by a former student, dr. Maleafisha Steve Tladi (35). Hahn died in hospital a week later, while Tladi was released



on bail of R500 (about \$80).

Two years ago Louw Rabie, a brilliant albeit reclusive geologist and brother of author Jan Rabie, was beaten to death with a fence pole by two Coloured men to whom he had lent some money a week earlier. Police in the small Cape town of Montagu readily caught his murderers because they happened to have drinking money during the week, taken from his home. He was 80 years old, but in good health. He is reputed to have been one of the most brilliant geologists and intellectuals this country has ever produced, writing copiously throughout his life but disdaining publication and public esteem. Africans with their oral tradition are fond of saying that “when an old person dies, a library burns down”. What strikes me about the relentless killings of educated whites, is that the criminals are indeed “burning down the libraries” of this country and physically exterminating the intellectual class, much like Pol Pot did in Cambodia. The media are celebrating youth, dance, colour, being black and exuberant - as opposed to the quiet studiousness of middle-aged and elderly whites, the bearers of knowledge and understanding. Are these learned whites who are being killed in exuberant, paradisiacal outbreaks of violence simply the remnants of a civilisation that is being eradicated in the name of decolonisation? No government spokesman has ever condemned such killings; so we may assume that the present regime is completely indifferent to them, where such killings do not enjoy their tacit support. Around our local school in the past week there have been two car hijackings, as well as one murder. It is not really considered to be an exceptionally violent area. Most of this is not even reported in the press, because there really is not enough space and ordinary crime is no longer newsworthy. It needs some further sadistic element to make the front

page, such as babies getting killed or raped, or elderly farmers being tortured to death. Farming in South Africa is now arguably the most dangerous profession in the world with more than 1600 farmers murdered since 1994, often in macabre and dehumanising ways.

To the outside world, white South Africans are congenitally evil. If our murderers and rapists had been white and their victims black, Europe or the United States would long ago have sent an expeditionary force to put a stop to it. At present, news of white suffering in South Africa hardly inspires a yawn in Western capitals. This is why a recent article in *The Despatch*, detailing the rape of a dog by three black men, gave me some hope that a chord will be struck somewhere in the coolly indifferent breasts of our fellow-Westerners. Even if the lives of Louw Rabie, Brian Hahn, Lisbé Smuts-Smith, Kayla Rawstorne and tens of thousands of others are of no value to them, perhaps they will take pity on the mongrel bitch in Grahamstown that was recently raped by three black men. Or perhaps two black men, as the third one protested his innocence upon being dragged out of the shack by screaming, "I came here to relieve myself. These two were raping the dog when I arrived!" Cruelty to humans, especially white humans, is today a normal feature of our society, just like human sacrifice used to be in the culture of the Aztecs. Cruelty to animals, or non-consensual sex with dogs, may still evoke some sympathy, not only locally, but also internationally. I therefore feel sorry for Masganda - the name of the dog concerned - who was rescued with a bleeding vagina and in need of veterinary attention, but perhaps this lowly creature of uncertain lineage could become a martyr for our cause in alerting opinion-makers and political leaders of our plight.

Cycling has become a popular sport in South Africa. However, its practitioners regularly get shot at by gangs of black youths in the street, so that many of them carry guns and knives for self-defence on their bicycles. Members of the Johannesburg mountain-bike club were outraged a while ago when two cyclists, Scott and Lloyd Griffith, were charged with murder after an armed battle with their four black assailants, one of whom succumbed to his wounds. Most of the time, however, whites are helpless victims of crime. The government has recently passed a new gun law which makes it difficult, if not impossi-

ble, to own a fire-arm. They have also abolished rural commandos of military reservists entrusted with crime-prevention in the country, without any police units replacing them. Occasionally the newspapers carry stories of crime victims successfully defending themselves against attacks, offering armed resistance. As a result of the new gun law, this will soon end and we shall simply be able to hide or flee from our assailants. Defending oneself against a marauding robber or rapist might be a manifestation of racism, and is therefore frowned upon as being a kind of "right-wing" response.

Being robbed of one's vehicle or household belongings is now considered quite normal, and often people ascribe escaping with their lives to their own astuteness, such as being friendly to the robber, helping him load the effects into a vehicle, not looking him in the face so as not to recognise him afterwards, et cetera. A friend of mine in Kempton Park kept up a reasonable conversation with the thieves emptying his house, tied up as he was with a gun pointed at him. He survived, although his elderly mother was badly roughed up and had to be hospitalised. In other instances, of course, people are not so lucky and they become just another murder statistic. Then they simply adapt and die.

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The first draft of this article was submitted to the British *Spectator*, who turned it down about a year ago. I have now updated it with references to more recent incidents. Probably no mainstream newspaper in South Africa will publish it, because it refers to the race and gender of violent criminals, which is taboo here as elsewhere in the Western world. As George Orwell said, however, "during times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act".

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*Dan Roodt is an Afrikaner author and activist.*