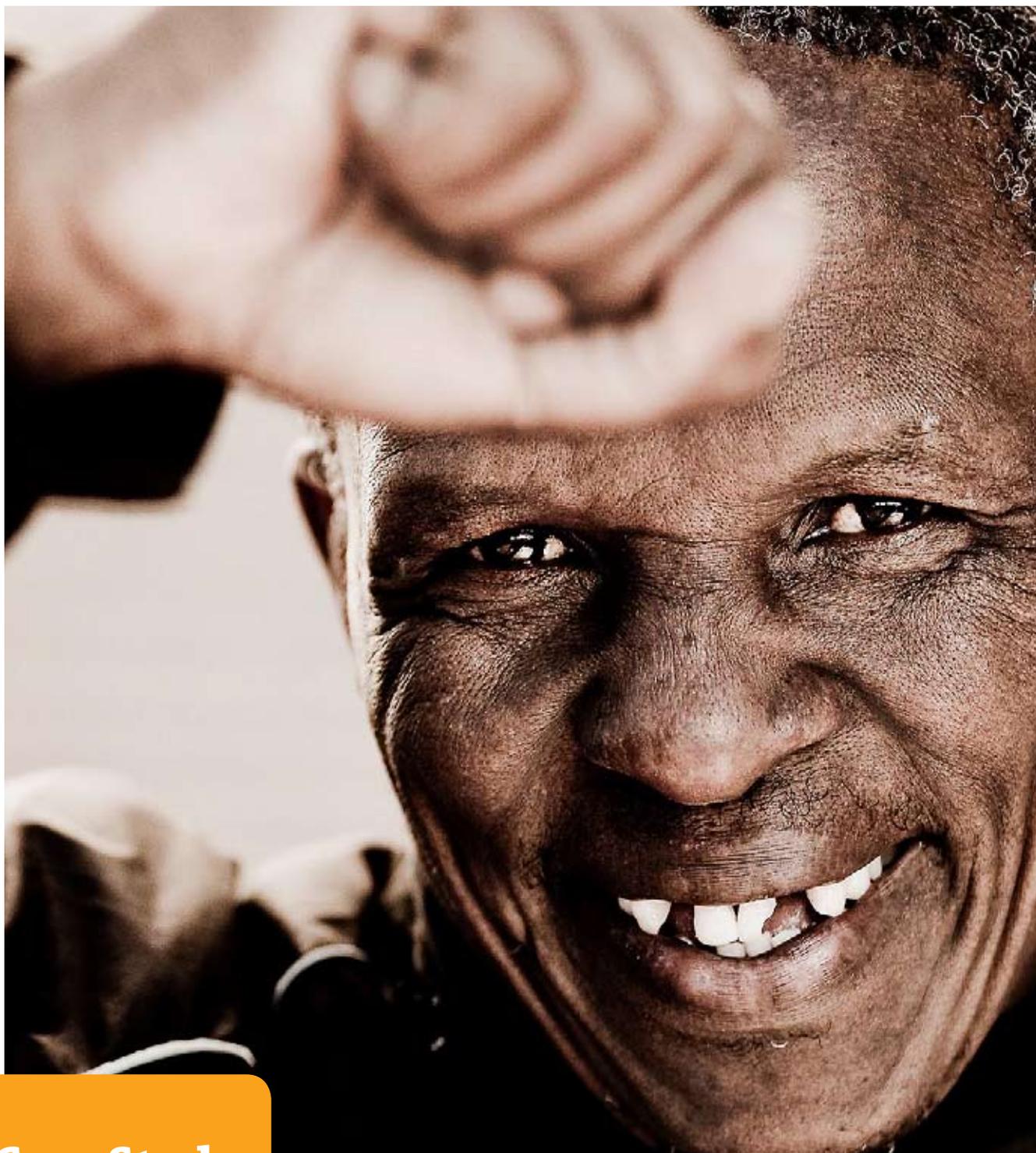


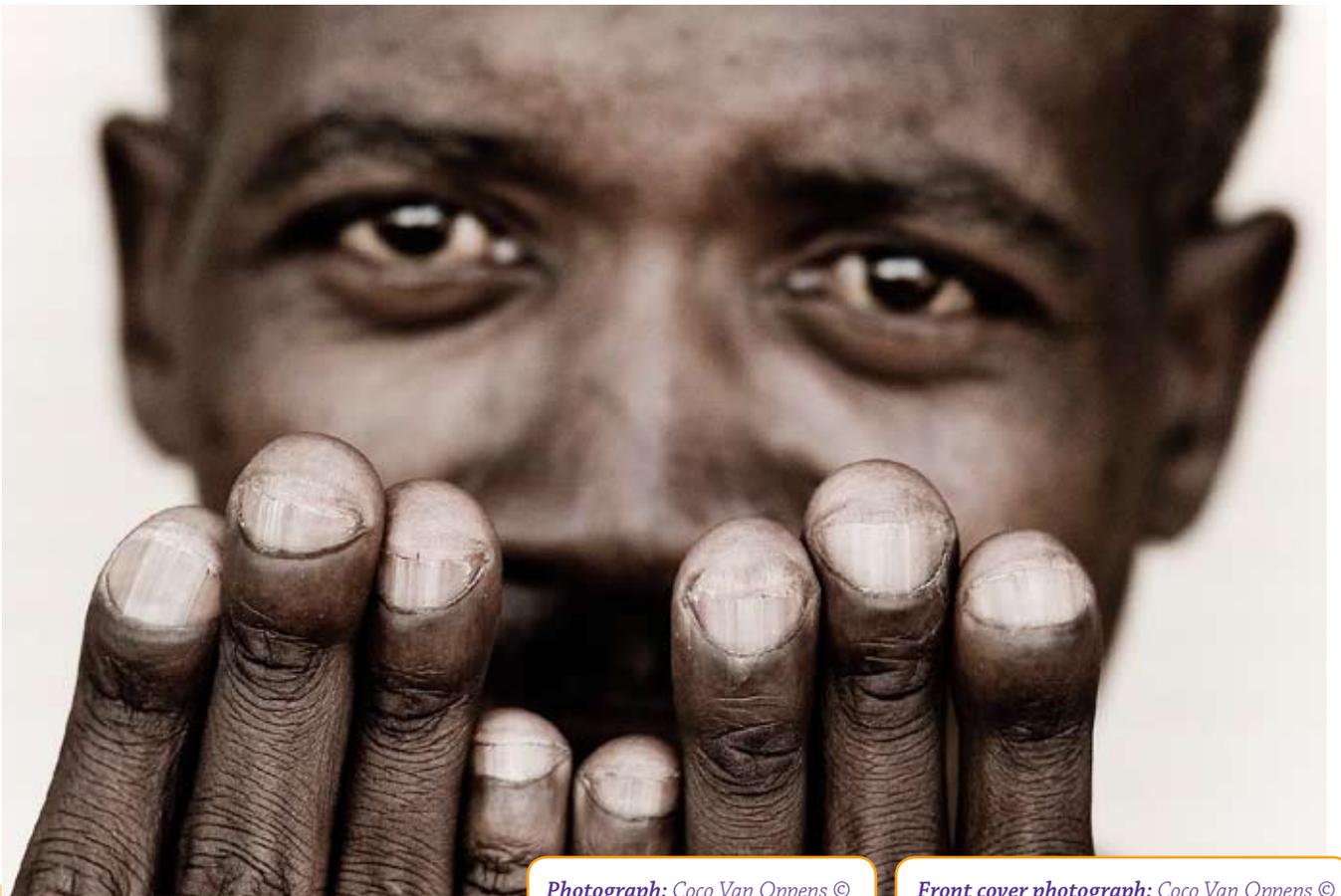
# **NO PLACE BY THE FIRE:**

The story of South African  
ex-combatants and the National  
Peace Accord Trust



**Case Study**

Commissioned by The Atlantic Philanthropies  
Written by Marian Nell and Janet Shapiro, February 2012



Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©

Front cover photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©

# Key

|               |  |                |   |
|---------------|--|----------------|---|
| <b>AIDS</b>   | Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome                    | <b>NPA</b>     | National Peace Accord   |
| <b>ANC</b>    | African National Congress                              | <b>NPAT</b>    | National Peace Accord Trust   |
| <b>APLA</b>   | Azanian People's Liberation Army                       | <b>NPO</b>     | Non-profit organisation   |
| <b>APLAVA</b> | Azanian People's Liberation Army Veterans' Association | <b>PAC</b>     | Pan Africanist Congress   |
| <b>AZANLA</b> | Azanian National Liberation Army                       | <b>POA</b>     | Programme of Action   |
| <b>CBO</b>    | Community-based organisation                           | <b>PTSD</b>    | Post-traumatic stress disorder  |
| <b>CSVR</b>   | Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation    | <b>SACC</b>    | South African Council of Churches   |
| <b>CV</b>     | Curriculum Vitae                                       | <b>SADF</b>    | South African Defence Force   |
| <b>DDR</b>    | Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration          | <b>SANDEF</b>  | South African National Defence Force                                      |
| <b>HIV</b>    | Human Immunodeficiency Virus                           | <b>SANMVA</b>  | South African National Military Veterans' Association                     |
| <b>IFP</b>    | Inkatha Freedom Party                                  | <b>SAPS</b>    | South African Police Service  |
| <b>KZN</b>    | KwaZulu-Natal  | <b>SASSETA</b> | South African Safety and Security Sector Education and Training Authority |
| <b>MK</b>     | Umkhonto weSizwe                                       | <b>SDU</b>     | Self-defence unit   |
| <b>MKMVA</b>  | Umkhonto weSizwe Military Veterans' Association        | <b>SPU</b>     | Self-protection unit  |
| <b>NEC</b>    | National Executive Committee                           | <b>TRC</b>     | Truth and Reconciliation Commission                                       |
| <b>NGO</b>    | Non-governmental organisation                          | <b>UDF</b>     | United Democratic Front   |

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- the highly committed staff of the National Peace Accord Trust
- Hugh Lewin and Gerald Kraak, for their assistance in editing our text; and
- Helle Christiansen, for her copy-editing, proofreading and facilitation of layout, design and dissemination.

The title of this report comes from an ex-combatant interviewed for this publication: "We were soldiers then, and proud, but when we came home, we found no place by the fire."

Most of the photographs in this publication were taken by Coco Van Oppens, South African-born international photographer. They are an evocative portrait of ex-combatants who participated in a Hero's Journey in the North West province in 2007.

The full suite of Coco's photographs can be seen at <http://cocovanoppens.co.za/theherosjourney/>.

Our grateful thanks to Coco for allowing us to use these powerful images.

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# Dedication



*Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©*

This publication is dedicated to the memory of the formidable Maggie Seiler, founder and director of the National Peace Accord Trust. She died in July 2011 after a short battle with cancer. Maggie worked tirelessly and – at times – in conditions of great adversity for the recognition of the needs of ex-combatants who were largely ignored by government, until recently. She was greatly admired and loved in the ex-combatant communities throughout South Africa.

The creation of a Department of Military Veterans within the Ministry of Defence and the roll-out of a programme to support ex-combatants are owed in no small part to the lifework of Maggie.

The Atlantic Philanthropies is proud that we were able to support the work of the National Peace Accord Trust and to have been associated with such a remarkable person.

# A great American dies: a tribute to Maggie Seiler

By Charlene Smith<sup>1</sup> (14 July 2011)

To hear a South African you would swear that we won liberation from apartheid oppression all by ourselves. It was we who suffered. We who conquered.

And when it comes to today's failures, then there are a host of 'them' and 'they' and 'others' we can blame.

Triumph is a cloak we all wear; failure is the wretched garment we throw at others.

Today, a dear friend died. Maggie Seiler was an American who came to South Africa not long after democracy. She was married to a political scientist who was intensely interested in this country. It fascinated and frustrated him, an emotion every South African shares.

But while he entered into South African debates with all the argumentative zeal of someone born here, Maggie was quiet; she watched, she listened, and most of all she became concerned by the fear behind our bravado, the anger masked by determined happiness.

A gentle Christian with Quaker instincts, she began working for the National Peace Accord Trust – do you remember that organisation? – created when Zulus fought township residents, when third force agents rode into townships in pickups like hunters going after kudu, and when rifles were placed into the hands of *kitskonstabels* (poorly trained municipal police, who were more likely to shoot journalists and each other than anyone else).

I remember those days. I remember driving through Soweto with my jacket filling with blood from the wound of a young comrade lying in the arms of another on my back seat, while I and another leaned from front windows screaming at residents to remove burning barricades. He died.

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<sup>1</sup> Charlene Smith is an award-winning South African journalist now living in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her book *Proud of Me: Speaking out against Sexual Violence and HIV* (Penguin Books: 2001) was nominated for the Alan Paton Award. It was updated in early 2012 and is available on Amazon as *Taming the Echo*. In it, Charlene writes of being raped and her global efforts to improve treatment and care of rape survivors. It depicts the difficulties she experienced due to her outspokenness – stalkers, death threats and political persecution.

Maggie stood on no public platform, she wrote not a single angry word demanding reform, no one heard her but for the young comrades, brutalised from an early age by having AK-47s thrust into their pre-adolescent hands.

I remember when there were no statesmen, when Mandela, de Klerk and Buthelezi<sup>2</sup> sat on a platform convened by churchmen and the Peace Accord was born. Neither would look at the other. Their folded arms and tight mouths showed their level of commitment to peace, to the accommodation that might save lives. It took many more to die before they sullenly did what we, the people, needed them to do.

Maggie, in the meantime, stood on no public platform, she wrote not a single angry word demanding reform, no one heard her but for the young comrades, brutalised from an early age by having AK-47s thrust into their pre-adolescent hands. They were profoundly traumatised, and because of it, very dangerous.

Maggie took me to meet some in Katlehong<sup>3</sup>. I remember one, Scott: he had been a comrade since he was 12. He confessed he could not remember how many people he had killed or girls he had raped – until his sister was raped and not long after killed herself. That partly woke him from the rage politicians exploited in him. He began having nightmares; in every nightmare those he had murdered came to spit on him, to taunt him.

But the worst was yet to come. Before 1991 and the unbanning of organisations, these comrades were hailed as ‘young lions’, the heroes of the revolution, but after 1991, as negotiations efforts intensified, they became an embarrassment. The closer we got to democratic elections and hopes of peace, the more politicians ignored them. Before, Scott boasted, he could directly call Hani, Zuma<sup>4</sup> and others. Now others took messages for calls that were never returned.

He and his friends had been heroes. Storekeepers paid them to protect their stores, they could walk into any store and take what they liked: food, liquor, cigarettes ... they could have almost any woman they wanted, and those that scorned them were made to pay.

But now with democracy so close, no one wanted them. They were an embarrassment. And so those scorned did what we should expect, but never do: they turned on society; they became criminals, they began robbing stores. They robbed and shot so many café-owners<sup>5</sup> that the corner store that had been a feature of South Africa disappeared.

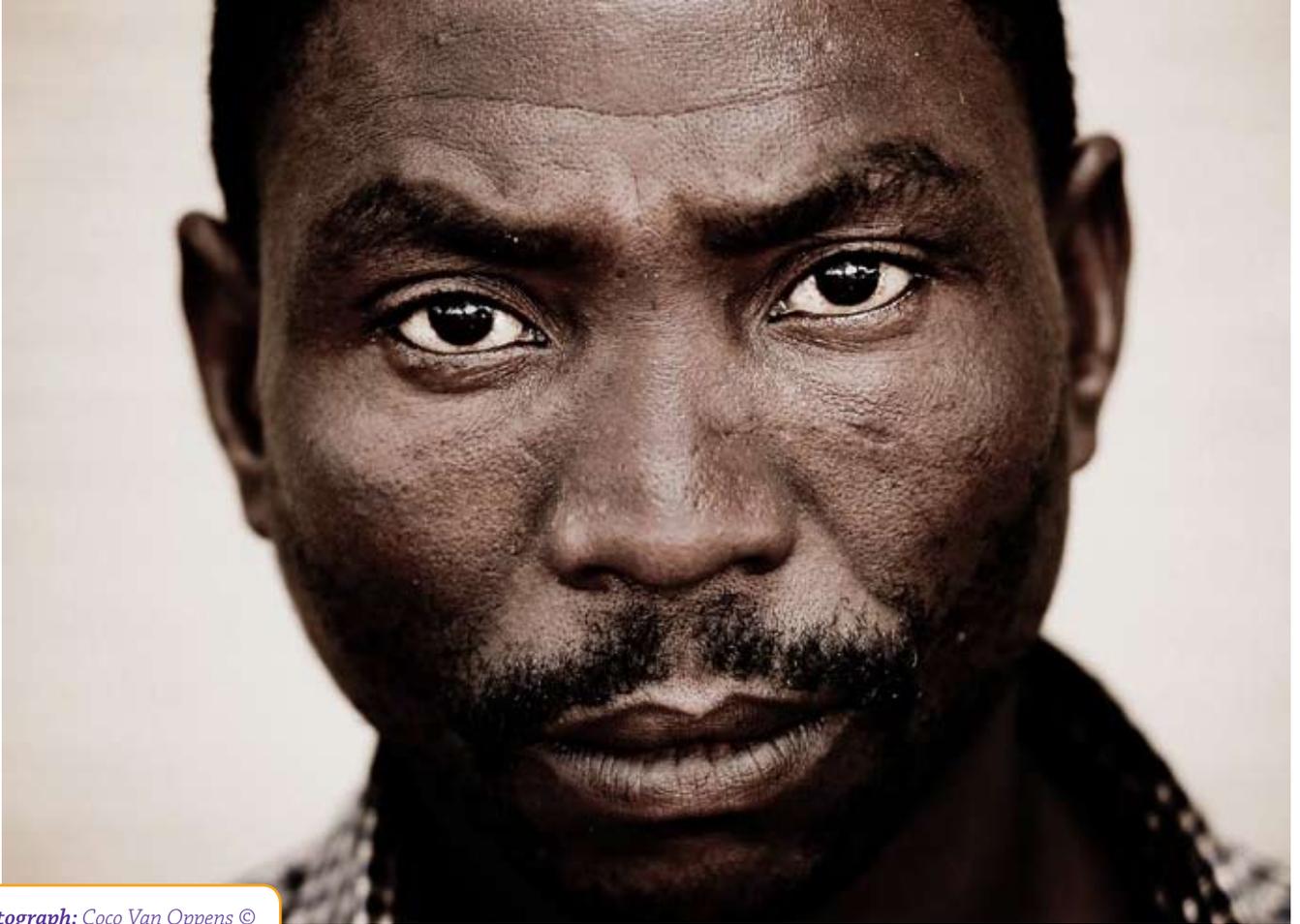
To listen to Scott and friends like him was profoundly depressing. It was easy to reject him and those like him. But Maggie could not, she would not. She saw the humanity within them that they no longer believed in.

<sup>2</sup> Nelson Mandela, FW de Klerk (president of South Africa 1989-1994) and Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leaders of the African National Congress, the National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Township some 35 km south-east of Johannesburg.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Hani and Jacob Zuma, leader of the South African Communist Party and the current president of South Africa, respectively. Chris Hani was assassinated on 10 April 1993.

<sup>5</sup> In South Africa, a café is a small store/kiosk that sells sweets, newspapers, food etc. It usually stays open for longer than more conventional shops.



*Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©*

**After I was raped and stabbed, Maggie was there. Just simply, gently, there.**

And so she worked with them, with the aid of others at the National Peace Accord Trust.

Scott and others helped by Maggie were hired by peacemakers in Rwanda and Burundi to assist them turn their brutalised young men and women back into dignified, law-abiding, respectful citizens. Indeed, if you truly want peace, it is the killers you need to first convert to evangelists, they know better than the rest of us the savagery of war and why we need to keep it at bay.

After I was raped and stabbed, Maggie was there. Just simply, gently, there. She organised for a group of 12 rape survivors to climb a mountain. Our guides? Men like Scott. One 40-something-year-old white woman who had been gang-raped by black housebreakers, with her husband tied up on the bed next to her, broke down and sobbed. We were about to climb a mountain and sleep in tents on the summit in the company of men, who looked to her, like those who had attacked her.

"I can't do this", she wailed.

The guides' faces began crumpling. One went and sat next to her and said, "I will protect you."

Such small words, so large the impact. She calmed, and he did, he helped her over rocks and boulders, brought her water, carried her pack, he cared for her.

As we climbed the mountain another woman, raped by a security guard at work, also began weeping, "I can't do this, I can't do this." And it wasn't that she could not, it was that her heart had been so broken, she no longer believed she could do anything. Certainly not without alcohol.

And so I said, "Look at how the mountain is trying to help you."

"How?", she asked.

"Look at those plants, hold onto them when you feel yourself slipping."

For me, it was Maggie helping me, by helping these people so wounded to believe in themselves again. Helping me discover my own strength.

Hold onto the saplings bending towards you, they are stretching towards you encouraging you to hold onto them, to pull yourself up. The mountain wants to help you."

And as we scrambled single-file up the mountain, she was between Maggie and I. I would hear her mutter, "The mountain is helping me, helping me."

And for me, for me it was Maggie helping me, by helping these people so wounded to believe in themselves again. Helping me discover my own strength.

A friend, Kathi Walther, said she met Maggie at Bikram Yoga, which Maggie took to with enthusiasm after her husband died. Kathi's dog had died, she was heartbroken. She was sitting disconsolately on her own. Maggie, who did not know her, sensed something was wrong and went and quietly sat next to her. Such was the radiated warmth of Maggie's spirit, that although she said nothing, Kathi began weeping and confided in her. As she said, "Maggie was just Maggie."

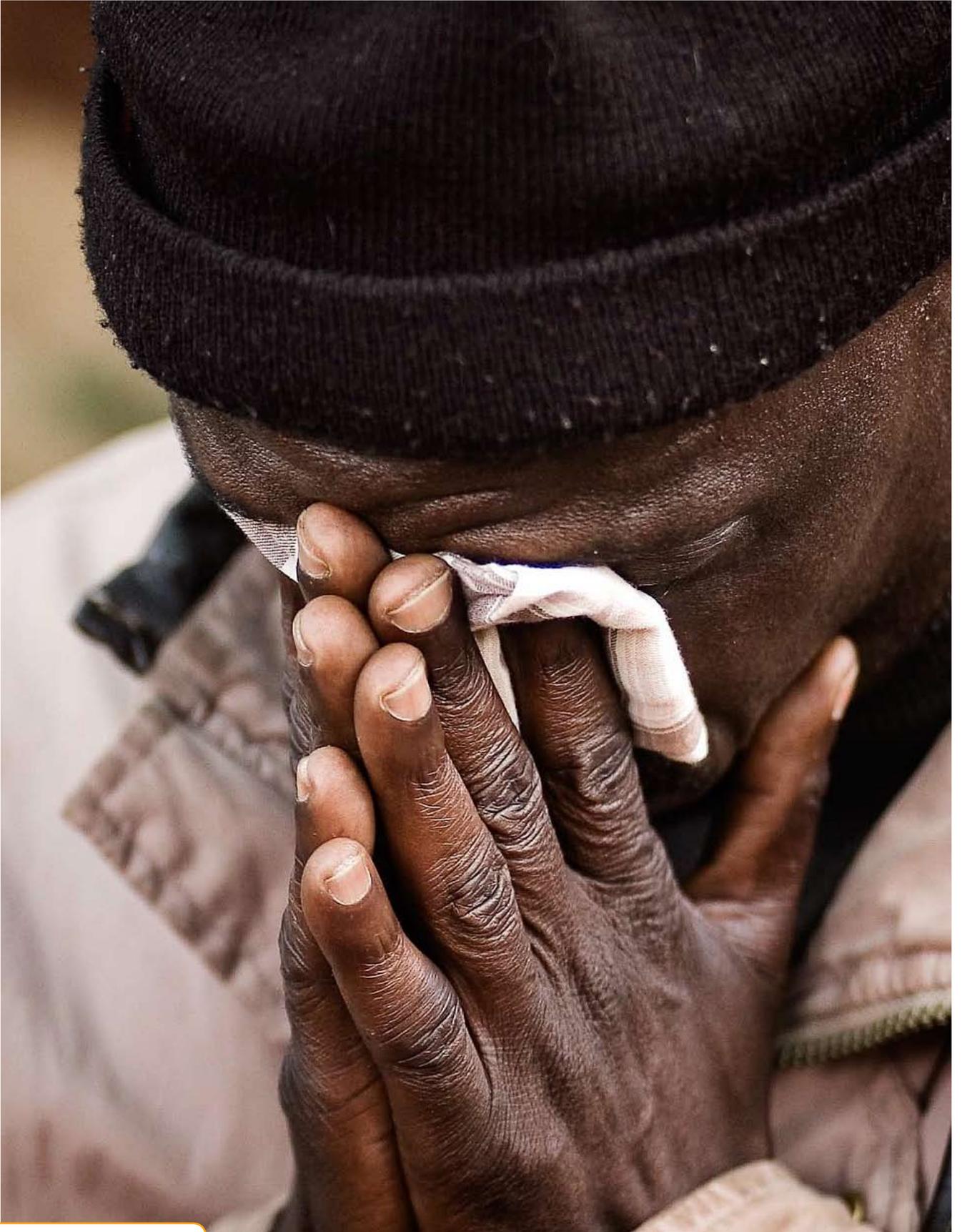
Just over two months ago Maggie was diagnosed with liver cancer, 10 tumours. She had remarried, Clive, not long before. They had found a new home to live, they had plans to travel South Africa, the adopted home she loved.

Three weeks ago she Skyped me to say goodbye. She was matter-of-fact and while I tried to be cheerful, to be strong for her, I failed, I sobbed, we both cried. Clive has written twice-weekly to her friends, giving us long updates as our friend, South Africa's sister, began a path that would lead her away from us, for now.

I asked her what she wanted from me; she finally said, an inspirational book. What do you buy for someone who is dying? I refused to buy one of those awful books written for the dying, she would have hated it. And so I sent her my favourite book on love and loving, *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. It arrived this week. I asked Clive, if he read nothing else to her that he read what the little fox says after the Little Prince has tamed him,

*"Goodbye," said the fox. "And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."*

I refused to say goodbye to Maggie. *Au revoir* Maggie, until we meet again. *Siyabonga, sisi* [Thank you, sister].



*Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©*

# I. Introduction

Ex-combatants came home to find that peace was not the promised land, but a place that required them to fight once more – this time for a place by the fire.

This is the story of how the forgotten freedom fighters of South Africa's liberation war made a place for themselves beside the slow-burning fire of South Africa's new democracy. Because the National Peace Accord Trust (NPAT) played an important, if not pivotal, role in this process, it is also, to some extent, the story of NPAT. But the Trust would be the first to recognise that the main players are those ex-combatants, who left South Africa to fight for freedom from apartheid and then came home to find that peace was not the promised land, but a place that required them to fight once more – this time for a place by the fire.

## Some historical background

In the 1960s, following the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and other movements seeking a peaceful end to the system of apartheid, freedom fighters took up an armed struggle against the South African government. They left the country for military training in supportive countries in Africa and Eastern Europe.

Each movement established an armed wing – Umkhonto weSizwe (MK, the so called 'Spear of the Nation', under the banner of the ANC), the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), falling under the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), and the Azanian National Liberation Army (AZANLA) linked to the Azanian People's Organisation. Many were trained in rural guerrilla warfare although they often fought and worked underground in urban areas.

The mid-1960s through the early 1970s were marked by sporadic acts of sabotage and attempts to infiltrate armed combatants into the country. These were met, for the most part, by repression, and an armed struggle failed to gain traction.

But after the nationwide uprising against apartheid in 1976, the ranks of the liberation armies were swelled by a wave of young activists choosing exile and enlisting in the armed struggle. This became a recurring feature of the

growing struggle, especially in the 1980s when an increasingly desperate and militarised apartheid regime used an array of security legislation and violence to brutally repress resistance. The ANC called on its supporters to respond to the violence of the apartheid state by taking up arms.

The experiences of Rias who enlisted in the PAC were typical for this period.<sup>6</sup>

He was known as Rias by his close friends and family, after a popular footballer. He joined the struggle in 1976. Before this, he was an ordinary schoolboy going to school, playing soccer and hanging around with his friends. He got involved in the student uprisings by coincidence. Students at his school asked him to represent them in the march that was to take place on 16 June because he was a student representative. He thought he was chosen because he was in the debating team, and also because he was a prefect.

Rias left South Africa on the night of 26 October 1976, travelling in a minibus with 18 other young men. The driver explained that there were fewer roadblocks at night. Rias could only leave the country after his mother granted him permission to go, and getting that permission was important to him.

*It was important to get permission, because I felt that if she agreed for me to go, this means that I had her blessings for anything I wanted to do, I would be successful at it.*

On the afternoon that he left, he played soccer somewhere in Soweto. With him, he took only two pairs of jeans and takkies and his “rubber shoes”. The group of 18 arrived in Swaziland and were met by two men who took them to the police station to record their presence in the country. They were then taken to a house in Thiloni Park which they later discovered was a PAC house. Since he was regarded as a student leader, Rias was expected to brief the leadership of the PAC in that house on the situation in South Africa. On the evening of his arrival in Swaziland, he and two other Student Representative Council members were left at the house in Manzini and asked to give their views. They were then told they should go back to South Africa to recruit more students. Rias refused because he felt he would risk arrest.

<sup>6</sup> Box content adapted from Dube, Nobayethi, *Rias' Story – “We are just Foot Soldiers”*, in Everatt, David (ed), *Only Useful until Democracy? Reintegrating Ex-combatants in Post-apartheid South Africa – with Lessons from Kosovo & Zimbabwe*, The Atlantic Philanthropies/Strategy & Tactics: 2007.

“The first thing that we did is what we called ideological classes. We got exposed to books – you know, the Nkwame Nkrumah books, the Patrice Lumumba books, the Mao Tse books, the Karl Marx books.”<sup>6</sup>

When he left South Africa, Rias did not know which organisation he was going to join. He says he joined the PAC because the person who drove him out of the country was PAC.

*The first thing that we did is what we called ideological classes. We got exposed to books – you know, the Nkwame Nkrumah books, the Patrice Lumumba books, the Mao Tse books, the Karl Marx books. Those are all political books, so reading material was given us to read.*

The aim of the political classes was to make them understand what was going on in South Africa and why. And they were also waiting for their turn to leave for Tanzania. There were 43 other people staying in the house. Things were not easy. There was not enough to eat. Rias did not dare write home for fear of letters being opened. Girls were moved to other areas “as having them in the house had led to some problems”. Finally, they went to Tanzania where they received political and military training. Rias thought about home when they returned from training centres to the camps.

*In the camps, the only thing that was waiting for us is when are we going home to fight, and that day was not coming.*

During this period, the ANC emerged as the most influential liberation movement, buttressed by its internal wing, the United Democratic Front (UDF), which mobilised large numbers of the population behind its demands for a non-racial democracy.

Young UDF activists established para-military formations such as the Bonteheuwel Military Wing in Cape Town, one of many ‘self-defence units’ (SDUs) which sought to protect communities from police and military repression. From 1984 onwards, SDUs were incorporated into the ANC’s strategy of making the country ‘ungovernable’ and they became highly militarised.

In the 1980s, supporters of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) – a Zulu traditionalist party, which sought the political independence of the former Zulu Kingdom – collaborated with the apartheid government and, fearing the growing importance of the modernist ANC, resorted to violence against the UDF. They formed themselves into paramilitary ‘self-protection units’ (SPUs).

This led to a civil war in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and in the hostels on Johannesburg’s East Rand, where many Zulu migrant workers lived. Some 12 000 people died in this war, resolved only by the advent of democracy in 1994. It suited the government of the time to portray the

There are an estimated 80 000 ex-combatants, and each one of them has a tale to tell. Yet, many are reluctant to do so.

fighting as internecine 'black-on-black' violence and to entrench enmity in the townships, hostels and rural areas of KZN.

Ingredients of tribalism, criminal activity and conflict with security forces added to the toxic combustion in these places. People fled their houses and tracts of deserted homes became no-go areas. Khumalo Street in Thokoza on the East Rand was one such no-go zone and, at the height of the violence, was the scene of inhuman atrocities.

Add to this mix the soldiers of the so-called 'independent homelands' and the members of the South African Defence Force (SADF), the young white men forcibly conscripted to defend apartheid. In 1996, the ANC estimated that, by 1985, more than 32 000 SADF members had been deployed in townships throughout South Africa to support the South African police in maintaining law and order, in addition to those deployed on the country's borders to deflect insurgents.<sup>7</sup>

All of the people who participated in these various structures are deemed to be ex-combatants. In this study we are concerned, however, to profile those who served in the liberation armies and in the SDUs and SPUs.

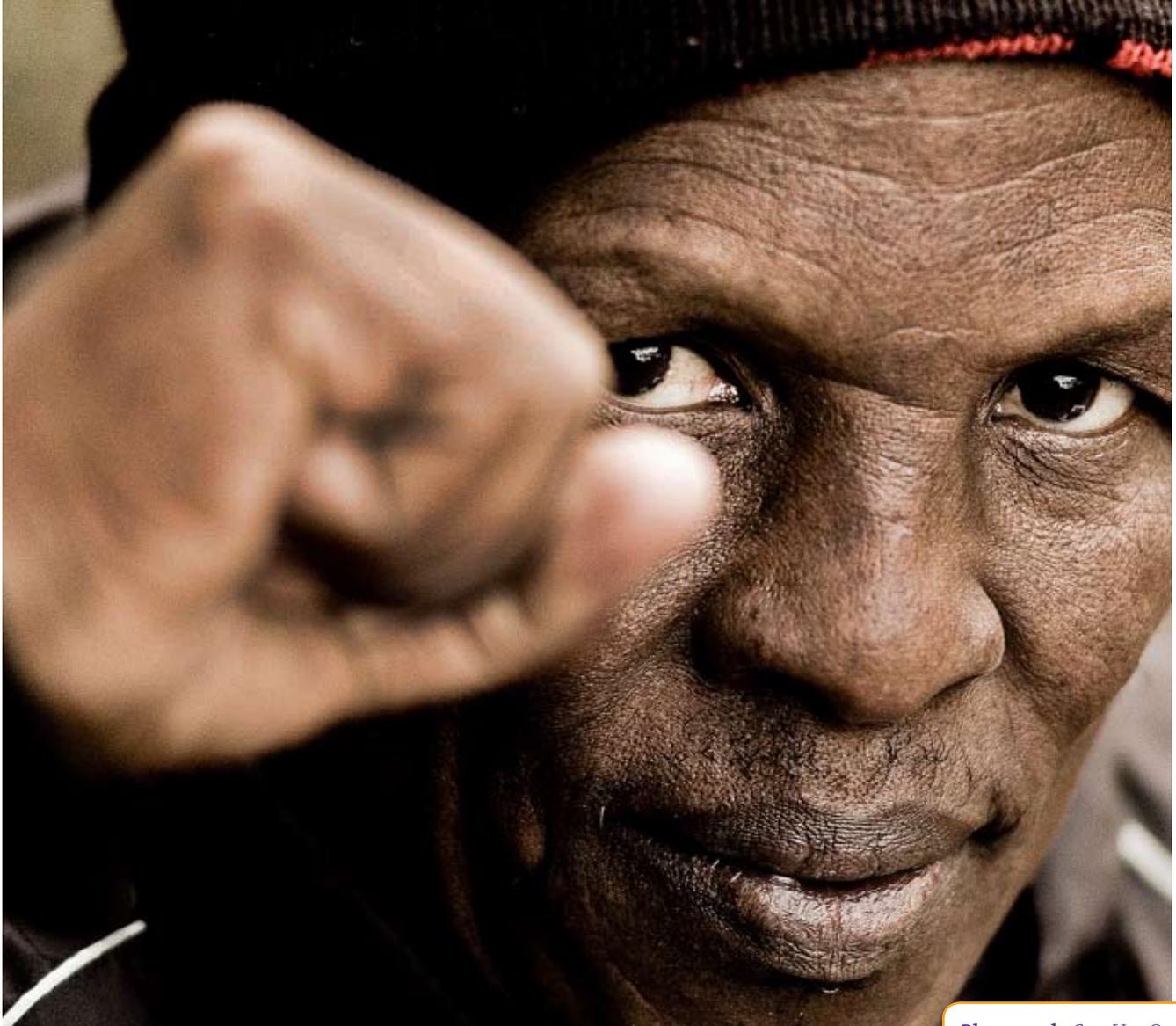
In the late 1980s, an impasse developed between the security structures of the apartheid state and the anti-apartheid formations, neither side able to overcome the other. This, together with far-reaching changes in the international environment (in particular, an end to the Cold War) forced the contending parties into negotiations for a political transition that was to result in a democracy.

With the advent of democracy in 1994, these men, young and old (some had been in the bush since the 1960s), were told that it was time to put down their guns and offer olive branches. In the convention centres and meeting halls where the political transition from apartheid to democracy was negotiated, their leaders had cobbled together an inclusive peace and it was time to go 'home' and 'live the dream' of a non-racial South Africa. Only, home had become a foreign place and the aspirations of the ex-combatants were put on the back burner by those negotiating the peace.

## Our brief

According to NPAT research, there are an estimated 80 000 of these ex-combatants, and each one of them has a tale to tell. Yet, many are reluctant to do so. Many researchers and well-meaning people have taken them back to their difficult days in the struggle and they no longer want to go there.

<sup>7</sup> ANC, *Further Submissions and Responses by the African National Congress to Questions Raised by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, ANC: 12 May 1997.



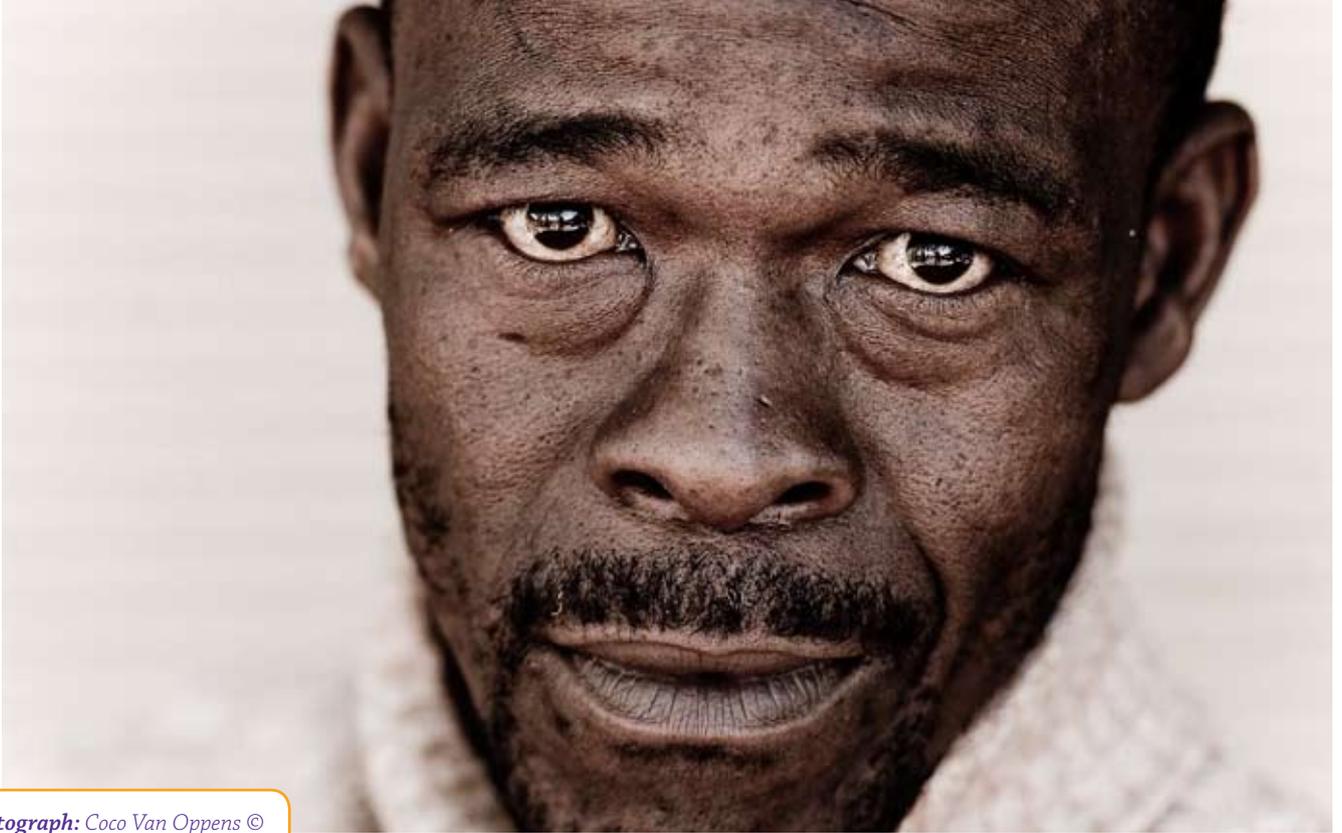
*Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©*

So, when we were asked to write about NPAT's work with ex-combatants, we decided to use the very many versions of their stories that had already been published, to speak to a few who were willing to repeat their journey into the past (on condition of anonymity), and to use existing reports and publications to weave together a story of the undefeated spirit of these young men and women.

Having answered the call to liberate their country, they now came home to find that the space around the fire was crowded and no one really wanted them there. With the help of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like NPAT, they have now made other contenders shift up so that there is space by the fire, a space that honours the role they played by giving them the opportunity to help build the future.

So, we used a number of secondary sources, which are listed in the bibliography. We thank the writers of these sources for their hard work, and hope they understand the need to use what they have produced rather than have ex-combatants tell their tales yet again. We must also thank those who told us their stories afresh and gave us the privilege of hearing them first-hand, as well as for an apparent ordinariness that masked so much pain, anguish and courage.

We had a considerable degree of cooperation from NPAT and its ex-combatant supporters. John Hall, chairperson of the National Peace Accord



*Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©*

(NPA) and of NPAT, shared his considerable knowledge and his archives with us. At one stage, the NPAT archives were stacked in boxes all around our office as we delved into the past. Above all, our thanks go to the late, indomitable Maggie Seiler – founder and director of NPAT until her death in July 2011 – who told us her story, gave us her interpretations and, through her credibility in the ex-combatant community, opened doors for us.

We were asked to write this publication by The Atlantic Philanthropies, which gave a series of generous grants to NPAT over a six-year period up to the end of 2010 as part of its Reconciliation and Human Rights Programme. Its objective was to support successful demonstration projects for the social reintegration of ex-combatants, which the government could take over and replicate to scale. This would only happen if there was a strong advocacy element to the programme – to persuade relevant government departments to commit resources to meeting the needs of ex-combatants.

As it turned out, the ultimate objective of The Atlantic Philanthropies' investment – the reintegration of the ex-combatants into their communities through partnership with government, as a key building block for a stable South Africa – would require effective advocacy in conditions of great adversity.

From the point of view of The Atlantic Philanthropies, the expected results of the programme were that:

- ex-combatants would no longer pose a threat to South Africa's political stability
- a significant proportion of ex-combatants would have been reintegrated into society
- up to 8 000 ex-combatants in six identified municipalities in the Eastern Cape, KZN and Gauteng would have been reintegrated into their communities after participating in a series of programmes and interventions organised by NPAT field staff

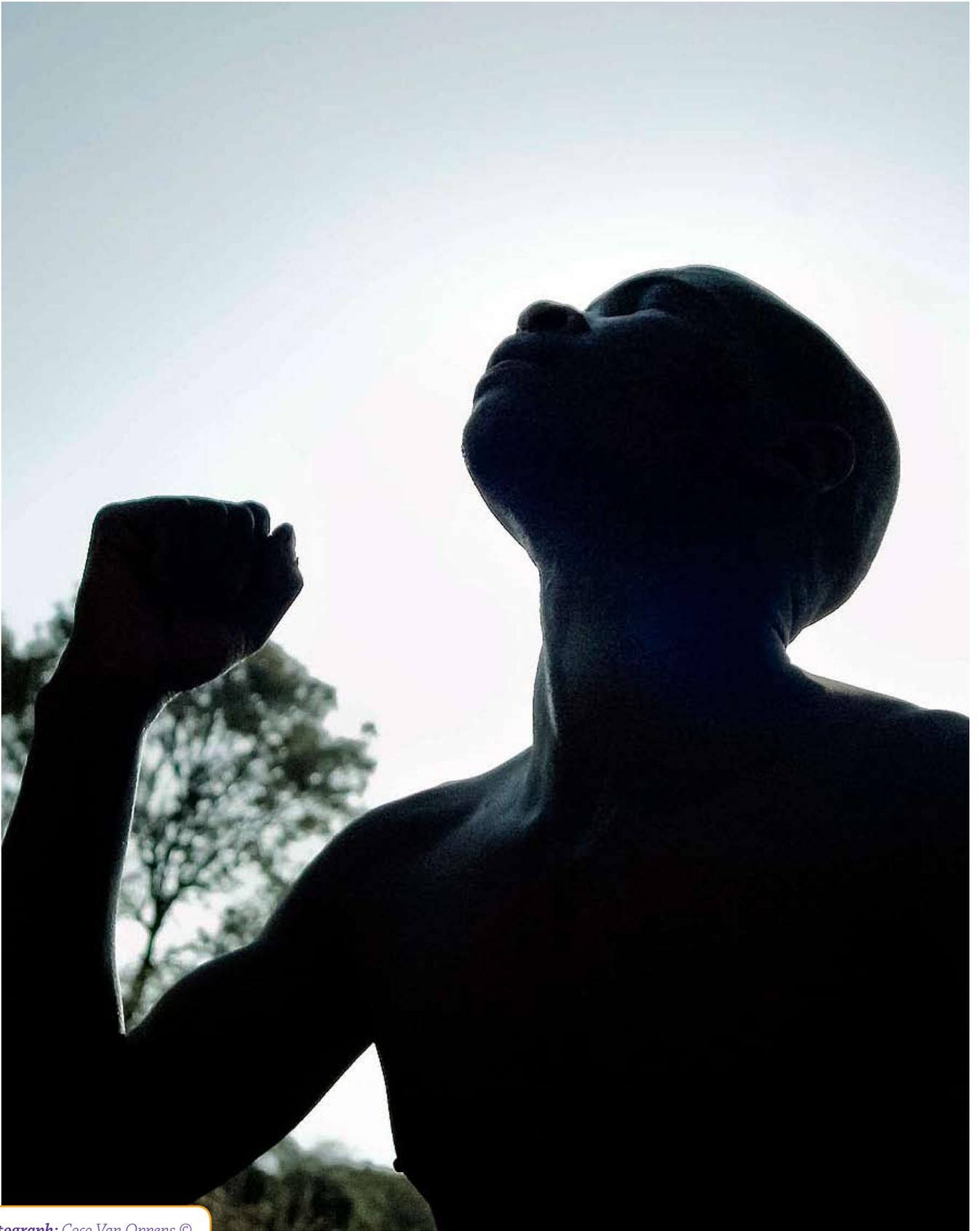
**Only a quarter of ex-combatants who need a programme of support have accessed one.**

- government and non-profit psychosocial, health and other services would be available to, and accessed by, the target group
- ex-combatants would have improved access to employment, and to top education, housing and health services
- as a consequence of lobbying and advocacy by NPAT, an increasing level of government resources in the Eastern Cape, KZN and Gauteng would have been invested in ex-combatant programmes and more partnerships formed with government departments and non-profit organisation (NPOs) to provide services to the target group; and
- NPAT would have repositioned itself as an accredited training provider for future sustainability.

In the event all these expected results were achieved, and while attribution is a slippery concept, The Atlantic Philanthropies certainly made some contribution to this at a particularly crucial time, just as NPAT made a considerable contribution to the rewriting of ex-combatant history in South Africa.

In many ways, this is a success story, although NPAT is quick to point out that only a quarter of ex-combatants who need a programme of support have accessed one. It is not a story that ends with a rainbow illusion. Nor is it idealistic. In the mess, from which people emerged, there are stories of both success and failure, of hard work and dark hours before hopeful, but uncertain dawns. There is still much to be done, much to be fought for, but one day we hope that old warriors – sitting round fires, whether they be in townships or suburbs or on farms, surrounded by families that are enjoying the fruits of liberation in the form of houses and services and jobs – will be willing to tell their stories and be honoured for them. There is an old African proverb: “Until the lions have their own historians, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter.”

Let the voice of the lions be heard!



*Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©*

## II. Fighting for freedom and peace

As peace was brokered, the 'young lions' as they were named became viewed with fear and suspicion.

During the bloody days of the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the teenage soldiers of the SDUs and SPUs were viewed as heroes by their communities. As peace was brokered, this changed – the 'young lions' as they were named became viewed with fear and suspicion. But many young men without any training and prior military experience had been mobilised *en masse* to protect their communities and neighbourhoods, and this was a reality which could not be wished away.

In 2006, a study of the impact of these violent years on ex-combatants was carried out for NPAT by Bea Abrahams.<sup>8</sup> The report relies mainly on quantitative information gathered via questionnaires over a period of three months. A total of 214 participants from Thokoza, Ktlehong and Vosloorus in Gauteng, the Ugu and Sisonke Districts in KZN and the Alfred Nzo District in the Eastern Cape completed the survey. They comprised 109 males and 105 females. Additional information was obtained from individual interviews.

Most of the respondents were in the 18 to 29 years-of-age bracket. Almost 40 per cent of the respondents were in their teens or pre-adolescence when they participated in or were exposed to political violence. Only 18 per cent of the respondents were in full-time employment, with about five per cent in part-time employment. Seventeen per cent said they were sometimes employed, but a full 51 per cent were not. This was despite the fact that their formal educational levels were, on the whole, higher than that of the general population.

Of the sample, 79 per cent had witnessed killing, 57 per cent had seen someone in their family killed or injured in political violence, 10 per cent had killed someone, 83 per cent had experienced community violence and 38 per cent had participated directly in community violence.

*At that time, the community was solidly ANC and at war with the Zulu hostel dwellers. Most of the hostel people were Inkatha [IFP] supporters. Men and women from the community were abducted and taken into the hostels where they were murdered, and hostel dwellers were ambushed and killed when they came out. It was like civil war. We wore white headbands and the Inkatha*

<sup>8</sup> Abrahams, Bea, *Providing Trauma Counselling and Psycho-social Support to Military Veterans*, NPAT: May 2006.

Many of the lucky few who do get jobs pass through a cycle of unemployment, employment and back to unemployment.

*people wore red headbands, but after a while, nobody knew who was who and we carried both white and red headbands for insurance. Weapons were pouring into the community and soon a black-market gun trade developed. I saw a lot of death. There were bodies all over the place. Sometimes they were there for days and dogs fed off the corpses, so we shot the dogs.<sup>9</sup>*

An overwhelming two thirds of those surveyed or interviewed by Abrahams said they found it difficult to forgive those who had injured them, their families or their community, while a third felt that they had given their all for the struggle, for little or no reward.

In talking about the direct personal impact on their lives, ex-combatants in Abrahams' study and others reported nightmares, obsessional thinking about their violent past, fear of people, poor concentration and memory, feelings of anger, violent behaviour, irritability, aggression, paranoia, hallucinations, vengeful thoughts, blaming, fear of the dark, and difficulty in taking on social roles such as mother, father or breadwinner.<sup>10</sup>

*Some of the participants describe how they won't watch war movies or how they always cry when movie stars cry. Some saw dogs eat corpses; others, people shot in front of their eyes. They remember running over the dead bodies of their comrades. Some see the faces of those they killed in their dreams and wake and cannot sleep again. Some fear that the spirits of those they killed are coming back to kill them.<sup>11</sup>*

Many of the children of the ex-combatants have had to deal with intergenerational psychological trauma – not only being brought up by parents psychologically crippled by their experiences in the struggle, but also with the socio-economic poverty which was often a result. Many in the study ascribed their unemployment to poor education, a lack of skills, a lack of work experience and a "lack of personal contact with influential individuals who can facilitate access to employment".<sup>12</sup>

Those who work with ex-combatants recount that many of the lucky few who do get jobs pass through a cycle of unemployment, employment and back to unemployment, due to an inability to concentrate, alcoholism, drug-taking and lack of sleep – all the residue of their unresolved years of conflict. Many ex-combatants have consequently been marginalised and left vulnerable to all the problems that go with poverty, poor service delivery, high unemployment and inadequate psychosocial services.

So, why has there been no place by the fire for these cadres of the struggle?

<sup>9</sup> NPAT website, [www.peaceaccord.org.za/stories1.htm](http://www.peaceaccord.org.za/stories1.htm).

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that the works we studied and the interviews we conducted did not include those young white men who had been conscripted into the South African apartheid army, although anecdotal information picked up in the course of our work suggests that they too were highly traumatised, that many resorted to drugs and alcohol to deal with their trauma and that their need for reintegration was and is great.

<sup>11</sup> Abrahams *op.cit.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

# III. The search for a place by the fire

While it is relatively easy to send soldiers home and call them civilians, mindsets do not change as easily.

*Everyone wants to live a good life. But we spent our youth at war and when it was all over there was nothing for us. The new government gave some ex-combatants a one-off payment but there were no funds for education, no job prospects and no future. After the transition, some of the SDU members who fought apartheid joined the new police force, the army or security firms but they never settled. Some committed suicide. Others just continued doing what they had done in the early 1990s.<sup>13</sup>*

International studies have shown that when a civil conflict comes to a close, a number of strategies are required to demilitarise the society and reintegrate the former combatants into public life. These are commonly referred to as disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR).

## Disarmament

Demobilisation is the process of turning a soldier into a civilian. While it is relatively easy to send soldiers home and call them civilians, mindsets do not change as easily. Disarmament and demobilisation entail the cessation of fighting, the handing over of weapons to the authorities and political agreements to sustain peace.

In South Africa, this was not without its problems. In contrast to other conflicts in the world, a formal hand-over of weapons was never agreed as part of the formal negotiations.

*The demobilisation process is something that Teddy has never really understood. He heard from fellow SDU members that they had been asked to hand over their weapons. There was mistrust among all the groups involved in the conflict. SDU members did not believe that the hostel dwellers would hand over their guns just like that. The hostel dwellers had traumatised the country since 1990 and Teddy did not believe that they would honestly hand over their weapons.<sup>14</sup>*

<sup>13</sup> NPAT website, [www.peaceaccord.org.za/stories1.htm](http://www.peaceaccord.org.za/stories1.htm).

<sup>14</sup> Dube *op.cit.*



*Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©*

SDU members were also reluctant to hand over their weapons because the community had contributed towards buying the guns, and it seemed unfair that someone else was now dictating the terms. In any event, they were frightened that the violence might flare up again.

*We did not know if the opposition was also handing in their guns. And what if something caused conflict and we were back at square one? How were we to defend ourselves?<sup>15</sup>*

Weapons caches continued to exist in many places. The period from 1990 to 1994, when the political negotiations for a transition from apartheid to democracy were taking place, was very violent. The notion of a 'peaceful transition to democracy' was a matter of degree rather than reality.

Clandestine groups, some within state and military structures and opposed to democracy, fuelled the civil war between the ANC and the IFP, seeking to destabilise the negotiations. Weapons caches tended to be owned by a group rather than individuals and many disappeared into the savage fighting waged in rural and urban areas. Partly as a consequence of this, political violence continued into the early years of South Africa's new democracy, notably in KZN. When these conflicts were finally resolved, many weapons were absorbed into criminal networks. Armed crime that undermines social cohesion and stability continues to this day.

## Demobilisation

Cadres waiting in camps in foreign countries in the early 1990s were unsure what was expected of them, although it became clear that as the political negotiations progressed, they would no longer be expected to fight the

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

## Returning guerrillas had many expectations, most of which were not met.

liberation war on home territory, for which they had been trained. Some of them began to come 'home' of their own accord, crossing the borders and returning to the villages and townships they had left, waiting for some official word of what they should do next. According to the late Maggie Seiler

*People from exile should have been brought back to a settlement area to start with reintegration instead of sending them home – they weren't used to that kind of environment.<sup>16</sup>*

The period of demobilisation was stressful. Returning guerrillas had many expectations, most of which were not met.

Personal circumstances also presented challenges. Many men had left the country very young, and returned with families. They were not provided with accommodation and had to go back to their parents' homes. Those who came through Johannesburg International Airport were not provided with any transport, and families in South Africa had to arrange for them to be met. The experience of Rias, a member of APLA was typical.

*Rias felt he was a burden to his family and it would have been helpful if he had been provided with some means to set up his new life. Their communities labelled them exiles and many ex-combatants felt stigmatised, especially since there was little status or benefit attached to their situation. Many despaired and felt that they were being exploited to further other people's aim. "We are just foot soldiers who were supposed to further the aims of the organisation."<sup>17</sup>*

Successful demobilisation would also have been aided by a smooth integration of the fighting parties into the newly constituted South African National Defence Force (SANDF), which was meant to merge the soldiers of the apartheid SADF and those of the guerrilla armies into a single force. But this was an erratic and incomplete process. To be reintegrated into the SANDF, ex-combatants had to pass tests, for which many did not have appropriate educational qualifications. Under-age applicants were also not accepted.

The command structure of the SANDF continued to be dominated by officers of the former apartheid military. Ex-combatants complained about the continued use of Afrikaans as the language of instruction, about stigmatisation and marginalisation, physical and psychological harassment, inefficiency in dealing with grievances, unfair dismissals, and unpaid or docked salaries.

*[We were] thrown outside like morning mucus. [...] Forgotten is an understatement; we have been wished away. [...] They are frustrating us out of the system.<sup>18</sup>*

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Maggie Seiler, October 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Dube *op.cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Ex-combatants quoted in Gear, Sasha, *Wishing Us Away: Challenges Facing Ex-combatants in the 'New' South Africa*, CSVR: 2002.

Some even believed that the SANDF was deliberately trying to get them to leave.

*They tried to transform us into regular soldiers. In 1992 and 1993 there were squad drills. After the elections they brought us back to South Africa – we flew from Uganda to Hoedspruit Airport<sup>19</sup>. They took us to a military base and started to give us training to integrate. But I left and never went back again – I left the army and never went back again. There was no more war. I got a force number and am still struggling for a pension. People are dying of AIDS, lots of people are dying, I feel useless in life. If Tambo and Hani<sup>20</sup> were alive our lives would be manageable. But no one helps. When we think about ourselves we are still struggling inside the country. People are free, but us from MK are suffering. I am no longer the person who left the country. I have changed. We fought to liberate others but we are not liberated. I feel I might as well drink all the time.<sup>21</sup>*

Chris – an ex-member of MK – said

*When I left I was involved with student politics and I didn't finish at school. When I came back I tried to register to write my matric but I kept getting instructions about integration and missed my opportunity. I was an officer, a military engineer in MK but in the SANDF I had to be a junior because they said I was too young to be an officer. There was a march of veterans on the Union Buildings<sup>22</sup> and Madiba [Nelson Mandela] spoke to us and promised to speed up the process of integration. I was sent to Walmansthal [military camp north of Pretoria] and was there doing nothing for eight months. It was a wasted opportunity for matric and my family responsibilities were mounting. I left in November and got a job in security – about 20 of us tried to open our own security company but it didn't work out. I stayed at home and did odd jobs in construction.<sup>23</sup>*

Then in 1996, the Department of Defence published a *White Paper on Defence*<sup>24</sup> subsequently approved by Parliament which argued that, as a result of integration, force levels had been greatly inflated, creating an SANDF structure that was neither cost-effective nor appropriate.

The paper proposed voluntary release of members of non-statutory forces who were constitutionally part of the SANDF but either did not wish to serve in the defence force or were unable to do so for reasons of ill-health, age or aptitude. Coupled to this were proposals for compensation, especially

<sup>19</sup> Military airbase in the north-east of South Africa.

<sup>20</sup> Oliver Tambo (former secretary-general, president and national chairperson of the ANC; died on 24 April 1993) and Chris Hani (refer footnote 4).

<sup>21</sup> Gear *op.cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Official seat of the South African government and the president of the republic in Pretoria.

<sup>23</sup> Interview, October 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Democracy – White Paper on National Defence for the Republic of South Africa*, May 1996.

Once certain measures had been implemented, the general attitude on the part of government appeared to be that the needs of ex-combatants had been dealt with.

for aged and disabled military veterans, through the *Special Pensions Act*<sup>25</sup>, although those who were under 35 years-of-age in 1994 did not qualify.

Gratuities for certain periods of service were also made available. Once these measures had been implemented, the general attitude on the part of government appeared to be that the needs of ex-combatants had been dealt with and would be treated no differently than those of other vulnerable groups, such as women or children, or people with disabilities. Ex-combatants were left to compete for the resources of society.

## Reintegration

Reintegration typically has three aspects:

- social integration – when soldiers become not just civilians but part of society with a demilitarised social identity
- political reintegration – where ex-combatants participate fully in the political life of their communities; and
- economic reintegration – where former combatants build their livelihoods through gainful employment or productivity.

As David Everatt and Ross Jennings explain in their 2006 study on the needs of ex-combatants in the Gauteng province

*In any post-conflict society, demobilisation represents a key moment for acknowledging the violent past by helping ex-combatants to transform themselves into engaged, productive citizens of the new society – mirroring the transformation of society as a whole.*<sup>26</sup>

South Africa has struggled on all these fronts. According to some of our informants, the reintegration of ex-combatants into society was not even on the formal agenda during the negotiations towards a democratic dispensation. The ANC had prioritised the release of its cadres in prison instead.

The reintegration process was incomplete and fraught with problems. In the Everatt and Jennings study, just one third of their sample had been part of a formal demobilisation process. Those MK soldiers who elected demobilisation were entitled to a one-time grant based on how long they had served (around R35 000 on average). Some benefited from a scholarship fund. But the study found that only six per cent had received financial compensation and that this tended to go to the better educated, and to men rather than women. Further, a large number of ex-combatants did not get

<sup>25</sup> Republic of South Africa, *Special Pensions Act 69 of 1996*.

<sup>26</sup> Everatt, David & Jennings, Ross, *Only Useful until Democracy? Profiling Ex-combatants in Gauteng*, The Atlantic Philanthropies/Strategy & Tactics: 2006.



Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©

their demobilisation grants because of corruption.<sup>27</sup>

The SANDF's Service Corps was established in 1995 to assist demobilised soldiers reintegrate into civil society through skills training, conversion courses and career profiling. But again, there were many complaints: ex-combatants claimed they were given limited training choices, were subjected to racism by instructors and that there were differences in the ways ex-exiles and ex-SDU members were treated.

According to Professor Jacklyn Cock's 2004 study on demilitarising South African society, only nine per cent reported that the skills training they received helped them find employment, and in 2000, an independent audit report encountered misuse or possible misappropriation of some R300 million earmarked for the retraining of ex-combatants.<sup>28</sup>

It is estimated that between 1995 and 2002, the Service Corps trained only between 3 000 and 4 000 former APLA and MK soldiers. In 1999, it was reported that the Service Corps employed 252 staff members while there was a total of only 202 trainees. Service Corps officials countered these allegations and complained that there was a sense of entitlement on the part of ex-combatants, a lack of gratitude, and a failure to recognise the constraints

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Cock, Jacklyn, *Rethinking Militarism in Post-apartheid South Africa*, London School of Economics: 2004.

**Piecemeal reintegration strategies failed and resulted in a high rate of suicides among the former ex-combatants, aggressive behaviour and criminal activities.**

under which the Service Corps was working.<sup>29</sup>

Outside of the military, attempts to work with militarised youth proved difficult. In 1994, for example, a Community Constable Project was established to police and restore peace in conflict-ridden townships by integrating 800 former SDU and SPU members into the South African Police Service (SAPS). But communities claimed they were undisciplined, trigger-happy and unaccountable to the police. The constables themselves showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

In the absence of a long-term, coherent and national reintegration plan, including ways to deal with the PTSD of many ex-combatants, piecemeal reintegration strategies failed. This resulted in a high rate of suicides among the former ex-combatants, aggressive behaviour and criminal activities.<sup>30</sup>

Findings in Bea Abrahams' report show that almost two thirds of the respondents had not received psychological, moral or social support; that criminal elements within the communities had gained dominance; and that violence had become an accepted way of life. Twenty-three percent felt that their families were somehow disappointed in them because they had become involved in political violence.<sup>31</sup>

When it came to employment, potential employers were often not keen to employ ex-combatants. This was not only because of the unaccounted-for years on their CVs. Local governments, for example, found their presence threatening and sometimes would not even accept them as a category. According to ex-combatant interviewees, the use of the term 'combatant' reminded people of a time dominated by fear and suspicion, which they preferred to forget.

In an interview with Maggie Seiler in October 2010, she recounted the following quotes from a meeting she had with a group of ex-combatants in 2006:

*"Everything we did was in secret, so no one wants to remember what we did for them. The ordinary foot soldiers are now invisible. They only want to pay attention to us when they think we are a security risk."*

*"It's hard to socialise with anyone but a comrade. People don't understand you."*

*"Our children will spit on the graves of the stupid fathers who went to war, stupid war, and got nothing in return."*

There is general agreement in the studies we have cited that many of the ex-combatants turned to crime as a way of using the skills they had acquired in military training, to ensure the survival of themselves and their families.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Schell-Faucon, Stephanie, *Journey into the Inner Self and Encounter with the Other: Transformation Trails with Militarised Youth of Opposing Groups*, CSVR: undated.

<sup>31</sup> Abrahams *op.cit.*



*Photograph:* Coco Van Oppens ©

In a speech in 2004, Mluleki George – then deputy minister of defence – remarked

*While we may be in agreement that there is no excuse for criminality, we must, to some extent, stand indicted for probably not having done enough to ensure the socio-economic stability of our military veterans and their dependants.<sup>32</sup>*

The issue of the involvement of ex-combatants in crime was also a generational one. Older, experienced criminals attracted young criminals and created

*a cohesive and self-perpetuating criminal class that has a major negative impact on broader society with dangerous implications for democracy.<sup>33</sup>*

Add to this that many of the ex-combatants were unable to provide their children with secure and stable homes. So, this next generation too became attracted to the spoils of crime, creating a generational perpetuation of involvement in criminal activity.

The ex-combatants' associations formed to represent the interest of ex-combatants also struggled to deliver on promises such as the establishment of rehabilitation centres or business enterprises for their members. Both the MK Military Veterans' Association (MKMVA) and the Azanian People's Liberation Army Veterans' Association (APLAVA) were founded in 1997 but struggled to organise themselves.

<sup>32</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Opening Address of the Deputy Minister of Defence, Mr Mluleki George, MP, on the Occasion of a Symposium on Military Veterans, University of South Africa, (Florida Campus), 25 August 2004.*

<sup>33</sup> Maggie Seiler, quoted from NPAT's website, [www.peaceaccord.org.za/stories1.htm](http://www.peaceaccord.org.za/stories1.htm).

# IV. The cold years

As the years wore on, the ex-combatants had to deal with complex transitions from hero to threat, from being taken care of to poverty, from significant to insignificant, and from fearsome to feared.

So, the ex-combatants returned – whether from foreign lands in Africa or Eastern Europe, the dusty streets of the East Rand townships or the bushes of KZN – to what they had assumed would be a heroes' welcome and a place around the fire. Instead, they found a country consumed with a desire for peace, eager to 'wish away' the memories of the violence which had preceded it.

Despite the disappointments of the immediate post-demobilisation period, many of the ex-combatants continued to hope that their contribution to the struggle would be recognised with some material compensation for the years of exile, whether from home or country. Many had sacrificed a formal education and they needed support to find employment. Many were also aware that they had yet to deal with the psychosocial effects of involvement in the armed struggle.

In the post-demobilisation period, they felt betrayed by their political leaders, who had compromised on their needs in the negotiation, but looked to the new government to put things right, including official recognition of their political role, welfare provisions and appropriate compensation. In this early period from 1996 to 2000, there was some optimism that these aspirations would be met. As we saw in the previous chapter, this proved largely not to be the case.

As the years wore on, the ex-combatants had to deal with complex transitions from hero to threat, from being taken care of to poverty, from significant to insignificant, and from fearsome to feared. Their feelings of betrayal escalated, and their hopes of improvement dissipated. They became increasingly aware of the disjuncture between what they had fought for and the little they had gained. They gradually came to the conclusion that – on the whole – the political leadership who had launched them into battle were often doing considerably better than those who had fought in the battle.

*Getting into Shell House [at that time, the ANC headquarters] ... it is like getting into heaven. To get such rewards, you had to know the right people. Today we are left behind ... it is they who are now in the fat.<sup>34</sup>*

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<sup>34</sup> Gear *op.cit.*

On the ground cadres were talking about coups, taking what they ‘deserved’ and forcing government to meet its obligations.

Jacklyn Cock notes that

*Overall the ex-combatants are increasingly expressing their collective sense of social exclusion in a variety of protest acts, including marches and threats to blockade roads and take hostages. The disruptive potential of these ex-combatants is one of the contradictory consequences of the shallow, uneven process of state demilitarisation. [...] Meanwhile, resentful ex-combatants were talking about “people riding around in BMWs, giving jobs to their friends” and muttering about “digging out our weapons.”<sup>35</sup>*

According to Maggie Seiler

*The very meaning of life for many ex-combatants and their families was linked to the struggle. That sense of meaning was shaken with the transformation to a democratically elected government in 1994. Many ex-combatants became self-destructive, feeling they didn't get the rewards they deserved. They saw little ‘pay back’ for the sacrifices they made during the struggle. This perceived lack of reward was exacerbated by the return of the exiles. Most returnees were urban, well-educated and upwardly mobile. Returning exiles inevitably took top positions in government and the public sector, and were prime candidates for lucrative black economic empowerment schemes within the private sector. The visible success of returning exiles was a reproach to those who had been part of the struggle within South Africa and who were now largely marginalised. [...] With their liberation mission accomplished, there was little to fill the vacuum. Many turned to crime and as they became engaged in criminal activities, many became alienated from their communities.<sup>36</sup>*

According to interviewees this was a depressing and worrying time. They reported that although the different veterans’ organisations had come together in 2003 to form a broader body to advocate for ex-combatants – the South African National Military Veterans’ Association (SANMVA) – on the ground cadres were talking about coups, taking what they ‘deserved’ and forcing government to meet its obligations. An NPAT report noted that

*[The] involvement of the government in this issue [ex-combatants] has been severely disappointing.*

*The ex-combatant force is changing and expanding further in the direction of crime and lawlessness. Younger men are being recruited by the older ones for professional crime. It also seems that military veterans from Zimbabwe are coming here and training ex-combatants for professional activities such as cash in transit [heists].*

<sup>35</sup> Cock *op.cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Maggie Seiler, October 2010.



*Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©*

In this period, the ANC leadership – with demilitarisation and demobilisation behind them – appeared to regard needs and aspirations of ex-combatants as a welfare problem and not a political one.

*While NPAT's role in working towards the reintegration of ex-combatants is characterised as 'catalytic' and 'facilitative', stakeholders concede (and worry) that it is largely thankless work in the view of a government which appears to have largely abdicated its responsibilities to ex-combatants of every political stripe.<sup>37</sup>*

But what lay behind government inaction?

In this period, the ANC leadership – with demilitarisation and demobilisation behind them – appeared to regard needs and aspirations of ex-combatants as a welfare problem and not a political one. It saw the role of the MKMVA and others as ensuring services were provided to its members. It expressed disquiet that the MKMVA was raising political demands. The ANC argued that the political problems of ex-combatants should be raised through the party's local branches and official structures.

Behind this attitude may have been a fear that veterans' associations would come to pose a political challenge to the ANC's control of local communities. It is also likely that the needs of ex-combatants were not prioritised because they were not part of the support base of President Thabo Mbeki who took control of government after the elections in 1999. Although he received military training in his youth, Mbeki went on to a diplomatic career representing the ANC internationally and was not politically close to MK.

MK veterans had not played a role in Mbeki's ascent to leadership in the ANC, and his support base came to rest with the emerging middle class.

However, by marginalising the MKMVA and its members, the ANC and Mbeki provoked the very reaction they had set out to prevent. The MKMVA threw its support behind Mbeki's challenger for the ANC leadership, Jacob Zuma, who defeated Mbeki at the ANC's National Congress in 2007.

These were the cold, dry years for the ex-combatants when they felt forgotten and unappreciated. Some refer to it as the 'time of the closing window' of hope.

<sup>37</sup> NPAT Report, October 2006.

# V. Into the breach: the National Peace Accord Trust

NPAT pioneered an effective programme of psychosocial support for ex-combatants, skills training and education and advocacy for reintegration and economic development.

Against a background of government inaction, it was left to civil society to step into the breach. NPOs, such as the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), KZN Survivors of Violence and others worked with ex-combatants. Prominent among these was NPAT, which pioneered an effective programme of psychosocial support for ex-combatants, skills training and education and advocacy for reintegration and economic development.

The Trust has its roots in the violence that consumed parts of the country in the run-up to the political transition of 1994. The NPA was signed into being on 14 September 1991 by all the major political parties.

The Accord aimed to end fighting across the country and help rebuild communities which had been ravaged by political violence. It committed the signatories to political tolerance and to preventing their members from taking part in acts of violence or intimidation. It upheld freedom of speech, conscience, belief, association, movement, peaceful assembly, political activity and multi-party democracy. It also set out codes of conduct for political organisations and the security forces, especially the police.

A National Peace Council, headed by businessman John Hall, was to oversee the working of the NPA and mediate disputes. The National Peace Secretariat, under Dr Antonie Geldenhuys, was to establish and coordinate regional and local dispute resolution committees. Finally, the National Peace Commission, under Justice Richard Goldstone, would investigate violence and recommend ways to remove the causes of conflict. Ten regional and 162 local peace committees were established around South Africa. According to Hall, they “kept the lid on violence” as South Africa edged towards its first democratic elections.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Interview with John Hall, September 2010.

Early on, NPAT came to realise that before its brief of economic upliftment could even be considered, a first major priority was to deal with the consequences of the violence and trauma of the 1980s and early 1990s.

## The evolution of NPAT

Even though political violence continued in some parts of the country after the elections, the committees were dissolved once democracy was achieved in April 1994. The government ceased funding all peace structures from the end of that year.

In terms of the Chapter 5 of the NPA, NPAT was set up and charged with measures to facilitate post-violence, socio-economic reconstruction and development. The Trust was mandated to raise its own funds from private and international sources that would be matched on a R1:1 basis by government. In its first year, NPAT raised R14 million for economic upliftment of ex-combatants.<sup>39</sup>

Early on, the Trust came to realise that before its brief of economic upliftment could even be considered, a first major priority was to deal with the consequences of the violence and trauma of the 1980s and early 1990s. Most ex-combatants had been involved in violence, or had seen people die. Their trauma had never been treated and had become deeply embedded in their psyches. They were haunted by the souls of those they killed and the trauma they held over from their direct experiences of and exposure to often sustained violence. This manifested itself in depression, mental illness and suicide, but also in substance abuse and inter-familial violence. This was the initial focus of NPAT's programmes.

In 1994, the Trust appointed its founding director, Maggie Seiler, an American Quaker. Together with Sylvia Mdluli, Maggie built up a network of care workers in KZN to provide psychosocial support to ex-combatants suffering from PTSD. She forged connections with relevant government departments, such as Health and Social Development, and created a database of communities that had become dysfunctional because of their exposure to violence. KZN and the East Rand, unsurprisingly, emerged as key areas for intervention. In Ekurhuleni on the East Rand, Maggie worked with Johanna Kistner, who would later set up the Ekupholeni Mental Health Centre at Natalspruit Hospital to provide trauma counselling for local communities.

In June 1995, NPAT unveiled a further R10 million programme to rebuild community unity in KZN, on the East Rand and in Alexandra in North-Eastern Johannesburg.

In implementing these services, NPOs confronted a lack of available resources, relative to the scale of the problem. There was a shortage of psychologists and psychiatrists in the public health service, for example, and

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



Photographs: NPAT ©

private one-on-one counselling was prohibitively expensive. NPOs were thus challenged to find alternative ways of providing therapy to the ex-combatant community. For NPAT, this was to become the innovation of 'eco-therapy'.

Eco-therapy was introduced to the Trust in 1996 by a psychologist who was successfully using the methodology with substance-abusing children and saw its potential in working with ex-combatants. Eco-therapy aims to help individuals understand and create meaning from the emotional and psychological difficulties they are experiencing by forming a relationship with the natural world. This enables participants to make better sense of their inner emotions and life experiences. Those who have developed eco-therapy believe that a wilderness area, in its natural state, facilitates the experience of healing.

Eco-therapy typically takes the form of a 'trail' where participants leave their familiar, usually urban environment for a natural one – a wilderness, which may be a mountainous region or a forest. Eco-therapy stresses the importance of the relationship between the human psyche and the natural environment. The wilderness frames the challenge of overcoming trauma.

*Mountains are usually associated with spiritual aspiration. They are the highest points of Earth reaching up into the heavens. They seem to be part of the sky, yet they are firmly part of the Earth. In a sense, mountains bridge Earth and heaven, down and up, conscious and higher conscious.*

*Boulders are huge, stone-like masses, often occurring as obstacles in one's path. They also represent psychological obstacles or hurdles that we encounter in life – obstacles in terms of challenges that may prevent us from attempting a task or fulfilling our potential. They may call for strength, skills or resolve. Each boulder overcome is another step towards more self-actualisation.*

*A forest hosts an unending web of archetypal patterns, incorporates many opposite polarities, such as life/death, day/night, male/female, silence/sounds, young/old, tall/short, above/below, thin/thick, all enmeshed in a complicated symbiotic fashion within the cycle of life and death. These patterns of coexistence allow for vibrancy of life forms. Within the reciprocity of relationships and reciprocal impact, the coexistence of trees creates a balanced ecosystem.<sup>40</sup>*

NPAT has used different *modus operandi* to identify ex-combatants that might benefit from eco-therapy. Whereas on the East Rand it already had links with street committees and used these to target former members of SDUs for its programmes, it made contact with *indunas*<sup>41</sup> in the hostels so it could work with former SPU members.

<sup>40</sup> NPAT document on eco-therapy, undated.

<sup>41</sup> Local community leaders.

## The core intention of eco-therapy is healing through insight, learning and growth in a wilderness environment.

In the politically contested province of KZN, NPAT used already established and credible non-partisan networks, such as primary health care workers and community care workers in deep rural communities, to identify potential champions of ex-combatants who would then negotiate access for programmes through tribal authorities.

Eco-therapy is premised on five psycho-therapeutic principles:

- the wilderness is healing
- trauma is stored in the body
- eco-therapy helps shift social beliefs that shape behaviour
- eco-therapy incorporates local African culture and ritual; and
- eco-therapy provides the best results when you spend time preparing the participants before the trail and debriefing them when they return.

The core intention of eco-therapy is healing through insight, learning and growth in a wilderness environment. It is intended to achieve empowerment and transformation. It allows participants to reframe personal situations with a view to personal responsibility and motivation. Core concepts include risk, creative expression, personal responsibility, transformation of trauma, empowerment and connectedness to the environment and others.

Despite the times of 'aloneness', the process relies heavily on group dynamics. Success depends on the amount of time and energy invested in preparation for the trail and, for it to have lasting effect, it is probably necessary for a critical mass in a community to have gone through the process. Group work, individual reflection, symbols and rituals are used during the trails to heighten people's awareness of the connection between themselves, other people and the natural environment.

Eco-therapy has some very specific advantages, as it

- is relatively inexpensive and provides a quick healing experience
- requires little equipment (mainly tents and sleeping bags) and can therefore be used by most communities; and
- provides an alternative to one-on-one counselling, which is usually unaffordable.



*Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©*

## The Hero's Journey

In NPAT's eco-therapy programme the trail is presented as a 'Hero's Journey'. This journey has two parts.

First is the physical journey away from the familiar environment which has been constructed by humans. Participants enter a natural environment with its own logic and element of risk – water, animals, snakes and one's own physical ability.

The second, and most important part, is the metaphorical journey, the interior journey. Here, it is not an external threat that you face but 'the beast within yourself'. The outcome is that a specific experience and maturation is gained. Participants come back more confident, perceptive and capable. The experience gives power back to the participants and shifts them from a 'blaming' to a 'dealing' mode.

In pre-trail meetings facilitators emphasise the need for participants to move beyond victimhood and to take control of their destiny. The participants are responsible for their own healing and the eco-therapy provides the facilitative context.

Before they set out on the Hero's Journey, participants paint their faces with mud to show separation from the world they know and to enter another world. Facilitators keep four candles burning at the departure site (north, south, east, west) until they return. This is to give strength and hope.

## The solo

The participants set off in different directions into the bush with only fresh water as sustenance. They may take notepads and pencils to record their experiences and feelings, but no other distractions. They will have 24 hours alone and may use any form of reflection they choose. Participants have to deal with their inner fears and fears of the natural environment. This is called 'the solo'.

The solo experience was a huge challenge for some. They had avoided ever being alone.

*To cross the river, going up the mountain and down, shows how life is. Before, I was very much unsafe and unstable. This taught me that life is not smooth as I thought. When crossing the river, our team experienced problems – I could not leave them behind. I learned to be calm, patient and have tolerance. Before, I had a lack of self-esteem, my life was unstable and disturbed. Crossing cold water was scaring, wildlife exposure a nightmare. I am afraid of snakes.*

*This taught me what life is: it is not a bed of roses; you must work and make it the way you want it. Trauma was a nightmare, but now it is over. My thought is well-balanced. I have been asleep for a long time and during this trip I awoke. Now I feel my brain is open to new things, not confused like before. This is a place where my head can rest.<sup>42</sup>*

The spot where participants choose to spend the 24 hours is referred to as the 'power spot' because, by the time they leave it, they should have power to take charge of their own lives. Facilitators check on them in the late afternoon to make sure all is well, often finding that participants have gone back to military ways. For example, they may have devised warning systems; or their spots are camouflaged 'military-style'. The facilitators replenish water supplies and communicate minimally, using rudimentary sign language.

The solo experience was a huge challenge for some. They had avoided ever being alone. As a facilitator explains, "Sunrise to sunrise is a long time – a huge amount happens in that time."<sup>43</sup>

*I felt that there was a heavy load I have been carrying all along and a strange aura evolved around me while I was praying to God and my ancestors. During that moment my fears subsided and I felt the inner peace and the meaning of the aura as I kept on praying. Then serenity brought the true meaning of my being in this therapy, and the significant part is when I realised that there are things that I should let go and accept my failures, regrets, losses and [I] began to forgive myself.<sup>44</sup>*

*On arrival at the place I had solo, I started by greeting my ancestors and telling them about myself, who am I, where I come from, told them the reason for being there and asked them to be with me for the next 24 hours because I wanted them to give me blessings on everything I asked for, my past, present and future life and give me power to be able to forgive myself and release my sins forever. As I continued with my prayers, asking them to protect me from evil as their son, I felt my upper body sweating and I felt like something was being released/removed from me. Within seconds I saw two birds flying round my position and making a lot of noise as a signal of communication. After about 20 minutes they flew together away from my place of solo.<sup>45</sup>*

<sup>42</sup> Quotes from participants from an NPAT report, undated.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with facilitator, September 2010.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with participant, September 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with participant, September 2010.



Photographs: NPAT ©

The sweat lodge is used primarily to cleanse mind, body and spirit, and for doctoring, healing or for preparation for an important life passage.

*Eco-therapy triggered something. When I used to think of things I used to distract myself. During the solo fasting I couldn't distract myself. I had to question myself, answer myself, recognise that no one can heal us except ourselves. You have to take responsibility for yourself.<sup>46</sup>*

On the morning of the third day, after 24 hours, a drumbeat rolls out as the sign to come back to the reception area.

## The sweat lodge

When they return, the participants enter a 'sweat lodge' – an enclosed brick-sealed space – where they sweat in darkness, while water runs over red hot stones to create steam. They can be silent, or cry out to spirits possessing them, sing, or simply cry. The idea is that steam removes toxins from the body, negative ions are released into the air to counter fatigue and tenseness, and the endocrine glands are stimulated by the rise in temperature. There are physical benefits (like a sauna), but the sweat lodge is used primarily to cleanse mind, body and spirit, and for doctoring, healing or for preparation for an important life passage. It is an almost womb-like experience. One participant said, "Visions of the dead disappeared and it seems they were left in the steam hut."<sup>47</sup> Another said

*The steam hut was superb. At first, I thought it was a waste of time, we were never going to be steamed, not like this. When the steam started to pour down and we were praying, something was removed from my shoulders and when I went out of the steam, I was so dizzy, nauseous, my stomach was grumbling, I felt like throwing up, but did not.<sup>48</sup>*

<sup>46</sup> Interview with participant, September 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with participant, September 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with participant, September 2010.



Photographs: NPAT ©

After the sweat lodge, the participants proceed to a swimming pool, or some form of cooling water, and go back to collect their clothes. They do not look back to the bush where they have shed their old lives. Breakfast is the first meal after the 24-hour fast, then rest and recovery until lunch.

## Reflection

Afterwards, participants reflect together on their thoughts at their power spot or other thoughts. The facilitator tracks patterns in the storytelling. This means discerning signs of victimhood, self-pity, blame or anger. The facilitator explains to the group the emotion that the participants are releasing and what is replacing it. Some of the issues held back before the solo experience come out and the reflection may go on until late in the evening.

## The closing ceremony

On the morning of the fourth day, there is a closing ceremony enabling participants to internalise the whole journey, express new insights and understandings, ask questions, and articulate steps for when they go back to their communities. One of the points of discussion that recurs is how the original desire to protect their communities, which led individuals to become combatants, can be reframed in the current context so that they can play a positive role in community development.

## Impact

Facilitators explain that there are some feelings the ex-combatants may have in the aftermath of the experience. "If you lose something that you are used to, you start feeling some emptiness within yourself"<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with facilitator, September 2010.

Indeed, there does seem to be some degree of post-trail depression but this can have positive outcomes, as when one participant, yearning for the kind of contact the experience had given him, formed an informal sports club and began to look for skills training and ways of finding employment.

The theory, which seems to be borne out in practice, is that this process does not allow people to become dependent and that, as they reconnect with themselves, they are in a position to take control of their lives and are empowered to take the next steps.

Hero's Journeys have taken place in Northern and Southern KZN, and in the Magaliesberg Mountains in the North West province where stones and sky seem to meet and integrate reality and aspiration in a very physical way. They have also been carried out in Hogsback and the Alfred Nzo District in the Eastern Cape, as well as in the Northern Cape.

Initially, Hero's Journeys were confined to single political formations, for example SDU- and ANC-affiliated groups. Later, trails were carried out with integrated groups, MK and APLA, or ANC- and IFP-aligned defence committees where there is a strong focus on reconciliation.

A facilitator explains how the different groups would initially come heavily armed and had to be persuaded to leave their weapons behind. Then SDU and SPU members coming from the same communities eventually began to share photographs. In many cases, people in one group had lost family members to violence by another.<sup>50</sup>

The process seems to give people courage to go back to their communities with a different perception of who they are and how they fit in. They stop seeing themselves as a distinct social group entitled to special benefits, but rather as part of the community with something to give.

*I have tried hard to reintegrate myself into my community. An example was when I organised a cleaning campaign around a primary school in my area where a young girl was raped.<sup>51</sup>*

Although NPAT does not track what happens to participants in the long term, many anecdotal stories and short-term feedback (two weeks after the Hero's Journey) tell of remarkable changes.

According to NPAT – of a sample group of 125 youth leaders who participated in 20 Hero's Journeys in the period 1996 to 1999 – nearly 80 per cent turned away from crime, with a significant percentage becoming involved in restorative community work. Substance abuse among the group dropped by two thirds; trauma was reduced by 70 per cent; stable relationships increased by more than a fifth; and, initially all unemployed, 72 per cent were gainfully employed by 1999.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with facilitator, September 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with participant, September 2010.



*Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©*

**Eco-therapy has provided an effective response to NPAT's early concerns that economic upliftment of ex-combatants and communities affected by violence could only be considered once the consequences of violence and trauma had been dealt with.**

An important limitation when it comes to larger-scale impact, however, is the labour intensity of the Hero's Journeys, which require at least two facilitators with a relatively small group of participants. In 2006, to address this problem and with support from the South African Safety and Security Sector Education Training Authority (SASSETA), NPAT trained 61 members of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) in Gauteng, the Western Cape, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape as facilitators of Hero's Journeys. This substantially increased the scale at which NPAT was able to intervene.

Eco-therapy has provided an effective response to the Trust's early concerns that economic upliftment of ex-combatants and communities affected by violence could only be considered once the consequences of violence and trauma had been dealt with.

As part of its programme, NPAT provides comprehensive skills training and community upliftment programmes. It routinely conducts post-trail advocacy and links needs with local resources, bringing together former combatants with local municipal officials and provincial departments to broker resources. Qualified staff with a track record of helping community-based organisations

(CBOs) to become more sustainable, provide the training. The team has varied expertise in fund-raising, health and social development, process and systems management, community profiling and engagement, marketing and skills training.

Team members have a holistic approach towards assessment and improving organisational capacity. The team assesses and makes recommendations for creating or improving financial and operating systems, fund-raising, staff and volunteer management, communications, operating policy and procurement.

Each NPAT programme is designed to provide opportunities for CBOs to receive training to meet their particular needs, acknowledging that one-size-fits-all is not appropriate to address the diversity of the communities. This post-trial work has involved:

- training and accreditation of 'social profilers' to interview and assess the needs of ex-combatants in particular communities as a basis for development programmes
- identifying gaps in service provision and brokering the involvement of local government and NPOs in providing these services
- where such services are not available, contracting these in
- training community volunteers to help provide services
- gaining approval and support of indigenous community leadership for ex-combatant development programmes
- persuading the Department of Labour and the National Skills Authority to recognise qualifications of ex-combatants who were trained outside South Africa, or who have acquired skills informally
- engaging with the local private sector to secure support for the programme and to employ ex-combatants
- organising workshops aimed at educating communities about ex-combatants and securing their support for reintegration
- participating in national umbrella structures representing ex-combatants, and helping to build their capacity; and
- helping local NPOs get funding for their work.

Many of these initiatives are now independent of NPAT. The South Coast Trauma Counselling Network, for example, has its roots in NPAT but no longer depends on the Trust for its survival. Khaniselani Development Trust in Kokstad, Southern KZN, is another such example.

Theodora Makalima – retiree and director of Khaniselani – says

*NPAT has been a great help to us. While the Department of Health funds our feeding schemes, NPAT secured funding for us from Themba Lesizwe and this, together with NPAT's specialised training programmes, has enabled us to build*



Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©

Since April 2005, NPAT has worked with more than 7 000 ex-combatants and their families.

*capacity so that today we are able to offer a holistic intervention in the Kokstad area with a special focus on psychological and emotional trauma. NPAT has given us access to a broad range of specialist training, and NPAT subsidises salaries for four of our staff members, which has made a great difference to our ability to deliver services to the community. NPAT's work in training community development workers and its eco-therapy training has had a great impact down here and we value this partnership.<sup>52</sup>*

NPAT was also able to access money from the Skills and Education Training Authorities for vocational training. NPAT's reintegration programmes now operate in six provinces and 32 major districts or regions around the country. Since April 2005, when The Atlantic Philanthropies became involved, NPAT has worked with more than 7 000 ex-combatants and their families. During this time, close to 1 700 frontline workers have been trained and a further approximately 300 have received training as eco-therapy facilitators, social auxiliary workers and volunteer counsellors. The Trust also coordinated the Select Steering Committee<sup>53</sup> to work with the ministerial task team on ex-combatants. Working with other organisations, such as the SACC, it has trained more than 400 church members in ex-combatant trauma support work.

Further, NPAT's effort to ensure formal recognition of a social auxiliary worker profession means that ex-combatants can be identified and trained as such. The role of a social auxiliary worker is multifaceted, involving assessment, interviewing, referral, basic counselling, group support, lobbying, advocacy, awareness campaigning and report-writing.

The Trust seems set to focus on this area in the future, while the Hero's Journeys will be taken over by SANMVA.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Theodora Makalima, August 2010.

<sup>53</sup> A grouping of stakeholders working with ex-combatants.

**“I was a school teacher and then I became a professional killer. Now I take care of orphans and vulnerable children.”<sup>56</sup>**

Much of what NPAT has achieved is attributable to the formidable commitment, drive and energy of Maggie Seiler, its founding director who died of cancer in July 2011. Her passion for her work poured out of her in her willingness to answer our questions and fill in the gaps in our research. As she said

*Nothing ever gets stale. Nothing stays the same – there are always new opportunities we can take. That is the core of what we do. Whenever there is an opportunity, we connect people to it.*<sup>54</sup>

A young man we spoke to is living proof that ex-combatants can overcome their past and become productive citizens. Unlike many of his SDU colleagues from the early 1990s, his experience of township struggle did not convert to a life of crime. Today he is a full-time community worker in Katlehong and a pillar of the community. So much so that community members want him to put his name forward to become an ANC member of Parliament. As he says

*I was lucky. I made contact with a woman who was a counsellor linked to the National Peace Accord Trust. She helped me turn my life around. It took me a long time to trust her but eventually I could open up and tell my story.*<sup>55</sup>

Another ex-combatant told us

*I was a school teacher and then I became a professional killer. Now I take care of orphans and vulnerable children. I also have a diploma in forestry. I repented and am now an mfundisi [pastor] preaching the good news from the pulpit.*<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Maggie Seiler, October 2010.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with ex-combatant, October 2010.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with ex-combatant, October 2010.

# VI. Making a place by the fire

The simmering dissent among ex-combatants found a focus in the ANC's crucial 52<sup>nd</sup> National Conference in Polokwane in Limpopo in November 2007.

By the mid-2000s, despite the best efforts of NPOs, ex-combatants – even those who had been on the Hero's Journey – had yet to make significant inroads into claiming a place by the fire. The MKMVA had been founded in 1999, after the passing of the *Military Veterans' Affairs Act*, but had not made much impression on the conditions of the ex-combatants.

Individuals and organisations grappling with ex-combatant issues called for a holistic approach that would incorporate psychological healing, social integration and, ultimately, more conventional economic solutions to their needs. This would include promised memorialisation projects, psychosocial support, skills training programmes and educational and economic benefits. This was never going to be possible on a sufficient scale unless government came to the party and service provision was coordinated.

The simmering dissent among ex-combatants found a focus in the ANC's crucial 52<sup>nd</sup> National Conference in Polokwane in Limpopo in November 2007. National conferences are held every five years to elect the movement's leadership and determine its politics. At Polokwane, Jacob Zuma, the then deposed deputy president of South Africa, had mounted a campaign to replace Thabo Mbeki as president of the ANC. Zuma had mobilised a 'coalition of the wounded' behind him, including those opposed to Mbeki's economic policies in the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the South African Communist Party. Disaffected ex-combatants were also part of this coalition.

Jacob Zuma was an MK veteran. Although an intellectual in the party, Mbeki had also been trained as a fighter in exile. But he did not have Zuma's combat experience, and for some this accounted for his lack of empathy with the needs of ex-combatants.

*The government has forgotten us, but Zuma – he knows our situation. He was one of us. There will be no change for us until Zuma is president. Jacob Zuma is going to put this country in the right way. No Jacob Zuma, no country. During the liberation struggle he was a very good commander so we know he will be a good leader.<sup>57</sup>*

<sup>57</sup> Interview with ex-combatant, September 2010.



Photograph: NPAT ©

*We are now saying the departure of MK, which is known to have been a repository of ANC politics, left the ANC weakened and the ideological depth of its new leadership is deteriorating.<sup>58</sup>*

It was during this time that NPAT, and Maggie Seiler in particular, began to realise that the long-term answer to the challenges confronting ex-combatants lay in influencing the resolutions that were to be passed at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Conference to become part of the ANC's – and thus the government's – Programme of Action (POA).

NPAT's relationship with organised ex-combatant formations had been quite tentative and the Trust was met with a lukewarm response when it approached the MKMVA about a strategy for Polokwane. The president of the MKMVA, Kebby Maphatsoe, had not encountered NPAT personally. It was only when an ex-combatant in one of the MKMVA branches, who had worked closely with NPAT on the East Rand, told him about the work that the Trust was doing, that Maphatsoe began showing an interest. He and Maggie met.

*She [Maggie] is amazing ... She told them that, in order to be taken seriously, they must influence the ANC Conference to be serious about veterans. Later, they asked her to come and help them prepare for Polokwane – the chair phoned me and thanked me for introducing this woman – she is a revolutionary; she became our mother.<sup>59</sup>*

Any influence that NPAT had came from the work it had done at local level, which had given it credibility. This included the Hero's Journeys. It was a time when veterans were very angry and were talking about overthrowing the government. NPAT had a long-term relationship with communities on the

<sup>58</sup> Interview with ex-combatant, September 2010.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with an MKMVA East Rand member, September 2010.

## NPAT and the MKMVA set about lobbying for ex-combatants to be included as a vulnerable group in the Programme of Action of the Social Cluster.

East Rand, since 1992 and the days of the NPA. The Trust had trained local people, taken on the difficult psychosocial work, and it had worked with the Department of Social Development to get the idea of social auxiliary workers accepted.

NPAT recognised that developing policy for Polokwane required research, knowledge of ex-combatants issues, networking, workshops with stakeholders, report-backs and prioritisation of policies. NPAT played an influential role in providing support for the advocacy of the veterans.

The first thing Maggie Seiler did was to explore the proposed POA for the Social Cluster (a grouping of government ministries working on social development). The POA is a key tool in the implementation of government policy as it affects what is discussed by government, how policy is determined and how the budget is allocated. Maggie noticed that while many vulnerable groupings were specifically mentioned in the POA – including youth, women and the disabled – ex-combatants were not. The POA even specified what percentage of jobs should go to these named vulnerable groups and tied this to the performance contracts of local government. The POA also included a section on promotion of national identity and social cohesion. For NPAT, reintegration of ex-combatants was a key element in the building of social cohesion.

NPAT and the MKMVA now set about lobbying for ex-combatants to be included as a vulnerable group in the POA of the Social Cluster. Previous initiatives to bring ex-combatants into the picture as a vulnerable grouping for government and business had failed. Given that the POA included guidelines for setting up tenders and the percentages of jobs that municipalities were supposed to assign to vulnerable groups as part of their performance contracts, NPAT recommended to the veterans' associations that at least three per cent be assigned to ex-combatants.

NPAT did not draft the actual resolutions but contributed to strategic input and attended meetings of the MKMVA *ex officio*, something Maphatsoe acknowledged informally at a workshop he and Maggie attended in September 2010.

*NPAT had history and was part of the pool of people in the preliminary planning group. Maggie came across as honest, caring and intelligible on programmes. We made friends with NPAT.<sup>60</sup>*

NPAT met the MKMVA national office-bearers and responded to questions, participated in policy discussions and provided policy advice when it was requested.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Kebby Maphatsoe, September 2010.

“Conference notes that the issues of the welfare and proper social and economic integration of our ex-combatants have been raised sharply at the National Party Conference.”<sup>61</sup>

In 2007, before the Polokwane Conference, the MKMVA had its own national conference where leadership was elected, and policies and programmes developed. On this basis, it chose who it would support in the forthcoming ANC elections.

The ex-combatants lobbied extensively before Polokwane. They met the top six ANC office-bearers, ministers and directors-general. They had a number of documents and their own national conference resolutions prepared, as well as submissions to the ANC. Their arguments included the need to beware of people with military training becoming disgruntled and the supposed nature of the ANC as a caring organisation. The ex-combatants were part of a concerted effort in the ANC to get Zuma elected president and this has served their interests well.

Resolutions 39 to 41 put to the ANC 52<sup>nd</sup> National Conference dealt with the MKMVA and ex-combatants. These resolutions acknowledged the role played by MK in the struggle for liberation, but noted that

*[...] there is a significant number of ex-combatants who are struggling to make ends meet. Conference notes that the issues of the welfare and proper social and economic integration of our ex-combatants have been raised sharply at the National Party Conference.*<sup>61</sup>

The following recommendations were made:

- the inclusion of ex-combatants needs in the performance indicators for managers in the civil service
- the establishment of a Ministry of Veterans’ Affairs
- favourable procurement practices for ex-combatants
- skills training
- job opportunities
- participation in the secondary economy, including benefitting from the Extended Public Works Programme and from learnerships (apprenticeships) for the Social Auxiliary Worker Training Programme
- help desks
- psychosocial services; and
- an integrated approach to ex-combatants involving government, the private sector and civil society.

The resolutions went on to state that

*With regard to MKMVA, Conference mandates the ANC structures through the offices of the secretary-general, provincial and regional secretaries, to receive reports from MKMVA and give reports to ANC structures on its activities and work. Conference instructs the NEC [ANC’s National Executive Committee] to:*

<sup>61</sup> Resolution 39 under MKMVA in ANC, 52<sup>nd</sup> National Conference: Resolutions, 20 December 2007.



*Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©*

- *Address issues raised by our ex-combatants and oversee the proper functioning of MKMVA structures at all levels*
- *Take a direct interest in the welfare and reintegration of MK military veterans into civilian life*
- *Ensure, through a programme of action, that MKMVA participates in all programmes and structures of the ANC*
- *Ensure that all resolutions of the previous ANC Conferences on MKMVA are implemented fully; and*
- *In line with the Organisational Report, take direct responsibility for the continued existence and utilisation of MKMVA members as an organisational structure.*

[...] Conference agrees that a Presidential Commission on Military Veterans should be established in government and a comprehensive social package for all ex-combatants of former liberation armies be introduced by the state by the end of 2008.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Resolutions 40 and 41 under MKMVA, *ibid.*

## Resolutions adopted at ANC's 52<sup>nd</sup> National Conference put ex-combatants firmly on the agenda as part of a future Programme of Action.

Resolutions 36 to 47 under Crime Prevention and Mass Mobilisation also dealt with military veterans and with issues such as the Ministry of Veterans' Affairs; the taxation of Special Pensions and the age provisions; the Non-Statutory Force Pension; public transport allowances; and the integration of the MKMVA into NEC structures discussing peace and stability.

Further, a "transformed and all-embracing"<sup>63</sup> SANMVA should be the official representative body of all South African military veterans; special housing provisions should be made for military veterans; and the possibility of a medical aid scheme for military veterans should be investigated.

As had been intended, the resolutions put ex-combatants firmly on the agenda as part of a future POA. In the end, the MKMVA got most of what it wanted in terms of conference resolutions, and the Association accepted that there would not be a separate Ministry of Veterans' Affairs but that veterans' affairs would be included in the Ministry of Defence.

*The new name of the Ministry of Defence and Military Veterans from the previous Ministry of Defence indicates that key amongst the department's responsibilities is the administration of the military veterans. In this regard, the department will continue to seek out opportunities for delivering the best service to our veterans, whilst continually challenging ourselves to leverage the world's best practices. There will be a need to re-organise the department to ensure a unified direction on issues of military veterans, and numerous practices and policies to strengthen this approach will be re-evaluated.*

*Veterans have become part and parcel of the organisation and of everything we do as we design, implement and sustain programmes that serve them. It must be the mission of the Department of Defence to address their needs all the time, across the full range of support services that our government has committed to providing to them. It is important to make sure that through these programmes, the lives of our veterans and those of their families are improved, and that these individuals are further recognised for their contribution to ensuring that a democratic South Africa is realised.<sup>64</sup>*

Further, the Department of Defence's *Strategic Plan for 2010-2013* establishes a functional Department of Military Veterans and says that

*The department should be fully resourced to take responsibility for the overall management and administration of military veterans affairs, including but not limited to, developing policy, legislation, programmes, benefits and services that facilitate the transition from active service to civilian life.<sup>65</sup>*

<sup>63</sup> Resolution 44 under Military Veterans, *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Plan for 2010-2013*.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

At every level of government, someone is now accountable for work with ex-combatants, and performance contracts have to show that ex-combatant programmes exist.

One MKMVA representative told us

*We have done well in terms of our investment in Zuma ... but, if in three years' time there are still poor veterans, we will have failed. We want to cap levels of poverty so that ex-combatants should not sleep on park benches.<sup>66</sup>*

In the new dispensation since Polokwane, provincial and local governments have been involved in ex-combatant programmes and provincial premiers' offices have implemented special ex-combatant programmes.

Also, every government department has six social auxiliary worker posts and the position is used by the private sector as well. They are supervised by social workers and perform their functions under social worker guidance. In areas where there are many ex-combatants, three per cent of positions in government departments at various levels are reserved for them.

This means that the training done by NPAT (as well as by seven other organisations) can be used in government departments relatively easily. The provinces have Ex-combatant Desks and wellness coordinators with a specific responsibility for ex-combatants. At every level, someone is accountable for work with ex-combatants, and performance contracts have to show that ex-combatant programmes exist.

The needs of the former freedom fighters were immediate and long-term. Human resources policy in the military needed to be aligned from the point of recruitment to the day of retirement. The support of the veterans should be part of government's anti-poverty strategy. Some correlation was needed with those programmes. A means test was a requirement to determine the degree of need on an individual basis.

*The deputy minister listed the policy objectives. These included serving and memorialising military veterans. A seamless translation from active service was to be provided. The capabilities of veterans with disabilities had to be restored. The programme would make a contribution to reconciliation and nation-building. Finally, the policy would enhance the work force.*

*The deputy minister said that there was money available immediately to set up a department. An actual budget would only be available in the 2010/11 financial year.<sup>67</sup>*

We spoke with some representatives of SANMVA and the MKMVA and they expressed considerable satisfaction at the progress since Polokwane, not only for themselves but also for the country. As far as the ex-combatants are

<sup>66</sup> Interview with MKMVA member, September 2010.

<sup>67</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Briefing by the Deputy Minister of Defence and Military Veterans Affairs*, 4 November 2009.



*Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©*

**Ex-combatants score achievements since Polokwane at an optimistic 95 per cent but their main concern remains quality and sustainable jobs.**

concerned, they scored achievements at an optimistic 95 per cent but their main concern remained quality and sustainable jobs. In general, they wanted transparency around issues to do with them and feel that this has been achieved, albeit quite slowly. But this is acceptable, as one interviewee put it, “in a constitutional country”.<sup>68</sup>

What this chapter has shown is that, when they take a strategic approach, use the structures which bred them, plan effectively and get support, ex-combatants are able to achieve many of the goals which once seemed unattainable.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with MKMVA member, September 2010.

# VII. Pitfalls, opportunities and challenges

Unemployment remains a huge challenge among ex-combatants, with an estimated 75 per cent still without work.

After a false start, South Africa is beginning to tackle the needs of ex-combatants constructively.

Following the adoption of the Polokwane resolutions, a task team was set up within the Department of Defence, headed by Deputy Minister Thabang Makwetla. The team was tasked with recommending structures and policies to govern veterans' affairs.

However, the task team has more military representatives than veterans. Moreover, it is not clear whether members of SDUs and SPUs are recognised as ex-combatants in the emerging policy.

Currently, approximately 10 000 members can benefit from government's SASSETA programme, but most surveys place the number of ex-combatants who remain unemployed and vulnerable at around 70 000. Overriding all of this is the general problem with service delivery in the country, which cannot help but affect the ex-combatants in their communities.

At the same time, while veterans' affairs have been located in the Department of Defence, some ex-combatants believe the Department of Social Development would be a more appropriate home and would like to see closer links across departments. The Department of Social Development is already the lead department in victim empowerment and is therefore an important possible provider of psychosocial support to ex-combatants.

Further, unemployment remains a huge challenge among ex-combatants, with an estimated 75 per cent still without work. It is unclear to what extent ex-combatants are to be included in the so-called second economy or informal sector, which offers the most opportunities for those without formal skills training.

Despite the potential pitfalls that inevitably lie along the way, there have been successes, most significantly on the part of the MKMVA in its negotiations with the ANC and its success in getting its issues included in the Social Services Cluster POA. It is encouraging that the members of the MKMVA and SANMVA with whom we spoke seemed generally satisfied with progress. According to Maggie Seiler, there is still a need "to put the last legs on the chair".<sup>69</sup> For her, the policy was the seat, and the legs would be a strengthened

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Maggie Seiler, October 2010.



*Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©*

SANMVA – with effective provincial structures, a rehabilitation centre for ex-combatants and capacity to advocate for its members and hold government to account.

On a smaller scale, the City of Johannesburg implemented policies prioritising ex-combatants for employment and access to housing in 2008, after negotiations with NPAT. The Trust was also involved with the establishment of the Ekurhuleni<sup>70</sup> Demobilisation Project, which led to municipal employment of ex-combatants. However, neither of these projects has a funded trauma component.

NPAT also sees itself as providing support to SANMVA and is in close touch with the organisation. To NPAT, SANMVA is as a key organisation in taking forward some of the Trust's work, along with other organisations and community networks that it has supported.

NPAT would still be available to help with training materials, qualifications, policy development relating to socio-economic development, supervision and support for ex-combatant eco-therapy, especially assisting SANMVA to continue NPAT's eco-therapy model, and helping the organisation develop business plans. The Trust would like to see the model more grounded in CBOs (it is currently more NGO-focused) and accessing government support for salaries for social workers and social auxiliary workers. SANMVA could then be looking to identify champions at a local level to do fund-raising and identify others to get involved.

<sup>70</sup> The metropolitan municipality covering Gauteng's East Rand.

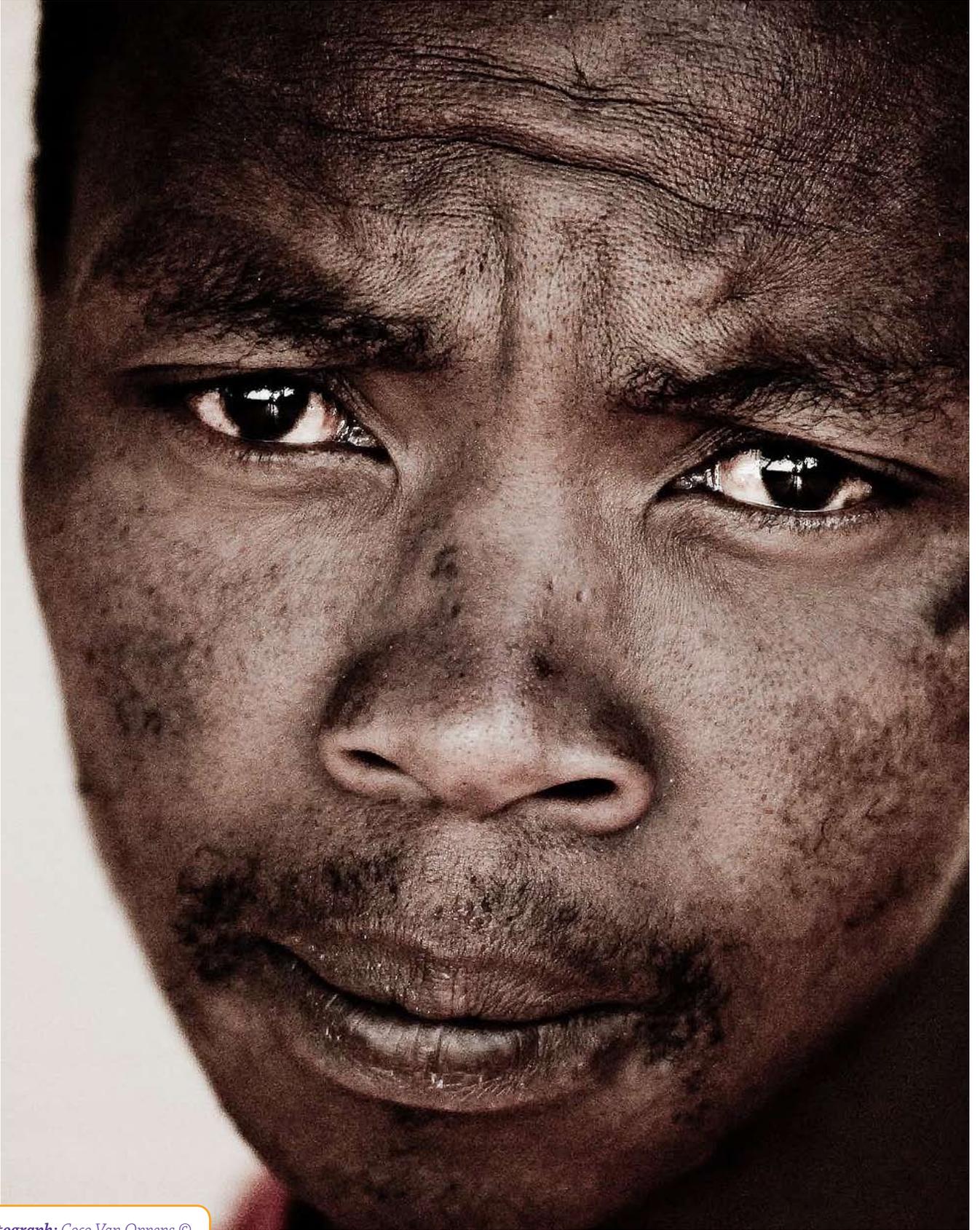
**The core of NPAT's model is an assertion that ex-combatants are not helpless victims of circumstances, but are an assertive – or potentially assertive – asset in building a new South Africa.**

As NPAT prepares to withdraw further into the background, satisfied that the ex-combatants can themselves take their interests forward, that they have the potential to make an important contribution to society and that they are now finally being given the opportunity to do so, the Trust is confident in a future that sees ex-combatants taking their rightful place by the fire. At the heart of the success of this endeavour must lie the determination of the ex-combatants and the political will of government and of relevant government departments, in particular the departments of Defence, Health, Social Development, Education and Human Settlement.

In addition, it remains crucially important to continue including ex-combatants in the mainstream political agenda of the country; pursue healing efforts through innovative psychosocial methods; and carry on creating opportunities for ex-combatants to participate productively in the economy through a variety of means, including access to land, finances, skills training and education in general.

The core of NPAT's model is an assertion that ex-combatants are not helpless victims of circumstances, but are an assertive – or potentially assertive – asset in building a new South Africa. This means assertiveness over helplessness, self-esteem over self-pity, responsibility over blame, forgiveness over guilt (including forgiveness of oneself), reconnection over isolation and marginalisation, linking needs to resources, and identifying opportunities rather than clinging to expectations and wallowing in frustration.

NPAT's own story shows how faith in people as agents of their own lives bears remarkable fruit.



*Photograph: Coco Van Oppens ©*

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## Case Study

### **NO PLACE BY THE FIRE:**

The story of South African ex-combatants and the National Peace Accord Trust