

**THE ROLE OF
POLITICAL VIOLENCE
IN SOUTH AFRICA'S
DEMOCRATISATION**

Edited by Dr Ran Greenstein
Community Agency for Social Enquiry

CHAPTER FIVE

Analysing political violence on the Reef, 1990 to 1994

David Everatt

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the changing nature of political violence on the Reef from July 1990 to July 1994. The analysis of monitoring data leads to the conclusion that the violence was manipulated by elements from the security forces of the apartheid state to guarantee their position under a new democratic dispensation.

UNDERSTANDING THE VIOLENCE

From July 1990 to July 1994, a total of 8 747 people were killed in political violence on the Reef.¹ Thousands more were injured. This chapter seeks to explain how this was possible on the eve of the democratic transformation of South Africa. Before political violence spread from KwaZulu-Natal to the Reef, four explanations for the violence had become dominant there:

1. 'Black-on-black' violence was the term favoured by state officials to disguise the complicity of the security forces in the violence.
2. Socio-economic conditions were seen as a primary cause of violence, whether by making unemployed and alienated youth available for violent activities, or by encouraging a violent expression of competition for scarce resources.
3. Political manipulation by the security forces to destabilise opposition forces had taken place.
4. There was a contest for control between Inkatha and the United Democratic Front (UDF) alliance in the province.

When the phase of political violence under discussion here began on the Reef in 1990, the same categories were initially used to try to explain it. Over time, however, competing explanations boiled down to two widely held views:

1. The first held that the violence was multi-causal, involving elements of poverty, ethnicity and political contestation.
2. The second, argued here, held that the violence indeed drew on a range of socio-economic and political factors, but that it was deliberately fomented; and that the security forces played a key role, beyond that of favouring Inkatha, in trying to affect the negotiation process.

From the day the Reef violence began, journalists and analysts offered competing versions of what was happening. The violence began after a rally called by Inkatha in Sebokeng on 22 July 1990, when police were reported to have escorted Inkatha supporters across the township to Sebokeng hostel, which they attacked. Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (Cosatu) members from the hostel reported that the Inkatha rally had been for 'Zulus' only. Those attending the rally were told that they had to defend themselves against the ANC alliance, which was Xhosa-dominated and anti-Zulu. Inkatha put its ethnic stamp on the violence from the outset.

The mainstream media initially adopted an ethnic or tribal explanation for the conflict, seeing it as more deep-rooted and salient than political affiliations: 'It was total war yesterday ... Zulu impis swooped. Spears and pangas flashed and the dead, mostly Xhosas, piled up amidst the cries of wounded and dying men'.² Community members who turned on the police, believing them to be favouring Inkatha, were 'black rioters' or 'a mob of armed attackers'.³ Many reporters were happy to fall back on notions of irrational, 'barbaric' action stemming from a pent-up and embattled Zulu or Xhosa nationalism.

Tribal war?

The notion of 'tribal war' was salient at the outset of the violence, where attackers were strongly identified by their victims and other township residents as 'the Zulus'. This remained the case for a long while, and in some areas which suffered from violence all Zulu-speakers were forced to leave, regardless of their political affiliation. However, no ethnic counter-force emerged. The ANC and its allies remained publicly committed to non-

racialism. Journalist Carmel Rickard noted that this had its dangers: 'After decades of Government obsession about ethnicity, the African National Congress and Inkatha are responding to this emotive subject very differently: the ANC ignores it and seeks a non-racial, supra-ethnic identity; Inkatha uses it as a powerful mobilising force'. By so doing, according to Rickard, the ANC had 'left the [ethnic] field open to Inkatha'.⁴

But the Reef is a massive multi-ethnic area, where multilingualism, marriage across ethnic boundaries and multi-ethnic households are common. A greater ethnic slant may have emerged if victims of the violence were ethnically identifiable. However, all township residents, including Zulu-speakers, seemed equally at risk.

Despite this, some commentators characterised the violence as an ethnic conflict between Zulu and Xhosa, which was conflated with political lines of difference. Where Inkatha played on notions of Zulu identity, the ANC was described as a Xhosa nationalistic organisation because of the large number of Xhosa-speakers in its leadership. For example, Patrick Laurence claimed that 'the ethnic skewering of Inkatha generally, and of the ANC at the leadership level, means that Inkatha/ANC rivalry degenerates all too easily into inter-tribal conflict'.⁵

As Inkatha moved from KwaZulu-Natal to the Reef in an attempt to create a new support-base, its natural starting point was the hostels which housed migrant labourers, many of whom were from KwaZulu-Natal. The first few months of violence witnessed the ethnic cleansing of hostels. Where Inkatha was the victor, only Zulu-speakers not opposed to violence remained; where Inkatha was defeated, all Inkatha supporters – and often all Zulu-speakers – had to leave. Hostels, which resembled prisons from the outside, became the armed fortresses at the heart of political violence on the Reef.⁶

Hostel-dwellers were an embattled group. Physically separated from the townships, they had clashed with students in 1976, and again in the 1980s with UDF supporters over the enforcement of stayaways and boycotts. This derived in part from the fact that very few township structures had organised within hostels: they often merely informed the residents of resolutions to be endorsed.⁷ Segal and others have noted that hostel dwellers were not entirely separated from the townships, with ties of friendship, work and sexual relations.

Nonetheless, many migrants retained a rural identity. They came to the cities to find work, but kept their families at home. In research undertaken by CASE, hostel dwellers from KwaZulu complained of the dirt of city life; of the

‘cheeky’ younger people who did not show respect to their elders; of the cramped space and lack of freedom, and so on. ‘Home’ was rural KwaZulu; the city was something that had to be tolerated.⁸

For KwaZulu-based migrants, a rural identity was inextricably linked with their ethnic identity, as Gerhard Mare noted, ‘anyone who is forced to have contact with a homeland is forced to have in part an ethnic identity’.⁹ Mare also pointed out that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, while migrancy from other homelands was increasingly characterised by the movement of whole families to the cities, KwaZulu-Natal was an exception to this trend.

Finally, Inkatha leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi was a master at conflating ethnic, geographical and political identities. In 1990 Buthelezi said he hoped that:

the Zulu people, whatever their political affiliation, will realise that the ANC campaign of vilification is no longer just against me and Inkatha, but also against the Zulu people, as Zulu people are being singled out by the ANC/SACP/UDF/Cosatu alliance for vilification, intimidation and killings.¹⁰

This was the basis on which Inkatha initially sought to mobilise Zulu-speaking hostel-dwellers – by claiming that they were to be the victims of a week of action called by Cosatu and its allies, against which they had to arm themselves. Cosatu in turn alleged that telexes had been sent from Inkatha headquarters in Ulundi warning local leaders in the Transvaal to defend themselves and prepare for armed conflict, thus providing ‘the war paranoia which acted as a signal for Inkatha’s warlords to go on the offensive.’¹¹

Pamphlets appeared calling for a Zulu revolt against the ‘Xhosa and Indian’ leadership of the ANC. Oscar Dhlomo, who had just left Inkatha, having been its secretary-general, warned that by ‘ethnicising’ political differences, Inkatha was transforming an ideological debate into a ‘highly charged’ ethnic war.¹²

Police reports on the violence initially talked of ethnic conflict. In mid-August the South African Police (SAP) described the violence as ‘a faction fight between Zulus and Xhosas’.¹³ Within a few days the police stated that ‘the one faction was Inkatha, the other is difficult to identify – whether residents or ANC’.¹⁴ Two days later, however, when the police themselves were accused of attacking Phola Park residents alongside Inkatha supporters, they reverted to ethnic categories: ‘Police said ... that the clashes were a result

of faction fighting between Zulus and Xhosas and dismissed allegations of partiality.’¹⁵

As time went on, however, no ethnic counter-force of any significance rose to match Inkatha. An ANC spokesperson told the press that the organisation ‘rejects with utter contempt the misguided reports in the press ... that seek to portray the carnage as a factional wars between Zulus and Xhosas’.¹⁶ The Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa) stated that the violence was ‘not tribalism as they have put it ... it is political’.¹⁷ Independent newspapers such as *The Weekly Mail*, *New Nation* and *Vrye Weekblad* reported the violence in very different terms from their mainstream counterparts, linking the violence directly to Inkatha’s push into the Transvaal. While Inkatha-supporting Zulu-speakers seemed to populate one side of the conflict, the other side remained ethnically and politically indistinct.

Over time, most mainstream newspapers dropped the language of tribalism, as it so clearly failed to describe what their journalists were reporting. After the hostels had been secured, the violence was turned at random against residents of all ethnic backgrounds (including Zulus) and of any political persuasion. In August 1991, a year after the violence began, an editorial in *The Star* noted that ‘twenty-four people were shot and hacked to death in the latest burst of savage fighting between ANC and Inkatha forces, amid allegations of police bias in favour of Inkatha’.¹⁸ Notions of ethnicity had vanished: new battle-lines seemed to have been drawn.

THE MEANING OF THE VIOLENCE

A common thread in explaining the meaning of the violence was to see in it a direct result of the socio-economic conditions in which hostel-dwellers and those living in informal settlements found themselves. This, combined with the collapse of an authoritarian state and the spiralling rate of criminal violence, led to competition for resources, which rapidly became violent. Human and political agency were absent from this view. As Aitchison noted with regard to Natal:

Common sense assures one that there must be something in this interpretation, though it seems singularly unhelpful in explaining why a lot of people took it upon themselves to kill over 1 800 people in three years and systematically worsen everybody’s socio-economic position in the process.¹⁹

Most of versions of the violence describe the conditions in which violence might occur, or which might sustain violence. Ethnic identity was clearly the basis for Inkatha's Gauteng mobilisation, and seems to have successfully won many Zulu-speaking, Natal-based migrants into a violent anti-ANC stance. It does not explain why violence should have started in July 1990 rather than earlier; why it peaked and fell away at key moments in the unfolding negotiation process and then died away – in Gauteng at least – rapidly after the 1994 elections.

The socio-economic circumstances in which hostel-dwellers lived, their rural and ethnic identities, and their feelings of alienation from the surrounding townships were contributory factors to their being available for violence. The same goes for the high levels of poverty in the informal settlements, which may help explain why violence was started with relative ease in many such areas, and why it could be re-started when necessary. But these statements beg more questions than they answer.

Analyses of the violence which were not based on incident reports, affidavits, sworn statements, eye-witness accounts and other data received from fieldwork monitors and other available sources, failed to grasp the nature of the Reef violence. Rather, they applied more or less plausible conjecture to what was assumed to be happening.

Most commentators focused on political competition, or ethnicity – but failed to analyse them in the context of ongoing violence which rose and fell at particular political moments. Many of them did not question the systematic failure of the SAP to act against killers; the mobility of attackers, the source of the resources required to maintain the violence, the apparent immunity of its perpetrators, and the ease with which a terrifying range of weapons was made available to aggressors.

Violence as a negotiating tool

The position argued here challenges the other explanations of violence described earlier in the chapter. It is derived from an analysis of the nature and function of the violence, using patterns in monitoring data revealing 'winners' and 'losers'. In other words, some political players benefitted from the violence by disrupting the attempts of the liberation movements to establish themselves in the country, while the liberation movements themselves had to struggle to create legal structures and begin legal political activities while being called on to arm their supporters.

Put simply, political rivalry, competition for scarce resources, spiralling domestic and criminal violence and other factors discussed above contributed to a climate for violence and conditions for its longevity. However, it is crucial to realise that the violence peaked and fell at certain key moments in the negotiation process. While the victims of the violence were picked largely at random, the peaks and troughs of violence were far from random.

Primary sources of data are essential in analysing the violence. The database at CASE comprised 5 640 violence-related incidents which took place between 22 July 1990 and the end of July 1994. The data was statistically analysed, yielding patterns across the Reef as a whole and areas within it. These local and regional level patterns pointed to violence being deliberately promoted at key moments, while an ongoing low level of violence continued.

One of the first articles dealing with violence on the Reef which set out the parameters within which the violence should be approached was produced by the Project for the Study of Violence, a Johannesburg-based NGO. According to the authors:

the violence we are witnessing is not a spontaneous outbreak of ethnic conflict. It is organised, orchestrated and planned ... If we are to see the hand that lies behind the violence, we need to understand which organised political interests are being served by it.²⁰

Violence and negotiations

The violence was manipulated by elements centered in the security forces to suit their particular political agenda. Where the interests of such security force members were championed by or similar to the National Party (NP), the violence rose and fell at key moments in the negotiation process which suited the NP. However, the NP were no longer reliable allies as they were looking for their own survival in the new conditions in South Africa. The violence also peaked in response to the tide of events in 1990 and 1991. Although formal negotiations took a long time to begin, the dismantling of apartheid went ahead, as expressed in the removal of the legal cornerstones of the system, the release of political prisoners, the return of exiles, exempting Umkhonto we Sizwe from restrictions on private armies in the National Peace Accord, and so on. These developments indicated that the NP government was not controlling the pace of change, and that the balance had swung in favour of the ANC and the anti-apartheid forces.

While the political violence in KwaZulu-Natal in the 1980s saw little public outrage outside the province, violence on the Reef in the 1990s was initially met with widespread media coverage and calls for peace. As we have seen, this soon faded away. Violence became the expected 'background noise' to more important political events.

However, two turning points in the negotiation process and broader political relations derived directly from massacres carried out by Inkatha supporters on the Reef. Both involved attacks emanating from Inkatha-controlled hostels on nearby settlements. The first was at Swanieville in May 1991 and the second took place at Boipatong in June 1992. These were by no means the only savage massacres of innocent people, or involved the largest number of victims. Massacres, carried out by Inkatha and ANC supporters, had occurred on many occasions in Natal without national or provincial impact. They had also occurred elsewhere on the Reef with little effect – barring the losses suffered by victims and their families. In both Swanieville and Boipatong, however, Inkatha and its supporters were seen to have gone too far, and local and international opinion was mobilised against Inkatha. This strengthened the hand of the ANC in negotiations. It also led to an intensification of local-level hostilities, as public anger turned on already embattled hostel-dwellers and other Inkatha supporters.

We argue that senior members of the security forces, deeply implicated in apartheid's violent and bloody past, sought to secure their future in South Africa. This they tried to do, in part, through manipulating political violence. Their natural allies were the NP government and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). The latter, of course, was not in a position to offer much assistance beyond foot soldiers (many of whom had been trained by the SADF) and some leverage on the NP. The NP itself, however, the sitting government, was in a very powerful position.

By early 1991, the ANC and NP were deeply divided about the future constitutional process. The ANC favoured an elected constitution-making body, while both the NP and IFP rejected this because the ANC would clearly dominate such a body. The ANC was trying to create a legal infrastructure, and had yet to hold its first representative national conference. With the changes taking place in the country, the question facing senior figures of the security apparatus created by PW Botha, which remained well-resourced and powerful, was how to ensure that their interests were catered for during negotiations and under a democratic dispensation.

While powerful, senior security figures were also vulnerable. Their past was littered with illegal actions in Africa, Europe and elsewhere. Their political masters in the NP appeared to be losing control over the political agenda, and events seemed to have gained a momentum of their own. The question arose in their minds as to whether politicians would offer members of the security forces as sacrifices in return for politicians' own indemnity or political future. They had to find a way of signalling to the ANC that accommodation with the security forces was a prerequisite to a national political settlement. At the same time, they could use violence as a means of ensuring that the needs of the security forces were considered by the NP as well. Until their own future was secured, the dependability of the security forces could not be assumed.

The argument put forward here is not a simple equation of the NP government with the security forces and the manipulation of the violence by the latter in the interests of the former. Violence was indeed being manipulated for political ends, with a clear link to the negotiation process. Once the ANC made concessions – amnesty for security force members, guaranteed employment for civil servants for five years, and post-election power-sharing – the shape of the political future was largely settled.

Once the political game was essentially over, the violence no longer required the same level of support, and the supply of weapons from the security forces to Inkatha began to dry up.²¹ The result was a peaceful election, with Inkatha taking part, and a Government of National Unity formed. That government, led by President Mandela, continued to embargo sensitive reports into alleged SADF and security force involvement in political violence. The security forces, whose acts of barbarity had been recorded by the world media for decades, had done remarkably well out of the negotiations.

22 JULY 1990: THE VIOLENCE BEGINS

July 1990 began as a relatively peaceful month on the Reef. During the first three weeks of July, police clashed with dwellers in a number of informal settlements as they tore down shacks while women from the settlements stripped to the waist and taunted the police. Extreme right-wing white organisations were accused of planting bombs at black taxi and bus ranks. UDF leaders continued to receive death threats, as they had during the 1980s. The ANC and Azapo held secret talks and local gangs such as the Jackrollers, the Black Cats, and the Gadaffi gang continued to clash with local youth structures.²²

The only point at which Inkatha played a visible role in Reef politics was in lying at the centre of a week of action in early July (from 2 to 9 July) organised by Cosatu against the war in Natal. A counter-rally called by Inkatha in Soweto mustered some 2 000 people. In what was to become characteristic, Inkatha members and supporters were urged to arm themselves, as embattled supporters of an organisation standing up to the strong-arm tactics of the ANC. Evans Sebiso, Inkatha's regional secretary, reported that 'our leaders said we must arm ourselves against the possibility of the ANC trying to force us not to go to work'.²³ Apart from this incident, Inkatha remained absent from grass-roots politics in most Reef townships.

However, on 20 July, Cosatu issued a press statement which claimed that Inkatha organisers had moved from Natal to the Transvaal, where they were operating in the single-sex hostels largely populated by migrant workers. Cosatu claimed that its members in the hostels had been told to pay an IFP membership fee and to attend a 'peace rally' organised by Inkatha, to be held on Saturday 21 July. Both Inkatha and the Vaal Civic Association had applied for permission to hold rallies at Evaton Stadium, but, in a pattern repeated for the next four years, permission was given to Inkatha – three days after the local civic organisation had been refused the right to use the stadium.

The Inkatha rally, Cosatu warned, would be the signal for attacks on Vaal residents. The press statement argued that Cosatu members in the hostels 'were given [the impression] that the attack on Vaal residents would be planned in Ulundi and would be launched from the rally'.²⁴ Cosatu's lawyers wrote to the Minister of Law and Order, warning that attacks from Inkatha supporters were expected. Sebokeng's SAP Commander, Colonel Mazibuko, gave assurances that no one at the rally would be allowed to carry weapons. SAP spokesperson Eugene Opperman took a harder line, claiming that the police could not respond to rumours.²⁵ The press also disregarded the rumours.

After violence broke out, newspapers spoke to Sebokeng residents and reported that 'for over a month now, mention of the date July 21 has brought fear to Vaal residents'.²⁶ The 'rumour' became a reality when 27 people were murdered as

Inkatha members armed with assegais, pangas, knobkerries and other weapons attacked the hostels when coming back from the rally. Police vehicles accompanied the marchers, but no attempt was apparently made to disarm them.²⁷

Despite Mazibuko's assurance that Inkatha supporters would be disarmed, police now claimed that they could not do so because 'it is Zulu custom to attend meetings armed with assegais, shields and knobkerries'.²⁸ Inkatha leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi argued, however – in contrast with the police interpretation of Zulu custom – that 'given [the] actions and utterances of certain ANC leaders and supporters, and in these circumstances, one can understand Inkatha supporters feeling the need to defend themselves and carry arms'.²⁹ Buthelezi went on to blame deaths on the 'taunting and jeering' directed at Inkatha by township residents.³⁰

The Inkatha supporters were escorted to the Sebokeng hostel complex, a Cosatu stronghold, which they attacked. The attacks were repulsed by non-Inkatha inmates, and Inkatha supporters who had lived in the hostel were not allowed to return. This was seen by both sides as a 'defeat' for Inkatha, and eye-witnesses to later violence reported hearing Inkatha supporters declaiming: 'Sebokeng won't happen again'.³¹

The day after the Sebokeng carnage, 13 people were injured in Wesselton, in the eastern Transvaal, when attacked by members of the Black Cats gang. The gang was later revealed to comprise Inkatha members who had received military training by the SADF in the Caprivi Strip, and whose task, in their own words, was 'to make conflict in the community'.³²

A day later, 24 July, seven buses carrying Inkatha supporters arrived at the Sebokeng hostel, and in the ensuing clashes, six people died. On the same day, the first incident of train violence took place, in Soweto, as a 'large group of Zulu warriors entered the train at Ikwezi Station looking for *mzabalazo* people'.³³ The same thing happened the next day on a Soweto train. On this occasion, the attackers, shouting 'Usuthu' (a traditional Zulu war cry) and brandishing iron bars, knobkerries and pangas, injured many commuters and threw a woman to her death from the moving train. As the train slowed down and entered the next station, commuters turned on their attackers and began to stone them. The attackers then fled to nearby Jabulani hostel. When the police arrived, they tear-gassed the commuters. The attackers disappeared.³⁴

Violence continued in Wesselton, where the Black Cats attacked ANC and local civic members and their houses. On July 28th, two inmates of Jeppe hostel in Johannesburg were murdered, allegedly for refusing to join Inkatha.³⁵ The following day, the bodies of three Soweto residents were found outside Jabulani hostel, which provided refuge to the train attackers when stoned by commuters. The message of retribution seemed clear.

In all, 51 people died in July following the first attack in Sebokeng. The pattern was already clear: hostels had to be cleared of non-Zulus and of Zulu-speakers who would not participate in violence. The hostels became armed bases from which attacks could be launched. Thereafter, the surrounding areas became no-go zones, and fear and confusion was sown through savage random attacks such as train violence. Criminal gangs were being used as proxy fighters in attacks directed at ANC members. Some of the key elements of low intensity conflict were becoming evident on the Reef.

Inkatha's strategy

At the launch of the Inkatha Freedom Party on 4 July 1990, Buthelezi stated:

I also say today that no power on earth and most certainly nothing that the ANC can do will shake Inkatha's resolve to come out as a new Inkatha and as a political party to claim a right and to claim its rightful place at the negotiating table. No power on earth will stop us being a powerful force at the negotiating table.³⁶

Buthelezi went on to list 'derogatory epithets' used to describe him by the ANC. The supposed ANC-led 'campaign of vilification' was frequently cited as the reason for attacks by Inkatha supporters, casting them in the role of defenders of Buthelezi's honour. Themba Khoza, for example, while disclaiming Inkatha responsibility for train violence, nonetheless noted: 'The only thing we can say, is not to humiliate Chief Buthelezi by singing derogatory songs about him because that creates tension and subsequently leads to conflict.'³⁷ Buthelezi on the occasion of the IFP launch merely asked 'if Dr Mandela is aware of the extent to which this vilification campaign fans the flames of this hideous violence'.³⁸

Violence was Buthelezi's major tool in trying to ensure Inkatha control in KwaZulu-Natal. The same tool was used to force Inkatha from a regional and ethnic particularity onto the national political stage. As in KwaZulu-Natal, political violence on the Reef followed violent membership drives by Inkatha. Cosatu claimed that 'certain Inkatha officials have been travelling from hostel to hostel mobilising hostel dwellers for war'.³⁹ Within a month of the launch of the IFP, political violence broke out after recruitment drives in Sebokeng and then spread via hostels to Soweto, Kagiso on the West Rand (5 August) and to Tokoza, Katlehong and Vosloorus on the East Rand (13 August

onwards). In August 1990 alone, 860 people were killed in political violence.

The similarities with KwaZulu-Natal, and the expectation of more violence as Inkatha sought to create a political support-base, were not missed. David Breier, writing in *The Sunday Star* commented that 'Inkatha's high-profile meetings, especially in hostels in the PWV area over recent weeks, preceded ... [the] orgy of death on the Reef which mirrored the mass violence in Natal over the past four years'.⁴⁰ A Johannesburg-based monitoring agency, the Independent Board of Inquiry into Informal Repression (IBIIR), was more direct:

The violence appears to have been precipitated by a brutal and aggressive recruitment campaign initiated by Inkatha which compelled certain hostel dwellers to leave the hostel and join the community with whom the hostel already had strained relations. Thereafter the conflict escalated along political and ethnic lines.⁴¹

It is important to recall the context in which these events occurred. The Inkatha recruitment drives took place in a situation where opinion polls reflected not only a minute level of support for the organisation outside Natal — at 2 per cent but also the fact that Inkatha was widely viewed with loathing on the Reef. Buthelezi's response to that was a blend of bravado and insecurity. Claiming that he did not give 'two hoots in hell', Buthelezi stated,

I am a major player, whether the Press vilify me or not. I am one of the major players, just as the ANC and NP are major players ... I am not one of the smaller ones. I am a major one.⁴²

Cosatu's Information Department, which played an important role in monitoring and analysing the Reef violence, produced a discussion paper which noted that 'Inkatha has come to the conclusion that it can only make itself a national political factor through the use of violence'. The first step for Inkatha was to establish territorial bases on the Reef, and then to systematically move through nearby areas to establish a support-base through the use of violence. Although initially the strategy seemed to be successful, it ultimately failed, with Inkatha securing only secured 3 per cent of the Gauteng vote in the 1994 elections. However, the short-term gains of the strategy of using violence as political leverage, which came in the form of

concessions by the ANC and its allies in the negotiating halls, were considerable.

PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE

Our basic premise is that in studying any local incident of political violence, a complex web of relationships and tensions will be involved. The players and their roles may differ from incident to incident or from area to area, depending on the socio-political and economic make-up of the area. Nonetheless, examining aggregated incidents across the Reef through the entire period throws overall patterns into clear relief. The rest of this chapter seeks to illustrate through primary data how political violence, in its many forms, served the cause of retarding the onset of democracy in South Africa while trying to secure the safety of perpetrators in the new dispensation.

After the whirlwind of violence on the Reef in July–August 1990, pitched battles continued, though less frequently than previously, while a low-level war of violent attrition became evident. Trains, buses and taxis were attacked. Funerals, beer halls and social events became targets of attackers from nearby hostels, or small, highly efficient but unidentifiable killing units. People walking past hostels suffered sniper fire or abduction into the hostels, frequently followed by the victim's body being dumped at the hostel gates a few hours later.

Prominent community activists, as well as ANC and Inkatha leaders, were assassinated – particularly those who seemed to be on the verge of negotiating peace in their locality. When relative quiet returned to the Reef, or to particular townships, a sudden conflagration would be sparked by a particularly savage incident or series of attacks. It was not a simple issue of Inkatha supporters attacking ANC supporters, or vice versa. Known Inkatha areas were also open to these attacks, alongside residents or ANC areas. The goal seemed clear: to maintain a level of violence and thereby to keep fear, insecurity and the desire for revenge sufficiently close to the surface so that when needed, smaller areas and then the whole Reef could swiftly be turned into war zones. Inkatha supporters may have been foot soldiers for much of the violence, but they were clearly regarded as expendable, and were turned on when necessary.

The violence seemed to move freely across the Reef and to change form as it moved. At critical political moments, however, many different forms of violence, across different areas, were synchronised. The violence also changed

scale over time. The end of 1990 saw massive battles, with thousands on each side, fighting over large territories. This could not be sustained, and smaller and smaller battles took place. These too died down over time, and small, highly mobile units of attackers moved from area to area, stoking conflict and moving on. In some instances, such as the attacks on Phola Park, they were able to spark off widespread violence; in others, no such response was forthcoming.

Through all of this, according to reports from victims, eye witnesses, reporters and monitors, the SAP were active participants in the violence or defenders of Inkatha supporters. Victims frequently alleged that attackers were escorted to their place of attack by the SAP, and then escorted back with the loot taken from their victims. These acts of collusion were widely reported and photographed by journalists. Large numbers of Inkatha supporters – over 1 000 marched more than over 10 kilometres before laying the Swanieville informal settlement to waste and then marching safely back to their hostel base at Kagiso – seemed able to participate in violence while immune to arrest and prosecution. The Reverend Frank Chikane of the South African Council of Churches asked:

How can the government allow hundreds of people to march – heavily armed – and raid, plunder and murder on their way and then march away, and then not arrest them? If the same group of people marched on state interests they would not last 10 minutes.⁴³

Police responses

The most frequent response of the SAP was an outright denial of any possibility of police misconduct, frequently accompanied by on-the-spot attribution of blame to others. Colonel Frans Malherbe spoke truer than he knew when he stated: ‘we categorically, again and again, deny these allegations’.⁴⁴ He and his colleagues seemed to have spent the four years of violence doing little but denying allegations of partiality or misconduct. Investigation rather than denial may have been a more appropriate response. His colleague, Eugene Opperman, claimed that the SAP was ‘used to these allegations being made – in fact ... they were becoming bored with them’.⁴⁵

Many of the policemen who were involved in fomenting violence later admitted their role in TRC hearings and other forums. One of them told the Goldstone Commission that ‘large quantities of arms and ammunition were

supplied to the IFP', and stated that 'Mr Themba Khoza had under his control thousands of IFP members who were able to cause violence and chaos in Johannesburg.'⁴⁶ Witness Q, 'Chappies' Klopper, confirmed in court that he had been present when two of the most senior Inkatha officials in Gauteng, Themba Khoza and Victor Ndlovu, had received weapons from the Vlakplaas-based death squad.⁴⁷ The Goldstone Commission reported: 'That large quantities of arms and ammunition were supplied to the IFP is confirmed on oath by van Heerden, Nortje and Klopper' (all of Unit C10 at Vlakplaas).⁴⁸

A Goldstone Commission report noted that according to Unit C10 member 'Chappies' Klopper, the Unit 'was involved from 1989 in violence aimed at the destabilisation of South Africa. It was involved, *inter alia*, in the organisation of train and hostel violence' under the overall command of Lieutenant-General Basie Smit and Major-General Krappies Engelbrecht.⁴⁹ The *Sunday Times* reported that the IFP leader in Gauteng, Themba Khoza, was on the police payroll as an informer, as was the MEC for Safety and Security in KwaZulu-Natal, Reverend Celani Mthetwa.⁵⁰ Willie Nortje, a member of the C10 hit-squad unit based at Vlakplaas, told a court that C10 paid for the services of prominent Inkatha officials, and that C10 as a whole 'was sympathetic to the IFP but not the ANC. In terms of the provision of weapons, this was only to the IFP and not the ANC'.⁵¹ Many more examples could be quoted.

Reporting the violence

Mainstream media coverage of the political violence of the early 1990s left much to be desired and tended to take police claims at face value. One of the few newspapers to query such behaviour, and to keep investigating political violence long after mainstream newspapers had deemed it as not newsworthy, was the independent newspaper, *The Weekly Mail*, which noted:

As soon as the police bar the media they signal that they want to act without public scrutiny. There can only be one reason for this move: they want to do things they don't want South Africans or the outside world to know about.⁵²

The Weekly Mail editorial went on to complain that 'we cannot rely on the police media liaison officers. They function as no more than a Department of Denials, habitually saying the word 'no' before they have even heard the question'.

This was scarcely new behaviour for the police. Prominent journalist Jon Qwelane covered events near Merafe Hostel, one of the worst centres of violence in Soweto, and noted that the Inkatha supporters from the hostel were not disarmed or tear-gassed; and when the *impi* attacked residents from the area, police tear-gassed the residents, not their attackers. The alliance between police and hostel dwellers had its roots in the Soweto uprisings of 1976, as Qwelane reminded readers, ‘when police openly instructed Meadowlands Hostel inmates to kill township residents.’⁵³

Some journalists pointed to the eerie familiarity of the violence. Philip van Niekerk, writing in *The Weekly Mail*, noted that a brutal attack at Denver station in Johannesburg ‘had all the hallmarks of a Renamo attack – random brutality, striking terror into the hearts of ordinary black people.’ This attack and others like it, van Niekerk argued, were ‘too concerted, too reminiscent of state-sponsored vigilantism elsewhere, to be coincidental’.⁵⁴ Such claims were swiftly denied or ignored by government and police spokespeople.

Despite its scale and brutality, the violence soon began to slip from the front pages of newspapers towards less prominent sections, unless accompanied by gory photographs or vivid descriptions of a particularly savage act. Even these seemed to become less and less newsworthy over the months and years after 1990, as the death toll continued to rise. Newspapers occasionally reported ‘landmarks’ in the violence, such as when the rate of killing overtook that in Beirut, or as the number of dead overtook the total number of people killed in the violence in Northern Ireland. Finally, only numbers of dead were mentioned, in point-form, hidden deep inside newspapers. Investigative reporting was left to a handful of independent publications.

Violence seemed to have become part of life on the Reef, not least because it was restricted to black areas and black victims. To this extent at least, the mainstream media found the habits of apartheid difficult to shake off. For much of the time, violence provided a backdrop to the ‘important’ events of the period, namely the negotiation process taking place a few kilometres from the sites of violence.

Warlords and weaponry

Ordinary black citizens of the Reef lived in deep fear, with no apparent recourse to the law or escape from random violence, and a media that seemed to find the deaths of thousands of South Africans of little interest. This opened space for the emergence of local leaders or structures, which did not hesitate

to use force to defend local communities. This frequently meant that communities were left in the hands of local warlords, most of whom operated from hostels. This was not restricted to Inkatha-controlled areas.⁵⁵

The natural response for many residents was to turn to the ANC, the most widely supported liberation movement, and request defence or weapons. Neither was forthcoming. The ANC suspended its armed struggle in 1990 in order to kick-start negotiations, and could not respond to such requests. The South African Communist Party issued a handbook on the structure and role of self defence units (SDUs). Beyond that, little was done. Within a year or so, many SDUs controlled areas through brutality and were alleged to be heavily involved in criminal activity, in part the result of their lack of accountability. A resident of Alexandra township, north of Johannesburg, complained:

Police are not willing to protect us from the carnage that has fallen on our township, and neither does the ANC defend us. The only option left for us is to defend ourselves.

A colleague added:

We are not protected here in Alex. We don't even have guns. We use petrol bombs, sticks and stones against people who [are] armed with rifles, shotguns, pangas and spears ... we don't see what the ANC is doing to protect us. They must give us guns.⁵⁶

Ramshackle township defence structures which had operated during the States of Emergency of the 1980s as local defence units while the security forces occupied townships, now sought to re-organise themselves into defensive bodies. In Soweto, youth marched to the Mandela house. They demanded weapons to defend themselves and rejected the advice that they should wait for defence units to be formed.

The ANC's main response to the ongoing political violence took place in the negotiating halls. The ANC's public approach was to focus on negotiations and the future dispensation, and not to be side-tracked. This approach, although appropriate in terms of the long-term transformation of South Africa, may have cost the ANC some support on the ground where day-to-day survival was at issue.

By refusing to resume the armed struggle, the ANC left the field open to

local leaders or structures prepared to defend communities with force. In some areas, this had disastrous effects. For example, in Phola Park, an informal settlement near Tokoza, the original members of the self defence unit were assassinated one by one. This left the Unit in the hands of criminal elements who allegedly waged a reign of terror and extortion against the community itself.

Graeme Gotz has described another form of pro-force leadership stepping into the vacuum created by the absence of an armed ANC response.⁵⁷ The local ANC leader in the Vaal area, Ernest Sotsu, had had members of his family slaughtered, allegedly by the 'Vaal Monster', Victor 'Khetisi' Kheswa, who operated from the Inkatha base at KwaMadala hostel near Boipatong. Following the murder of his family, Sotsu moved into the Sebokeng hostel complex, where he called repeatedly for effective SDU to be formed and to protect residents in the area. However, his efforts to recruit and train SDU members led to divisions among the ANC and Cosatu members at the hostel, which in time became violent. Other examples of similar situations exist.

The ANC response

The ANC and its allies were obliged to negotiate with those they accused of sponsoring violence by commission or omission. It took the savage attack on Boipatong in June 1992, which saw inmates from KwaMadala hostel, a known Inkatha stronghold, attack the town at night and slaughter 48 people, for the ANC to finally respond to popular anger by breaking off negotiations and instituting a campaign of 'rolling mass action'.⁵⁸ The number of people killed on the Reef in the sudden intensification of political tempers rose from 233 in May to 314 in June, a monthly toll not exceeded for 13 months. In the gloomy days that followed, ANC President Nelson Mandela warned all political parties:

History will not forgive any of us if the search for face-saving formulae prevents us from finding the correct responses which allow negotiations to be successfully resumed.⁵⁹

When the ANC returned to the negotiating table, it had secured the Record of Understanding with the government, which led to the release of political prisoners, restricted (on paper, at least) the carrying of traditional weapons and proposed sealing off a number of hostels with razor wire. Inkatha was excluded from signing the Record, signalling a shift by both the NP and ANC

from considering the three parties as equally important. The Record is widely seen as a turning point in the negotiation process.⁶⁰ Soon thereafter, according to evidence given in Eugene de Kock's trial, the supply of weapons from security forces to Inkatha began to dry up; their value to the security forces as foot-soldiers was rapidly diminishing.

It is testament to the deep level of popular support for the ANC, and the veneration of Nelson Mandela in particular, that the movement was able to maintain popular loyalty throughout the period of violence and during the 1994 elections, despite the ANC's official refusal to support retaliatory moves. The organisation included members and local leaders who became involved in crime and violence. Overall, however, in the face of deep provocation, ANC leaders managed to maintain considerable discipline.

The Reef war presumably had as an initial goal the aim of driving the ANC to a violent response, thereby simultaneously stripping the movement of its moral authority and giving the government free rein for a security clampdown on the ANC and others. Another goal was to weaken the ANC, a goal that was achieved in part. Many branches were launched very late, leaders were assassinated, meetings had to be held in secret in violence-torn areas, and many ordinary citizens preferred to stay far away from politics. As we have seen, ANC branches in areas such as Sebokeng suffered internal conflict as a direct result of the violence they were caught up in. The ANC was, to some degree, tainted by the violence of some members. The refusal of the ANC to arm members or defend them with force put further strain on relations with supporters.

The ANC leadership operated at a sophisticated level of national negotiations, keeping the 'grand prize' of liberation as their overarching goal. To expect people terrified by drive-by shootings, train murders or township massacres to keep their gaze fixed on this long-term goal of a democratic South Africa rather than defending themselves against those who attacked them on a near-daily basis seemed to many to be asking too much. Ultimately, this was a short-term problem. Despite the support of the security forces and the mainstream media, Inkatha failed to win the hearts and minds of the mass of Reef residents and consequently lost the war.

UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL VIOLENCE ON THE REEF

In the remainder of this chapter, we place the violence on the Reef in context. The CASE database of political violence on the Reef between July 1990 and

1994 records a total of 6 007 incidents. These resulted in 8 747 deaths. The majority of incidents occurred in 1992 (2 071 incidents) and 1993 (1 898 incidents). The worst-hit area was the East Rand, where 51 per cent of incidents occurred; this was followed by Soweto, where a fifth (21%) of incidents took place, the Vaal (10%), Alexandra (8%), Johannesburg (6%) and the West Rand (4%). The East Rand and Soweto house the majority of Reef inhabitants and suffered almost three quarters (72%) of all incidents of political violence. The East Rand is also a centre for the manufacturing industry and provides much of Gauteng's formal employment.

Incident numbers varied dramatically across the Reef, as the following graph reveals. The number of incidents of political violence that took place in 1990, 414 in all, cover the period 22 July to the end of the year. Many of these, however, were large-scale battles, while those recorded in 1994 are mainly small incidents involving limited numbers of people (drive-by shootings and so on). The incidents recorded for 1994 (288) end in July, three months after the 1994 elections. The massive number of incidents in the East Rand in 1993 reflect the total chaos and near-disintegration in that area, which was the closest any part of the Reef came to total collapse.

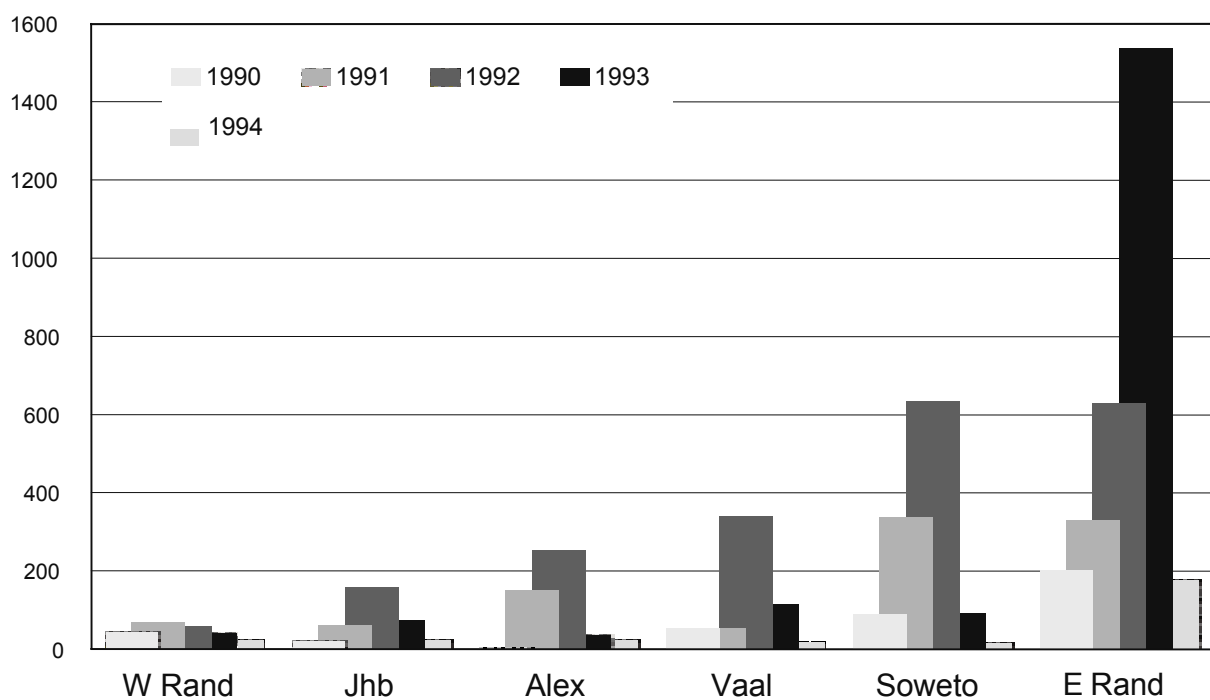


FIGURE 1
Incidents of political violence by area by year

Identifying aggressors and victims

One of the features of the violence is the large number of victims who did not know who their attackers were, where they came from and why they attacked. Table 1 shows this:

Reported identity of primary aggressor	Percentage
Unknown	63
Unidentified, organised	13
Hostel-dwellers	9
SAP	6
Township residents	4
Organisation member (e.g. union)	2
Informal settlement dweller	1
Gang	1
SADF	1

TABLE 1
Reported identity of primary aggressor

The figures in Table 1 record not the political affiliation of the attacker, but whether or not they were identified in any way by the victims. (A subsequent field recorded the political affiliation of both aggressors and victims and is reported below.)

In slightly less than two thirds of cases (63%), the attackers were unknown and unidentifiable. In a conflict popularly described and widely understood as a battle for territory and support between Inkatha and the ANC, this is quite remarkable. The category includes incidents where the victims, eye-witnesses, monitors or journalists (depending on the sources) could not identify the attackers in any way.

We noted earlier that the mainstream press spent limited space reporting the violence, which diminished further over time. This is reflected in this category, which includes an enormous number of incidents where monitors or media merely recorded that a body or bodies were found. These were sometimes accompanied by a description of the means of death (shot, stabbed, hacked) and occasionally other factors, such as the incidents that led to their death.

In a further 13 per cent of incidents, the attackers were unknown but

described by eye-witnesses or monitors as well-organised. This category is perhaps best described through an example. It includes the attackers who entered a house in Alexandra in March 1991, where a funeral vigil was taking place for a member of the Congress of South African Students (Cosas), an ANC-aligned student organisation. In the early hours of the morning, attackers burst through the door shouting ‘You are ANC and we are Inkatha!’⁶¹ and killed 15 people, injuring a further 18. Commentators pointed to the professionalism of the attack, noting that almost every bullet had hit a human target – very few were found lodged in or having passed through walls, floor or roof. Many of those who survived or escaped the initial gunfire were attacked with pangas as they tried to protect themselves or escape. The attack occurred despite Alexandra having been declared an unrest area, and in the midst of what the SAP claimed were regular SAP and SADF patrols throughout the township.

The police issued a statement almost immediately, claiming that ‘the people who were attacked have no links with any political organisation’,⁶² patently inaccurate in view of the prominent role of COSAS members in the vigil. The ANC leader in Alexandra, Popo Molefe (later Premier of North West Province), stated: ‘For us, this is clear Renamo-style violence’, noting that the SAP and SADF appeared to have withdrawn from the township ‘in order to allow space for massacres of this nature’.⁶³

The four years of Reef violence under study are littered with incidents such as the Alexandra massacre, smaller (and, on occasion, larger) in scale and less well-covered by the media, but equally powerful examples of highly organised brutality. One can only speculate about how often similarly planned operations took place but the details of which went unrecorded.

Political affiliation of primary aggressor	Percentage
Unknown	81
Inkatha	10
State	7
ANC	1
Zulu	1

TABLE 2
Political affiliation of primary aggressor

Because the attackers were unknown in so many incidents, their political affiliation was also widely unknown (though widely suspected). Fully 81 per cent of aggressors were of unknown political affiliation, as can be seen from Table 2. The table reflects the understanding of victims, eye-witnesses, monitors or media as to the identity of attackers. It is not a statement of fact but an aggregation of perceptions collected over four years. The trend is clear. In one in ten incidents, the political affiliation of attackers was alleged to be to Inkatha; in 7 per cent of incidents, attackers were identified with the state (police, army and 'third force'). ANC supporters were identified as attackers in 1 per cent of cases.

These perceptions indicate that Inkatha supporters were ten times more likely to be identified as attackers than ANC supporters. However, what is important about Tables 1 and 2 is the widespread absence of knowledge about who was attacking. Suspicions of state involvement were widely held and aired, and an enormous amount of *prima facie* evidence was secured. Very few arrests ever took place, and even fewer convictions were secured. It is only now that security force members are admitting to their role.

This absence of detail is not surprising since the police, whose investigations should have provided the information to fill the gaps, were an interested party and made few serious attempts to investigate the violence or uncover the killers.

We have seen that attackers were able to remain largely undetected. This is mirrored in the status of their victims, many of whom were similarly unknown.

Identity of victim	Percentage
Unknown	49
Township or informal resident, train commuter, etc.	34
SAP	8
Hostel-dweller	4
Organisation (e.g. union)	3
Unidentified organised	1

TABLE 3
Identity of victim

Just under half (49%) of those killed in the violence were 'unknown', meaning that the violence monitors or press listed them merely as bodies found, with

no other identifying characteristics. Another third (34%) were identified as residents of this or that area, or were identified by their context (this category includes people who were killed on trains, in beerhalls and so on). In 8 per cent of cases the victims were police. Hostel dwellers were twice as likely (9%) to be aggressors in the violence as they were to be victims of it (4%).

While we argue that residents at random were the main victims of violence, this is not entirely true, since only 6 per cent of those who were killed were women, while 3 per cent were children. This suggests that some degree of target selection was made by attackers. If we look at the political affiliation of victims, the following emerges:

Political affiliation of victim	Percentage
Unknown	82
State	9
ANC	5
Inkatha	3

TABLE 4
Political affiliation of victim

The data overwhelmingly indicate that this was a faceless war, carried out by unidentified attackers against unknown residents of the Reef. Only one in 20 victims of the violence were known to be ANC members – the main losers in this war were the African population of the Reef. Almost one in ten victims was either a member of the police or defence force, who were identified as attackers in 7 per cent of incidents. The vast majority of victims of political violence had no known political affiliation.

The overall pattern is clear: faceless attackers killed anyone in the areas they selected as targets. The main characteristic shared by victims of the violence is that they were likely to be African and not members of any particular organisation. When attackers were identified, they were most likely to be alleged Inkatha supporters or members of the SAP or SADF. The fact that attackers could wage such a ‘successful’ war and yet remain largely unidentified and avoid arrest or prosecution, suggests that a far more sophisticated body was at work than merely ANC and Inkatha struggling for turf.

The nature of the violence

What the numbers we have seen do not reflect is the way that violence changed over time. The initial months of Reef violence were marked by vicious attacks on residents, and the ethnic cleansing of non-Zulus from hostels. Those acts in turn provided ‘triggers’ for a series of set-piece battles between thousands of red head-banded Inkatha supporters from single-sex hostels on the one hand, and residents of townships, informal settlements or non-Inkatha hostels on the other. At the same time, train and taxi commuters were attacked by Inkatha-supporting hostel-dwellers.

The large pitched battles of late-1990 soon gave way to smaller sorties by Inkatha supporters, most often emanating from hostels, attacking surrounding areas; and a growing number of incidents involving unidentified but highly proficient killers.

It is also important to recall the swiftness with which the violence spread across the Reef. The graph below shows the dramatic speed with which violence engulfed the Reef. It shows the first incident of political violence in each area (not the subsequent incidents). Having started in Sebokeng, the violence had touched Soweto, Wesselton and some Johannesburg hostels by

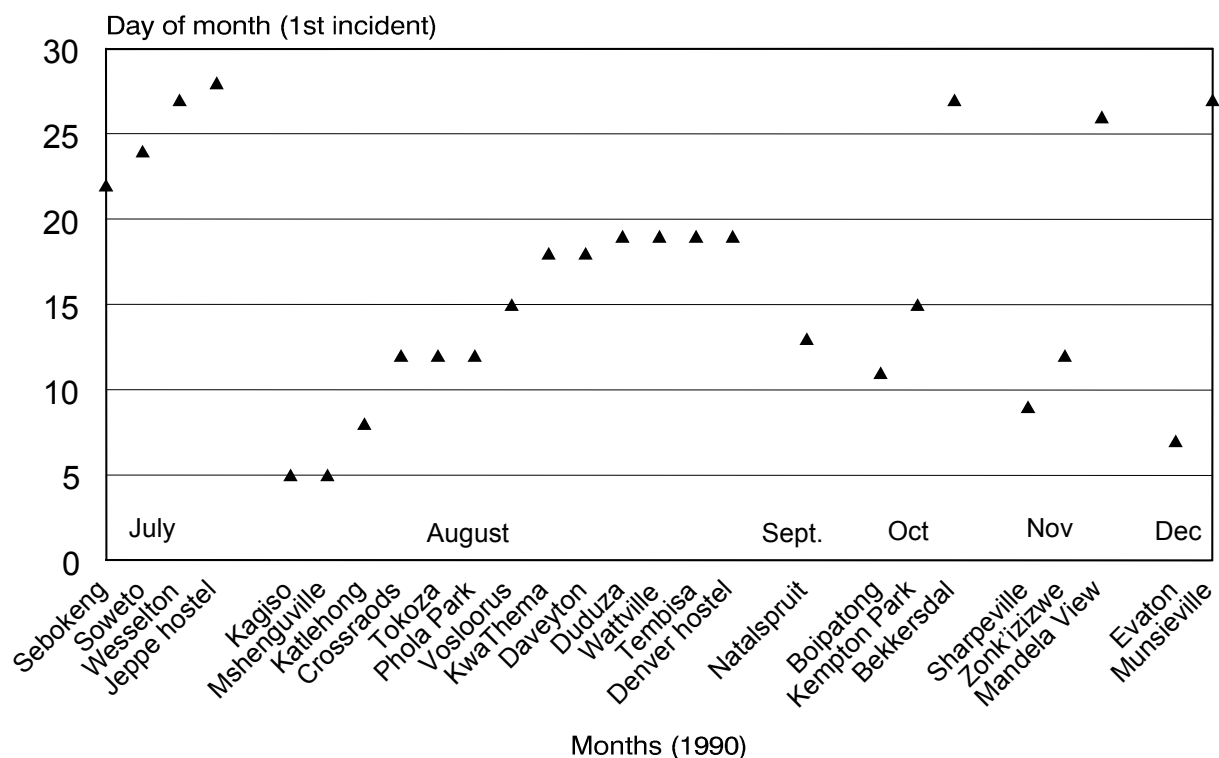


FIGURE 2

First incident of violence in different areas of the Reef, 1990

the end of July; early August saw the violence reach Kagiso on the West Rand, which was joined during the month by Katlehong, Tokoza, Phola Park, Vosloorus, KwaThema, Daveyton, Duduza, Wattville, and Tembisa, alongside new suburbs in Soweto and new hostels in Johannesburg.

The graph also shows how in August 1990, violence flared up in areas tens of kilometres apart on the same day. The scale, co-ordination and organisation involved suggest that forces with easier access to manpower and weapons than Inkatha must have been involved.

Before the end of the year, Sharpeville, Zonk'izizwe, Evaton, Munsieville and Bophelong joined the list of areas affected by violence. Alexandra, a densely populated black township on the edge of Johannesburg's wealthy northern suburbs, was one of the last-affected areas, for reasons discussed below. Within five months, political violence had broken out in 26 different areas.

The violence was not just swift in spreading, but also savage. In Sebokeng, a 2-month-old baby died of teargas poisoning, and a 9-year-old boy was shot; one hostel-dweller was shot while dancing to music on the radio, another while eating his supper. In Tokoza, in the same month, violence between hostel-dwellers and Phola Park residents began when 'one Xhosa – who had a drinking problem – stayed behind. When the Zulus came they attacked him, shot him dead, and burnt his clothes.'⁶⁴ Violence in many areas began with rumours such as this – that 'Zulus' had killed a Xhosa, or that 'Xhosas' had killed Zulus. The source of the rumours was never evident; the truth of the claims was frequently made irrelevant by the subsequent violence. In the Crossroads informal settlement near Katlehong on the East Rand, violence led to people leaving the area. The owner of a shack 'wanted to take her clothes across the railway line. When she came back, the shack was burning [and inside was] a three-month child.'⁶⁵ In Kagiso, a four-year-old was axed through the head. In March 1991, nine members of the Ramakgola family were murdered in Alexandra, including a 6-month-old baby shot in the stomach.

After the conflict broke out in mid-July 1990, August saw 860 people murdered in acts of political violence. By the end of 1990, 1 838 people had been killed in 414 incidents of violence. The situation is shown in the graph above. The brutality of the initial phase of violence is reflected in the high death rate per incident in this period, which dropped away over successive years. An average of just under five people were murdered in each incident, reflecting the scale of the confrontations taking place. By 1993 the rate had dropped to

two deaths per incident, and by 1994 to an average of one death per incident.

The graph also shows that 1992 saw a massive 2 071 incidents of political violence on the Reef, over 1 000 more than the preceding year and almost 200 more than in the following year. We argued earlier that the key period in the violence/negotiations nexus was that between the Swanieville massacre in May 1991 and the Boipatong and Bisho massacres in June 1992, resulting in the Record of Understanding in September 1992. During that period, 3 029 people were murdered in political violence on the Reef, more than a third of all people murdered in political violence on the Reef between 1990 and 1994.

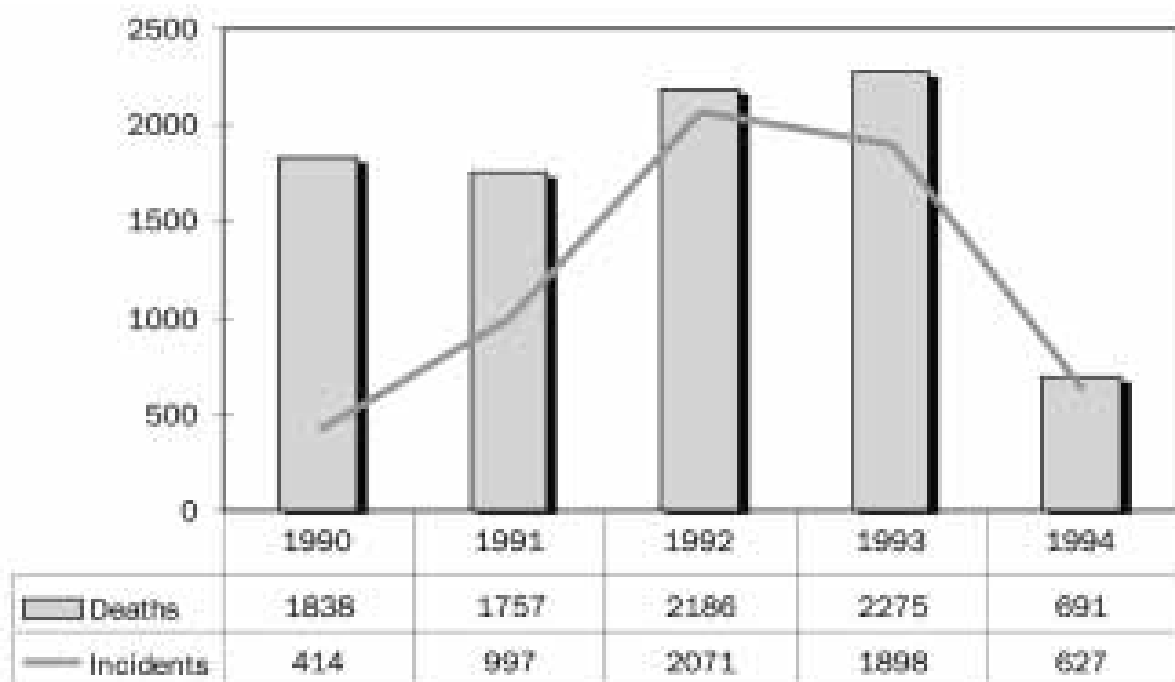


FIGURE 3
Deaths and incidents in political violence, 1990-1994

Weapons

We have seen how the violence of the early 1990s was categorised as an ANC versus Inkatha struggle, leaving space for the NP government to stand back and appear to play the role of non-involved peace-broker. This was a role which De Klerk exploited to the full. The violence kept attention focused away from the governing party and the state apparatus it controlled, but also created space for actions which, in the words of a journalist, ‘systematically served to increase the potential for violence’.⁶⁶

For example, a month and a half after the violence began, and in the midst of the huge pitched battles of late 1990, De Klerk reversed a century-old

prohibition against Zulu men bearing dangerous weapons in public. As the Durban branch of the Legal Resources Centre noted, 'in times of widespread violence this is a strange way to respond to the problem'.⁶⁷ The KwaZulu government followed suit, and repealed legal provisions which imposed an automatic penalty on anyone convicted of assault with dangerous weapons. In the same month the Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, amended the Dangerous Weapons Act to apply only in declared 'unrest areas', leaving people free to bear weapons in other areas.

The ease of access to weaponry was considerable. Reporters from *The Weekly Mail* reported that factory-made fold-up spears were being sold by unidentified white men to Merafe hostel-dwellers at R12 each. They reported allegations that the whites involved were police, ritually denied at the time but subsequently corroborated by the police involved in the practice in testimony to the Goldstone Commission. Unit C10 from Vlakplaas also sold weapons to Inkatha on a regular basis, according to witnesses in the trial of Eugene de Kock.

The Zulu monarch, King Goodwill Zwelithini, enflamed the passions of his followers when he addressed a rally at FNB Stadium in Johannesburg and claimed:

The call to ban the bearing of cultural weapons by Zulus is an insult to my manhood. It is an insult to the manhood of every Zulu man.⁶⁸

'Traditional weapons' became, in the language of Inkatha spokespeople, 'cultural weapons'. The rights of non-Zulus were ignored by the NP government as it sought to retain Inkatha support, as the Johannesburg daily newspaper *Business Day* noted:

Government tried hard to persuade Chief Buthelezi and his Inkatha Freedom Party to accept a ban on spears, but they refused – perhaps partly out of pride and partly for fear of leaving Inkatha hostel-dwellers vulnerable to attack. While government's reluctance to force a decision on potential allies in constitutional negotiations was understandable, the 'traditional weapons' argument just did not stand up when spears were being used to kill people.⁶⁹

The debate over traditional weapons overshadowed the need for weapons control across the board, and drew attention away from the proliferation of

firearms in the area. Figure 4 shows the extent to which different weapons were the cause of death in the Reef violence. Over half of all those killed or injured in the Reef violence were shot, while less than 20 per cent were stabbed or hacked, by traditional weapons among others. For Inkatha, this widespread use of firearms was evidence of the ANC 'trying to enforce their beliefs on a large proportion of South Africans ... Nowhere have we seen them call for a ban on AK-47s and the other sophisticated weaponry they have in their possession'.⁷⁰ Inkatha successfully deflected attention in this way throughout the Reef violence. The ANC played the same game by focusing on traditional weapons, and allowed gun use to be obscured behind media spats.

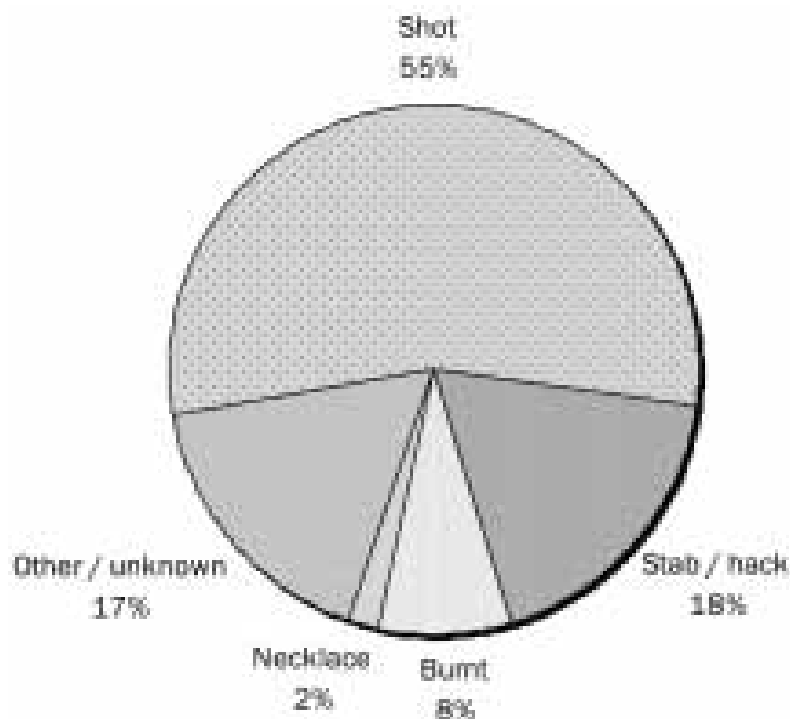


FIGURE 4
Main method of killing in the Reef violence

Looking at the use of weapons in all incidents (not just where they were the cause of death as above), we find that firearms were used in 58 per cent of incidents, and traditional or stabbing weapons in 20 per cent of incidents. The complete failure of the government to stop the movement of weapons – at which it was extremely successful during the uprisings of the 1980s where stones and petrol bombs were the most frequently used weapons – coupled with easing laws which restricted the carrying of certain weapons, remains one of the most damning indictments of the NP's role in the *interregnum*.

Hostels

One of the pillars of apartheid was the migrant labour system, under which most Africans were regarded as temporary sojourners in 'white areas' who were allowed there only to sell their labour and then return to their homes in the rural areas. Single-sex hostels were constructed to house migrant labourers in structures that were meant to be inhospitable and barrack-like for ease of control. The majority came from KwaZulu-Natal. Although hostel dwellers were regarded as different by township residents, many hostels were well integrated into township life. People could collect firewood on hostel property, take showers in the hostels, and children used to watch films when they were shown there. Many hostel-dwellers had partners in the surrounding townships.

Nonetheless, hostels were also Inkatha's only significant support-base in the province. Where they were not Inkatha-supporting, hostels were attacked and emptied. Tensions between hostel dwellers and township residents grew after the 1976 rebellion, when hostel-dwellers attacked students. This was worsened during the uprisings of the 1980s, where hostel inmates were expected to abide by boycott and similar strategies, despite almost never being consulted. By 1990, hostel inmates were volatile, and suspicious of (and frequently hostile to) township residents and township politics.⁷¹

Lloyd Vogelmann of the Project for the Study of Violence noted that hostel-dwellers had a shared identity as well as a strong sense of grievance deriving from their perception of being treated poorly by township residents. They were also easy to organise and could assemble very quickly, thus making 'planned attacks much more easy to execute'.⁷² The *Sowetan* noted that hostel-dwellers were made by the hostels 'aliens in their own country'.⁷³ In late 1990, monitors in KwaZulu-Natal and Johannesburg reported buses transporting many hundreds of unemployed Inkatha supporters to the Reef, swelling the numbers of hostel inmates with newly arrived and non-integrated Inkatha supporters, who were sent to the Reef to take part in violence.

In most instances of violence in 1990, hostels provided either the immediate source of conflict (as in Sebokeng) or acted as armed fortresses from which attacks could be mounted and to which attackers could retreat. Hostels had to be cleared of non-supportive elements – whether Zulu or not – and turned into safe areas for planning, training, and regrouping. In most instances, hostels were first ethnically cleansed of non-Zulus, and then of Zulus who would not support Inkatha or would not participate in the violence.

Those driven from the hostels frequently took up residence in nearby informal settlements, hardening the lines of conflict between hostel-dwellers and surrounding communities.

In other hostels such as the Sebokeng complex, where Inkatha failed to take control of the hostel, Inkatha supporters and their families were driven from the hostel to surrounding areas. Lines of conflict between these communities and the hostels in their midst were rapidly drawn, and in the latter half of 1990, the Reef area resembled a war zone.

In battles between residents of hostels in Tokoza, Tembisa, Soweto and elsewhere, and the surrounding communities, thousands took up arms against each other, with hundreds of dead and thousands of injured. Eyewitnesses claimed that in the vast majority of incidents, the SAP either allowed the battles to rage, or intervened only if the Inkatha forces were being defeated.

When police finally mounted raids in mid-1991, after months of pressure, they claimed not to be able to enter Denver and Wolhuter hostels in Johannesburg because inmates were 'drunk, armed and highly belligerent'.⁷⁴ During the uprisings of the mid-1980s, the police had no fear of large crowds hostile to them; this 'sensitivity' was learned in the 1990s.

Although they seized a limited number of home-made weapons and drugs, 'the police were under the impression that information about the raids had somehow leaked to the hostel-dwellers'.⁷⁵ The same thing happened when police tried to raid Soweto hostels. None of the hostels they raided were those where the ANC had claimed weapons training was taking place, using weapons that SAP members were delivering to the hostels, an assertion ritually rejected by the police.⁷⁶ With the benefit of hindsight and evidence given to the Goldstone Commission, the TRC and in court, the closeness of the relationship between many police and IFP officials makes these leaks entirely explicable. The same sources have also confirmed that police were indeed delivering weapons to Inkatha-controlled hostels, often in exchange for money spent on raucous parties.

Hostel-related violence peaked in 1992, when 41 per cent of all incidents took place. These incidents were primarily located in the East Rand (39% of all hostel-related incidents of violence) and Soweto (35%), followed by the Vaal (9%), Alexandra (9%), Johannesburg (5%) and the West Rand (3%).

Where aggressors were identified in hostel incidents of violence, hostels were the aggressors in 74 per cent of cases, followed by the police (8%).

Township or informal settlement residents were the aggressors in 7 per cent of hostel-related incidents. Where affiliations of aggressors were reported, a massive 80 per cent of incidents were ascribed to Inkatha, 13 per cent to the SAP or SADF, and 5 per cent to ANC supporters.

Two thirds of hostel-related incidents of violence resulted in one or more deaths. Women were killed in 5 per cent of such incidents (49 cases), and children in 2 per cent of incidents (19 cases).

In light of the debate about 'traditional weapons' it is worth noting that firearms were used in 61 per cent of all hostel-related incidents of violence, and that the AK-47 – described by NP and Inkatha politicians as a hallmark of the ANC – was the weapon most commonly used by hostel residents.

Sebokeng hostel

Hostels – in the initial phases of the violence, mainly those occupied by ANC/Cosatu-supporting inmates – were also the victims of attack. The Sebokeng hostel complex is an example. The hostel complex was attacked nine times in August 1990, resulting in 30 deaths, as Inkatha supporters sought to reverse the 'defeat' of July when they had been repulsed by hostel inmates. On a number of occasions white men were seen among the Inkatha supporters attacking the hostel. Bombs were planted in the hostel, shots were fired through windows, and hostel residents were ambushed at the nearby station.

The police seemed to do nothing to stop the attackers, who assaulted the hostel complex on each of the first seven days of August. On 2 August, the police raided the hostel and confiscated weapons, thereby leaving inmates without defence in the face of on going attacks. While searching the hostel, the police were accused of 'various unlawful acts including destruction of property, theft and assault'.⁷⁷ No charges were brought against the police alleged to have carried out these acts.

On 4 August, at approximately three o'clock in the morning, the hostel was attacked by some 150 men wearing red head-bands. White men in balaclavas were said to be among the attackers, who moved into the hostel complex using guns, grenades, and stabbing weapons. They were eventually trapped by hostel inmates. Suddenly, however, the police arrived in time to rescue them. A stalemate developed, broken by the arrival of the SADF at nine o'clock in the morning. Faced by the combined SAP and SADF forces, residents – disarmed by police two days earlier – sat on the floor. In response, the SADF opened fire with live ammunition. Among the dead were three

hostel residents shot in the back. A subsequent SADF inquiry cleared military personnel of any wrong-doing. This pattern – of police partiality in support of Inkatha supporters and their attacks – was repeated and reported frequently in the ensuing months and years.

Hostels in Soweto and the Vaal

Hostels were centres of violent destabilisation for the areas surrounding them. A case study of hostel violence in Soweto (prepared for submission to the Goldstone Commission) in the first two years of violence found that a violent hostel-related incident took place in Soweto almost every 48 hours, on average.⁷⁸ The weaponry used in hostel-related incidents in the first two years of violence covered the full range from AK-47, R1 and R4 automatic rifles; shotguns, pistols and handguns; hand grenades, petrol bombs and home-made bombs; ‘traditional’ weapons, including assegais, axes, spears and knobkerries; knives, pangas and machetes; and home-made weapons, including sharpened iron poles and sticks, tomahawks and others.

The study found that the largest single category of incidents of violence associated with hostels were those where hostel-dwellers were held to be directly responsible for acts of violence. These ranged from sniper fire emanating from hostels through to full-scale attacks on the surrounding community. Hostels were also attacked on a number of occasions. Hostels or sections of hostels strongly associated with a particular political or social organisation were attacked. Hostels where members of Cosatu resided were frequently attacked by supporters of rival political groupings.

Hostels which were perpetrators of violence were also attacked, usually in retaliation for earlier violence, or in ‘pre-emptive’ attacks following threats that the hostel would soon attack the local community (township or squatter camp).

Frequent reports throughout the Reef cited bodies found at or near hostels, attacks on train stations immediately next to hostels, and on beerhalls and taverns near hostels. The savage attack on the Gobizitwana beerhall in Sebokeng, which left 13 patrons dead and 11 injured, was alleged to have been carried out by Inkatha supporters living in KwaMadala hostel near Iscor, the state-owned steel manufacturer. The same hostel was given as the address of those arrested for an equally savage attack on a funeral vigil in Sebokeng. None of the accused, all of whom were resident at the hostel run by Iscor, were actually employed by Iscor.⁷⁹

KwaMadala hostel was also the springboard for the attack on nearby Boipatong, which left 48 dead and temporarily scuppered negotiations. Cosatu stated at the time: 'We once again warn the government and the management of Iscor who owns the hostel that we will hold them responsible both criminally and civilly for any future attacks which are launched from this hostel of death'.⁸⁰ The attacks continued regardless.

The role of the Iscor parastatal in allowing its premises to be used in this way has yet to be satisfactorily explained. The story of KwaMadala hostel in the Vaal could be repeated for many others in Soweto, on the East Rand, in Alexandra and Johannesburg, and elsewhere. They were seemingly beyond any police action.

Violence also took place within hostels. The initial months of violence witnessed conflict breaking out at a number of hostels, as one section of the hostel attacked another. Most frequently, the 'Zulu' section attacked the 'Xhosa' section, and sought to force the latter out of the hostel. Violence also flared if the hostel *induna* refused to support violence, or when hostels based on clan lineage chose not to support Inkatha leaders but to wait for word from their traditional leaders in Natal.⁸¹

On average every 48 hours Soweto experienced one violent incident associated with hostels, and an average of 2.6 casualties a day in hostel-related violence. Two out of three instances (64%) of hostel-related violence in Soweto resulted in the death of one or more people. Almost one in ten incidents (9%) of hostel-related violence in Soweto involved 10 or more casualties. Finally, the case study found that 308 hostel-related incidents were recorded in Soweto in the first two years of the violence. On only 11 occasions (less than 4%) were the police recorded as making arrests.

Inkatha and hostels

We have seen how political violence was inextricably bound up with the politics of the time. One of the results of this political overlay was that in the 1990s, Inkatha became a virulent supporter of single-sex migrant hostels, a remarkable turn-around on a system had been deplored as inhumane and exploitative for many years. The ANC response to hostel violence moved from calling for hostels to be abolished⁸² to demands for their transformation into family units, a notion that in a different political context would have won widespread support.

Calls for the abolition of hostels led an IFP supporter living in Dube hostel

in Soweto to state that if this occurred, 'thousands and thousands of people will die on that day'. He went on to explain that if hostels were abolished, hostel inmates would 'have to live among the hooligans, tsotsis and criminals in the townships. There's no crime in the hostel; the people from the rural areas are disciplined, whereas those born in the township are very rude'.⁸³

Official Inkatha spokespeople were equally clear. Suzanne Vos, then a member of Inkatha's Central Committee and now a Member of Parliament, stated:

The ANC has a hidden agenda and an ulterior motive in wanting to abolish the hostel system. They know the hostels are Inkatha strongholds, and they want to get our people out ... By calling for the hostels to be converted into family units, what the ANC really wants is to get the present occupants out – to dislocate and disperse them, and then decide who is going to get family units. It is a clever tactic to get our people out. After they have been upgraded, how do our people get them back again?⁸⁴

Recruiting Alexandra into the violence

Alexandra township is a small area, densely packed with people living in the small matchbox houses that characterise townships, and in informal dwellings. It is tucked on the fringe of Johannesburg's wealthy northern suburbs, fenced in by a main road and a belt of light industrial plant. Alexandra was one of the last townships in the centre of the Reef to be drawn into the violence, and a brief examination of events there is illustrative of what took place in most townships in 1990.

In mid-August 1990, when violence has already spread to much of the Reef, armed Inkatha organisers arrived at Alexandra's Madala hostel, claiming to have come to defend inmates against attack. Importantly, Zulu-speaking hostel inmates turned the Inkatha organisers away. The Alexandra Civic Organisation was one of the few in Gauteng that had extended its organisational work into the hostel itself, and had members inside the hostel. The hostel was also part of an Alexandra-wide campaign for better housing. Moreover, living arrangements in the hostel were multi-ethnic, unlike in many other hostels.

While violence raged on through the end of 1990 and the beginning of 1991, Alexandra remained untouched. Not a single incident of political violence was reported during the next six months. This changed dramatically in March

1991, however, when on the 7th and 8th, Inkatha bussed in scores of supporters and took control of the main hostel in Alexandra. By the end of March, 115 people were dead and scores injured, and the movement of thousands of newly created refugees out of their homes had begun. In advance of the attack, according to the evidence of Paul Erasmus to the Goldstone Commission, the police 'dirty tricks' staff had printed and distributed 100 000 leaflets designed to discredit the Alexandra Civic Organisation, which was organising hostel-dwellers across ethnic lines.⁸⁵

One of those bussed in from Natal, 'Sipho', stated:

There were about five executive members of the hostel council, Inkatha men, who were giving instructions to go to fight in the townships. We were told that the kids in the township had sent a message that they were going to burn down the hostels. So they said we had to go and attack to defend the hostel.⁸⁶

A street committee meeting in Alexandra's informal settlement was attacked in what was the first of many confrontations. As Inkatha tightened its grip on Alexandra's hostels, so attacks increased. Allegations of police complicity soon surfaced. In response, the SAP raided hostels and seized some weapons. Two days later, the ANC was denied permission for a rally, while Inkatha was given permission. Three IFP members were killed *en route* to the rally, after which Inkatha supporters attacked the informal settlement. Ten people were killed and 47 injuries were reported. A week later, hostel residents began abducting township residents into the hostel where they were tortured or killed; one man was beaten to death, another thrown from the window, while others were released because they were Shangaan. The ethnic issue was initially evident in Alexandra, as it was at the onset of violence in most parts of the Reef, although it soon disappeared.

Thulani, an IFP supporter from Madala hostel in Alexandra, claimed: 'We were not fighting residents, who are mostly ANC members. What we knew was that we were fighting the Xhosas who are against the Zulus'. Fellow inmate Samson added: 'We were told that Xhosas were going yard to yard looking for Zulus, especially Inkatha leaders, to kill them'. The power of these rumours of ethnic violence – often baseless – was enormous. Five days later, a funeral vigil was attacked, within metres of police security patrols, and 15 mourners were killed and 16 injured.

Once they had established a footing in the township, Inkatha's strategy was

to clear the nearby area of non-Inkatha supporters and to recruit residents through violence. Monitors reported that residents of the informal settlement and later the formal township were obliged to sign up as Inkatha members, pay membership fees and buy Buthelezi T-shirts. A similar strategy of recruitment had preceded Natal's Seven Day War. The IBIIR described it thus:

Much of the fighting in Alexandra related to a geographical struggle for control of certain areas. In January [1991], Alexandra was an ANC stronghold and had no or very little Inkatha presence. Members of the IFP now control at least two hostels in the area. From there they have moved into the community gaining control of streets which are situated near the hostels. Blocks which previously were crammed full of shacks are now empty. New shacks are being erected with the word 'Zulu' daubed on them.⁸⁷

By the end of March 1991, Alexandra had been transformed from a relatively peaceful urban township that had avoided political violence, into just another site of violence. By July 1994, Alexandra had been the location for 8 per cent of all incidents of political violence on the Reef. In 1997, Alexandra still has many displaced people living at churches or community centres, without the homes and belongings they had before the violence broke out.

The South African Police

The behaviour of the SAP throughout the period of political violence was reprehensible. Despite their remarkable ability to infiltrate the ANC and its underground structures with regularity during the years of apartheid, the police suddenly seemed incapable of the most rudimentary investigative or security work. By late 1992, almost 4 000 people had been murdered in incidents of political violence. Only one conviction had been secured.⁸⁸ The police managed to make arrests in only 6 per cent of incidents where monitoring data exist, frequently arresting members of the public defending themselves.

From the outset, the police adopted a stance of passivity in the face of violence. Early in the conflagration, an Inkatha meeting was followed by spear-wielding Inkatha supporters running through Soweto, instilling widespread fear. Lieutenant Bester of the SAP stated that Inkatha supporters 'will not be disarmed if they do not commit any crime'.⁸⁹ By 9 September, 99 people had been killed in five days; Captain Ida van Zweel reported that the townships were 'relatively quiet'.⁹⁰

The police offered many explanations for the violence, most of which laid culpability at the feet of the ANC. Speaking of violence on the East Rand, the police claimed that it was caused by the ANC strategy of service payment boycotts – loyal ‘Zulus’ were paying their bills and became resentful when electricity was cut off. This, according to the police, was the spark for the violence, which then spread.⁹¹ No evidence was produced to support this assertion.

Beyond partiality towards attackers, active complicity by the police was alleged as well. When a group of township residents attacked Inkatha-controlled Khalanyoni hostel in August 1990, the police formed a 15-vehicle convoy, marched the township residents to a nearby sportsfield, and disarmed them at gun-point. Nothing of this nature took place with Inkatha supporters. Rather, police were alleged (and filmed and photographed) in many instances to escort Inkatha supporters to their place of attack, and then to help them retreat with stolen goods piled onto police vehicles for ease of transport. Inkatha marchers were escorted through townships to rallies and back again afterwards.

John Matisson reported an incident outside Dobsonville number two hostel in Soweto, where ‘policemen sat in their vehicles chatting while flames came out of windows and looters carried off supplies of food and drink’. He went on to state: ‘I have stood next to General Erasmus [Divisional Commander of police] as troop carriers have escorted group and group of Inkatha supporters, armed with so-called traditional weapons as well as knives, clubs and axes, to a political meeting’. When asked why the crowd was not being disarmed, the police general’s reply was: ‘Go on, you take their weapons’.⁹²

While Inkatha were consolidating their grip on Reef hostels in July and August of 1990, police were particularly hesitant to act. Colonel Frans Malherbe agreed that hostels provided springboards for attacks, but claimed to be unable to launch any pre-emptive action because of insufficient manpower, never a problem when much of the country was in revolt in the 1980s. He also claimed not to want to ‘harass people living peacefully’ in hostels.⁹³ When police finally raided Tokoza hostel in mid-August of 1990, after a series of attacks and the murder of a township resident by hostel inmates 100 metres away from police, the hostel had been vacated by a pre-warned Inkatha, and only five men were found inside. Police campaigns such as ‘Iron Fist’, which were intended to clamp down on violence and which were given considerable media coverage, commonly targeted and affected mainly non-Inkatha residents. Mary-Ann Motloun of Soweto noted: ‘They [police]

have come many times to our houses and disarmed us. Directly afterwards, the Zulus come and kill us.’⁹⁴

It is safe to summarise the issue by quoting a non-Inkatha hostel-dweller from KwaThema, whose comment captures the views of countless other eye-witnesses or victims of violence: ‘Our problem’, he stated, ‘is not the Zulus, it is the police.’⁹⁵

The inactivity of police forced monitors and NGOs to act as investigative officers while the police did nothing. When sworn statements were submitted by two important NGO monitors, the Independent Board of Inquiry into Informal Repression and Lawyers for Human Rights, they were rejected by the Minister of Law and Order as ‘fabrications’ because they were not affidavits. When affidavits were submitted, the police responded with silence. Prominent lawyer Nicholas Haysom noted that whenever detailed allegations had been submitted to the police, ‘at best we are pressed to prove that we had good reason to release the memorandum. At worst there’s no response at all’.⁹⁶ Another lawyer noted: ‘You end up becoming the policeman and the police turn into judicial officers investigating your claims.’⁹⁷

Findings of monitors and of the Goldstone Commission repeatedly went against the police. The Goldstone inquiry into shootings in Sebokeng, which left 12 people dead, found that the commanding officer had no control over the men under his command and that that was ‘the direct cause of the shooting into the crowd’.⁹⁸ In a judicial hearing on the SADF massacre in Sebokeng, Judge Stafford found security force members criminally responsible on four counts of murder, ten of grievous bodily harm, all against people who he said posed no physical threat. He also found that SADF witness Commandant Stefanus Lombard had committed perjury by lying to the court, while Sergeant Major Martinus le Roux had given false evidence. The internal military inquiry was rejected as a whitewash. While no Inkatha members were found guilty by the inquiry, Stafford noted that the probability existed that Inkatha supporters were responsible for the other deaths and injuries that had occurred.

The media began to report police denials with greater criticism as time went on. *The Star* noted in an editorial that ‘complaints of security force partiality are made nearly every time there is a riot. It is hard to imagine how such a campaign could be orchestrated when the damning witnesses are, very often, ordinary people happening on the event’.⁹⁹ This did little to change the way in which police dealt with or reported on political violence.

The actions of the police were on occasion so crass that little press comment

was needed. For example, a month after violence broke out in Alexandra, police confiscated piles of weapons from Inkatha supporters – only to return them a few days later. SAP spokesperson Opperman claimed that after a meeting with the IFP, the police decided to return ‘genuine traditional weapons’.¹⁰⁰ At the time it was far from out of the ordinary for the SAP to act in such an outrageous manner and get away with it.

On other occasions, police excuses were so lame that they would be laughable were they not so lethal. For example, in Chiawelo, township residents gathered together in fear of an attack from a busload of Inkatha supporters returning from a funeral. The SAP and those in the bus fired on the crowd, killing three and injuring 30. The police justified their action by claiming that the bus was being attacked. When the police stopped and entered the bus, they ‘found numerous weapons but did not arrest anybody because the weapons were under the seats.’ Therefore, the police claimed, ‘no individual could be implicated’.¹⁰¹

In the midst of the cycle of accusation and denial, Nico Basson, formerly a senior security force member, broke ranks and talked about Operation Agree, a plan to destabilise South Africa as had occurred in Namibia.¹⁰² According to Basson, the first stage of the plan involved sparking ethnic conflict between the two largest ethnic groups, and limiting the visibility of the newly unbanned ANC by making public or visible allegiance (by wearing T-shirts, for example) a potentially fatal act. Basson claimed that in Namibia the SADF had recruited soldiers from Renamo and Unita, trained them in game reserves and rural areas and sent them to specific areas ‘to start paramilitary units, protect hostels and start violence’. The second stage was to construct a broad alliance ‘on the basis of Christian norms and values’, with the NP at the head, to fight the elections, as the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) had done in Namibia with considerable success.¹⁰³ Just two months earlier, De Klerk had stated:

I have no doubt that when the real electoral process is in the offing, alliances will be formed and that there will be a moderate alliance in which the National Party will play an important part. It’s quite possible that the Inkatha Freedom Party and the National Party can move into an alliance but I don’t think that they will be alone if they decide to do so.¹⁰⁴

A month later, the *New Nation* reported on a Mozambican named Ndimende who had been abducted by the SADF and taken to Phalaborwa for training in

the use of AK-47 rifles and pangas, getting on and off moving vehicles, all the while wearing the red head-band that became associated with Inkatha in the early 1990s. After the February 1990 speech, according to Ndimende, 'we were told that we would now have to fight a different kind of war'.¹⁰⁵

Subsequent revelations made to the Goldstone Commission have confirmed the use of foreign-born soldiers, the use of military areas for training Inkatha troops as well as others, and the role of the security forces in fomenting precisely the kind of violence Basson and Ndimende described. Paul Erasmus, formerly a security policeman, testified before the Goldstone Commission that the 'Covert Collection of Intelligence' section had been involved in misinformation and dirty tricks on an *ad hoc* basis in the 1980s; in the late 1980s these became 'more organised and nationally co-ordinated'.¹⁰⁶ Erasmus testified to being part of Operation Romulus, aimed at spreading misinformation about the ANC alliance.

The fact that no piece of paper has been discovered with Operation Agree on it (presumably stamped 'Top Secret') does not disprove these allegations. There seems to be enormous circumstantial evidence supporting them, and now participants are openly admitting to their and their colleagues' role. Reviewing the available material covering the violence between 1990 and 1994, and the subsequent admissions by key police and army personnel, it is difficult not to conclude that the security forces were the major player in the political violence that attended the birth of the new South Africa. Inkatha may have provided the foot soldiers; the security forces, appropriately, provided the generals.

Attacks on trains, taxis, buses, funerals, beerhalls and social gatherings

One of the key tenets of LIC, as we have noted, is to instil fear among the general population. The randomness of the violence perpetrated against the local population is key to this, warning everyone that they are potential victims and through randomness denying them the ability to work out how to avoid becoming one. Attacks on commuters, funeral mourners, drinkers in taverns and others in similar situations were a marked feature of the Reef violence. They became increasingly widespread after the initial phase in which Inkatha established footholds in the community through hostel take-overs and pitched battles. In other words, as the violence became characterised by smaller, mobile killing units, so attacks on places where people gathered increased. Across the four years under study here, there were:

- 417 attacks on train commuters;
- 223 attacks on commuters at train stations;
- 305 incidents involving taxis;
- 95 attacks on funeral or funeral vigils;
- 61 attacks on social gatherings (e.g. parties); and
- 38 attacks involving buses.

In other words, attacks on social gatherings of one sort or another accounted for a fifth (19%) of all incidents of violence on the Reef.

Train attacks began almost as soon as the violence itself, with an attack at Ikwezi Station. The next day commuters were attacked by men shouting the Zulu war cry '*usuthu*', leaving one dead and 29 injured. These two attacks were followed by four in August 1990, seven in September, three in October, two in November and so on. Most months, from 1990 to the end of the violence, witnessed attacks on train commuters. By July 1994, 742 people had been killed in train violence, and a further 1 894 injuries had been reported.

Many attackers made for the *mzabalazo* or 'struggle' coach, where politically-inclined commuters gathered to sing freedom songs and discuss political events. Others were less discriminating and attacked any coach, including those used for prayer meetings. Victims were killed by guns (in 30% of cases), traditional weapons (6%), other weapons, or by being thrown off or jumping from fast-moving trains. Fully 92 per cent of victims had no known or visible party affiliation. In 60 per cent of cases, hostel residents were involved in the attacks. In many instances, attackers would flee from trains to hostels located near stations.

An editorial in *The Star* noted: 'Well-armed, well-trained gangs knowing exactly what they are doing have hacked, shot and generally brutalised ... never claiming to represent any political party or faction, never discriminating, and never saying a word.'¹⁰⁷

The only response from the government was to establish a Commission of Inquiry, under the auspices of the Goldstone Commission. Fully 429 people died and 1 407 were injured before the Commission began; 56 were killed and 77 injured while the Commission was working, and 128 were killed and 261 injured between the interim and final reports of the Commission. A further 129 people died and 149 were injured after the final report.

The Commission report was a weak document, which seemed concerned with obscuring the political dimension behind the 'specific coach' theory.¹⁰⁸

The destabilising effects of train violence were avoided. A later Commission report noted that Unit C10 based at Vlakplaas had been directly involved in organising train violence, making use of members of C10, black policemen and Askaris, as well as members of the IFP employed at ABSA bank.¹⁰⁹ The contradiction between the two reports, produced by the same Commission, was not explored.

The same brutality was evident in attacks on other commuters (in taxis and buses) and at social gatherings. Attacks on funerals left 254 dead and over 700 injured. Of these, 40 per cent were ANC supporters; 4 per cent were Inkatha supporters. In all, 205 people died in attacks on shebeens and beerhalls and 270 injuries were reported. Fully 84 per cent of victims had no known political affiliation. A few examples will suffice:

- 13 people were killed and 11 injured when gunmen toting AK-47 rifles attacked a beerhall in Sebokeng in May 1991;
- 10 were killed and 4 injured when the Twelepele Bar Lounge was attacked in October 1991. Gunmen disappeared in two waiting minibuses;
- 9 people were shot dead at a party or shebeen in Vosloorus in June 1992;
- 6 people were killed and 2 injured in July 1993 when attackers, allegedly accompanied by police, entered a shebeen and opened fire; and
- 3 people, including a woman, were killed and 10 injured in the Funisi Tavern in Vosloorus when gunmen opened fire in April 1994 (three weeks before the elections).¹¹⁰

If we look at these forms of violence graphically, it is apparent that they peaked and fell at particular points in time. This suggests either that as political tensions rose so taxi, train, bus, funeral and beerhall killings increased in tandem; or, that those who were fomenting violence used these in a concerted attempt to raise political temperatures. As with all forms of violence at the time, the police seemed helpless. Commuters, drinkers, revellers, mourners – all were potential victims of roaming killer units, attacking and disappearing long before police arrived, or, on many occasions, with the alleged support of the police or white men with blackened faces.

In short: in almost every type of violence which afflicted the Reef between July 1990 and 1994, the hand of the police was seen and spoken about at the time by eye-witnesses; ritually denied by the SAP; and subsequently admitted to in various courts and Commissions by the security force members

responsible for it. The South African Police Service (as it is now called) has maintained a stoic silence as revelations continue.

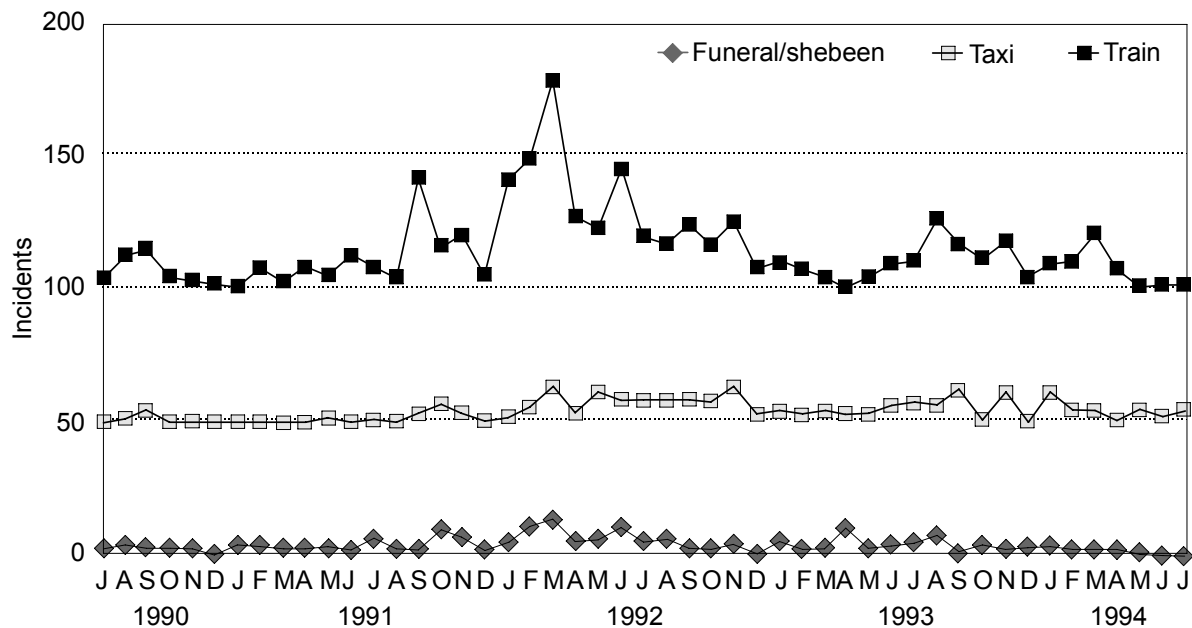


FIGURE 5

Attacks on taxis, funerals, shebeens and trains

CONCLUSION: KEEPING VIOLENCE ON THE BOIL

Writing with hindsight can be misleading. If it seems from the foregoing that the role of the SAP was clear; that suspicions of 'dirty tricks' department involvement were widely shared; and that Inkatha's role as destabilising foot soldiers was visible, then that should not be ascribed to the ease of writing after the event. It was commonplace among township and informal settlement residents on the Reef. It was that clear at the time, and made so by the ongoing reports from violence monitors (including CASE).

A host of agencies and commentators threw up a series of smoke-screens about what was happening. The media duly reported them, assuming a posture of 'neutrality'. The whole government apparatus worked hard to dis-inform about events, backed by the SAP, SADF, and Inkatha with their media machines. With the ANC still battling to develop relationships with the media, those who described the violence as a destabilising exercise, and who cited many of the facts and figures used in this book, were written off as ANC stooges.

This was particularly true because the mainstream media and the business community behind them were involved in a love affair with Buthelezi. During the 1980s, the media presented Buthelezi and Inkatha as the acceptable face of black emancipation, widely reporting the anti-sanctions, anti-socialist,

anti-armed struggle and anti-ANC rhetoric of Inkatha leaders.

As the role of Inkatha in the violence became more and more apparent, so business began to back off. More importantly, it was obvious that the ANC was the major player and destined to win power, and had to be wooed. Gavin Woods, director of the Inkatha Institute, noted:

The business community does not seem to be showing the interest in Inkatha that it did at the time of the Indaba. Since the unbanning of the ANC, Buthelezi is no longer considered to be such a major player – and business doesn't throw its money away. So Inkatha is being ignored, while the ANC is being courted, even adulated.¹¹¹

In a different vein, political analyst Gerhard Maré wrote:

The media is making a concerted effort not to link the day-to-day atrocities in which Inkatha is involved with Buthelezi's plans for the future. If the two were linked, the contradictions wouldn't hold. But by describing the violence as 'black-on-black' and not tying it to Inkatha, Buthelezi can be elevated as a visionary national saviour who will protect white interests, even as his supporters continue a bloody war.¹¹²

This could not be maintained in the face of growing evidence of Inkatha's role and the broader agenda of the NP government. According to a businessman formerly in the Inkatha-organised Indaba: 'The general feeling now is that it is not in our interests to be too closely associated with Inkatha, because of its involvement in the political violence.'¹¹³

For much of the violence, Buthelezi's main goal seemed to be to meet with Mandela, and then in a troika with Mandela and de Klerk. Despite evidence to the contrary, Inkatha spokespeople tried to keep up the pretence that their party was a major rival to the ANC, and that the real cause of violence was the ANC brooking no opposition. Gavin Woods claimed: 'Inkatha is a bigger national threat than anyone else, so we are suffering more.'¹¹⁴

After 140 people had been killed in two days of fighting in August 1990, Buthelezi commented: 'If I read the public mood correctly, then they will at this time be demanding to know from the ANC why they have been so tardy and have not responded to my invitations to ANC Vice-President Mandela to meet me for talks in a bid to find solutions to the conflict.'¹¹⁵ In an interview

for television news, Buthelezi asserted that there was no hope of stopping the violence until joint rallies were held.¹¹⁶

As a homeland leader who had refused 'independence' because it was tokenist, and had won widespread acclaim for this stand against grand apartheid, Buthelezi now claimed that the demand that homelands, including KwaZulu, be dismantled, had 'caused very deep anger – not only among IFP members but among all Zulus'. He went on, in a belligerent tone, that 'if you ... think that the future of this country can be determined by a deal between De Klerk and anybody else regardless of the Zulu people, then you must go and reread your Zulu history ... I am one of the major players, just as the ANC and NP are major players ... my organisation is the largest in the country based on membership. It is a fact.'¹¹⁷

The call for banning traditional weapons was described by Buthelezi as 'a declaration of war', belligerent language that he was to use with increasing frequency as the 1994 elections approached and Inkatha maintained its boycott stance.¹¹⁸ Successive proposals brought to the negotiating table were rejected by Buthelezi. For example, he stated: 'The prime danger of a constitutional assembly is that it will escalate the likelihood of conflict and violence. It could even precipitate a civil war.'¹¹⁹ This was a veiled warning that proposals not approved of by Inkatha – which seemed virtually impossible to find – would lead to an escalation in violence.

Successive apartheid governments had centralised state power enormously. De Klerk inherited a powerful state system, which under PW Botha had maintained a tight grip on the security forces. They, in turn, had huge slush funds available and easy access to a huge arsenal of weaponry. The mainstream media were critical but far from hostile, afraid as they seemed to be of an ANC government. The NP government was able to keep the Reef and KwaZulu-Natal in a state of war and flux; to retard the political work of the ANC on the ground; to provide sufficient bluster, with allies such as Inkatha, for 'black on black', Zulu versus Xhosa, and finally 'ANC violence', to buy them time.

In the final analysis, De Klerk was in a powerful position, and the double agenda – negotiating while destabilising – paid off. The socialist tenets of the ANC programme were dropped. Enough federalism was put into the interim constitution to satisfy the NP, which went on to win control of the Western Cape; and the ANC conceded ground on a host of smaller issues. NP strategists may feel that more could have been won, and attacks on De Klerk

in the Afrikaans press for selling out the Afrikaner suggest that this feeling is prevalent.

Nonetheless, in a global context where oppressive regimes were tumbling in the face of mass protest on the streets, the then South African government pulled off quite a feat, negotiating its way out of power but into an environment safe for capitalism – and safe for former oppressors. Some had to be sacrificed to the judicial process – De Kock is the most obvious example – but they were presumably sops thrown out to appease a nation's appetite for truth and (very mild) retribution. How many more gross violators of human rights, whose names we do not know, are still being hidden?

Finally, to repeat our basic assertion: beneath the welter of attacks across the East and West Rand, the Vaal, Johannesburg, Soweto and Alexandra, lay a high degree of planning. Although we have asserted this for many years, it is only now that some of the planners and perpetrators of the violence are giving evidence in court, that those who consistently rejected monitoring and media reports are now (without apology) being obliged to give it serious consideration.

The key role of security force members has become clearer over time through a number of media exposés, the admissions of other security force members, and in particular as former members of Vlakplaas, the covert action unit of the police, turned on their former commander accused of 122 charges including murder, Eugene de Kock. High-profile trials of former security force operatives and ministers, coupled with the public hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, have put the notion of a security force conspiracy to use violence to thwart democracy, or at least to win the best possible protective settlement for themselves, at centre stage. No one can seriously doubt any longer that the events we have described took place. The question is: how high did the conspiracy go?

In a long-running trial, a sequence of witnesses have testified to murdering opponents of the apartheid regime, planning violence on trains, hostels and elsewhere, setting up weapons-manufacturing factories, supplying senior Inkatha leaders from the then Transvaal with weapons, falsifying evidence when they were arrested, and other forms of assistance. The witnesses have detailed their own and each others' brutality and complete disregard for human life. It seems that they are living out the accuracy of an African proverb:

Human blood is heavy: the man that has shed it cannot run away.