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Violence in the South African Transition

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Summary

South Africa's negotiated transition (1990-4), while often heralded as a 'miracle', was accompanied by a dramatic escalation of politically-related violence in which more than 15,000 people died. A sober assessment of these years reveals that such violence was a central dynamic of the transition and its politics. The epicentres of violence were in Gauteng (then known as the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal, or PWV) and KwaZulu-Natal (then the province of Natal and the KwaZulu bantustan). Although patterns of conflict were locally and historically specific, being connected to conflicts over scarce resources, in these regions a war between *Inkatha*, supported by the state, and comrades aligned to the African National Congress (ANC) and United Democratic Front (UDF), the dominant strand of the liberation movement, emerged as the central fault line of the violence. State-sponsored violence - much of which took place under the veil of private companies, covert operations and bantustan regimes - played a central role in precipitating and aggravating political competition and violence, and the white minority National Party (NP) regime, still in power, was thereby responsible for much of the violence of the period. It is also widely held that, whatever he claimed, the government of F.W. De Klerk had extensive knowledge of the 'third force' covert operations that were waging violent attacks and fuelling the conflict. Both the NP and the ANC, while publicly eschewing violent methods, used violence as a key element of their political strategy during the period of negotiations, even if they were not always able to control it. While the ANC's role in aggravating the violence of this period has often been underplayed, recent historiography has amended this perception.

Keywords

Apartheid; transition; violence; bantustans; *Inkatha*; 'third force'; repression; ANC; NP; TRC.

On 2nd February 1990, President F.W. De Klerk of South Africa's ruling white minority National Party (NP) government announced his intention to unban the liberation movements and to negotiate formally with the African National Congress (ANC), the dominant African nationalist organisation, whose incarcerated leader, Nelson Mandela, would soon be released. This moment heralded a momentous move towards constitutional negotiations, which would eventually culminate in mass enfranchisement, the first multiparty elections of 27th April 1994 and the end of the apartheid regime. Yet this period was marked by the proliferation of violence on a scale unprecedented in South Africa's fraught history. In the years that intervened between these two occasions, at least 15,000 people died in violence, which continued in some parts of the country long after the new Government of National Unity had been installed.[1] The escalating violence of this period exposed the fragility of negotiations, threatening at times to undermine the process entirely, and it eventually gave weight to the drive towards compromise in the conclusive negotiations at the Multiparty Negotiating Forum in 1993.

While scholars and international commentators preoccupied with the elite politics of the negotiating table tended to regard violent episodes as mere interruptions to the high-level negotiations, within South Africa it was obvious to many that political violence was the defining feature of transition-era politics: the future of the country rested on the possibility of de-escalating and resolving these conflicts.[3] The deadly civil war known as the *uDlame* between the Zulu nationalist movement *Inkatha* and the ANC-aligned UDF (African National Congress; United Democratic Front), that had racked the Natal midlands during the late 1980s was escalating and in 1990 this conflagration spread to the urban areas of the PWV region (Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging) as Gauteng was then known.[5] While Natal and the PWV - both densely populated - were the epicentres of the violence, conflicts also developed in a variety of other settings, including in Cape Town, where there was a protracted taxi war, and in the bantustans of Ciskei and Bophuthatswana. How can the violence be understood and explained? Who was responsible for it? How was it connected to

the elite negotiations? And what were the consequences for the nascent democracy? There is an extensive literature on this subject and, inevitably, there are no brief answers to these questions. This essay provides an overview of some of the main fault lines and characteristics of the violence in its various historical contexts; offers an account of historical approaches to and explanations for the violence in its various forms and contexts; and points to some of the consequences and legacies of the violence.

The Paradox of Peace-Making

By the late 1980s, there existed an 'oppressive stalemate' between the state and the liberation movement. [6] On the one hand, the state was unable to contain dissent despite violent repression. On the other, while militant civic organisations and a strong labour movement presented serious challenges for the state and dented the productivity and profits of industry, the ANC could not win power through military or revolutionary means. The government also faced a debt crisis that, in the light of its military expenses, was existential.[7] It was amid this context that tentative 'secret' negotiations commenced from 1986. The history of the township uprisings (1984-6) and their aftermath of sustained rebellion are critical for understanding the dynamics of the period of formal negotiations that followed, for in these years popular struggles underwent significant transformation and the state responded with increasingly violent repression, while attempting to foster consent through reform. The state became thoroughly militarised through the National Security Management System (NSMS) and the capacity for militarised repression was expanded dramatically.[8] In the townships, amid resistance, repression and political competition, the authority of the state disintegrated and new violent forms shaped local political economies, popular justice and political performance.[9]

Corporeal state, communal and internecine violence peaked sharply in the years of formal negotiations, hence the following conventional periodisation of the transition from 1990 to 1994. Somewhat paradoxically, while instability and conflict drove the government and the ANC towards seeking a negotiated settlement, the new realities and uncertainties of the transition led to unprecedented levels of violence. The move towards political tolerance and reform heralded by De Klerk's speech in February 1990 was accompanied by a 'dramatic escalation' of violence from 1990: the number of people killed in politically-related violence

rose year on year throughout the transition years, with 4,400 killed in 1993, the most fatal year of the transition.[11] In Natal, where the war between the ANC-aligned UDF and *Inkatha* was the principle locus of conflict in the country throughout the late apartheid years, the Seven Days War in March 1990 marked the escalation of a war for power and territory which had begun in the urban areas of the region and now spread into rural areas.[12] On the Rand, the events of July 1990 marked the start of the 'hostel wars' between the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the ANC/UDF comrades.[13] As political space was nominally opening up in the South African Republic where the liberation movements were unbanned, in the 'homelands', or bantustans, conflicts intensified between repressive regimes (particularly Ciskei, Qwaqwa and Bophuthatswana, alongside KwaZulu) and activists aligned with the UDF/ANC, who continued to face persecution.[14]

The government and the ANC anticipated a democratic election, even if the shape of constitutional arrangements were still undecided, and engaged violent methods to further their electoral chances, with the state and its ally *Inkatha* most culpable in this regard: organised state violence, while not wholly responsible, played a major role in precipitating and fuelling violence, as covert and intensely violent repression became central to the state's transitional strategy. South African soldiers returned from Namibia, where a military campaign had been employed to undermine African nationalists in the transitional process, were redeployed in organised violence with a similar goal. Among returning political exiles were many trained cadres of *uMkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), the ANC's military organisation.[15] Arms were circulating in South Africa in higher numbers than ever before. Local conflicts over scarce resources became increasingly shaped by national politics, as all parties armed and supported their potential constituents. Ongoing mass mobilisation, now permitted in principle if not always tolerated in practice, intensified the political climate. Amid this potent combination of circumstances, violence came to be characteristic of repression and political competition and was the defining social dynamic of the transition to democracy.[16]

Early in the negotiations, in 1990 the NP and ANC made the 'common commitment towards the resolution of the existing climate of violence and intimidation… as well as a commitment to stability and to a peaceful process of negotiations'.[17] Yet amid these commitments, violence appeared to accelerate: in March, state police opened fire on unarmed protestors at Sebokeng, while in Natal the brutal Seven Days War unfolded; on 22nd July, again at Sebokeng, the IFP's launch rally resulted in intense violence.[18] The South African Defence

Force's (SADF) exposure in July of 'Operation Vula', revealed how weapons and comrades were being smuggled into South Africa to bolster the ANC's Self Defence Units (SDUs). Amid this fiasco, and escalating violence in the PWV, on 6th August 1990 the ANC and NP signed a bilateral agreement known as the 'Pretoria minute'. In return for political indemnities, the release of political prisoners and the lifting of the State of Emergency in Natal, Mandela agreed that the ANC would 'suspend all armed actions with immediate effect'.[19]

In practice, state repression slipped into the twilight and became more covert: the security state funded and armed covert operations and 'vigilante' organisations as part of a strategy to intimidate and undermine opposition, while bolstering allies of the NP and its federalist agenda through low-intensity warfare.[20] The ANC's SDUs, charged with defending local communities from state violence and aggression from *Inkatha*, at times precipitated the violence, both criminal as well as political.[21] Amid ongoing violence, the National Peace Accord was developed in 1991: although regularly criticised, the Accord and its monitoring institutions were critical initiatives in the development of a peace settlement. In this as in many other peace initiatives, the role of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) was instrumental.[22]

Violence intensified throughout 1992 and 1993 and at various points threatened to undermine the process of negotiations entirely. Amid popular disillusionment with the negotiations, calls for mass action and evidence of state complicity in violence, the constitutional negotiations broke down in May 1992 and their demise was sealed following the massacre of township residents by *Inkatha* supporters at Boipatong in June. The mass action campaign of mid-1992, adopted by the ANC to galvanise and display popular support for its negotiating role, was halted by the massacre of protestors at Bhisho, the Ciskei's capital, in September. While this turn of events encouraged the NP and ANC towards compromise, covert repression and political violence continued to escalate in this region and elsewhere. Public anger at the murder of Chris Hani in April 1993 threatened to undermine the new Multi-Party Negotiating Forum (MPNF), while *Inkatha* boycotted the forthcoming election and threatened violence until a valuable land deal finally persuaded the KwaZulu regime to accede.[24] The 'white right' wing also threatened to stage a violent uprising in the face of political change.[25]

If Mandela and De Klerk both formally eschewed violent methods, both the NP government and the ANC would continue to use violence, and the threat of violence, as part of their

political strategy throughout the transition. The executive leadership of both parties wished to be perceived by international observers as committed to peaceful change, while in practice preserving military capacity should negotiations fail, and advocating violence at critical moments to foster consent among their more militant constituencies. The NP government continued to sanction violent repression until late in the transition, presiding over security forces that were waging war through covert operations. Meanwhile, frustrated by their marginalisation from the negotiations at CODESA (Congress for a Democratic South Africa, 1991-2), MK militants within the ANC alliance advocated for armed struggle and engaged in the expansion of SDU activities to counter state aggression. The discourses of peace and violence that political leaders assumed during the transition years - in political agreements; accusations; speeches; statements; public appearances and other engagements with the domestic and international media - comprised an essential political terrain of the transition. Many of the period's most widely known episodes of violence were those most effectively exploited by politicians in this war of words.

Analysing the Violence

The colonial discourse of 'black-on-black violence' adopted by the government and the right-wing press claimed that 'pre-modern', 'tribal' and (by implication) irrational enmities drove the conflict between the comrades and *Inkatha*. The use of natural metaphors to describe violence also suggested it had a logic beyond modern and thus tangible political, social and economic dynamics: for example, the violence was 'sparked' or 'ignited'; it 'exploded' and 'raged'; it came in 'waves', and the blood 'flowed'.[26] While the violent conflicts of the transition were complex, they were by no means beyond explanation.

In informed accounts including broadsheet press reportage, the documentation of peace monitors and human rights organisations, and in the narratives of the main political parties, violence was often described in predominantly political terms. The government blamed the ANC; the ANC blamed the government and its 'puppets' in *Inkatha*, other 'surrogates' and bantustan regimes. Human rights groups sympathetic to the ANC tended to place responsibility for violence on the state, the so-called 'third force' and *Inkatha*, in turn underplaying the role of the ANC, its SDUs and comrades in the violence.[27] This was exacerbated by the fact that, perceiving they would not receive fair treatment, *Inkatha*

boycotted the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 1995-9), meaning that these perspectives were the glaring omission from the Commission's Report.[29] More recently, scholars have sought to redress this imbalance: Kynoch's book on the hostel wars reveals the role played by ANC SDUs in fomenting and sustaining violence on the Witwatersrand Reef, illuminating the significance of internecine violence as well as the role of criminal activity in shaping and driving the violence.[30] In its remit to uncover human rights abuses under apartheid, the TRC also inflated the number of recorded instances of 'political violence' while underestimating the role of other dynamics in the violence.[31] Some recent accounts argue for the primacy of political explanations, but historians and sociologists have long pointed to the multi-dimensional causes of violence. [33]

Historians and sociologists writing in the 1980s and 1990s emphasised the structural or socio-economic factors that shaped the violence of the late apartheid period. Marks and Andersson describe a 'culture of violence' underpinning the violence of the transition: a long history of colonial capitalism and apartheid produced widespread and racialised poverty and inequality, which were accelerated and entrenched through industrialisation. Land dispossession and segregationist legislation systematically denied Black South Africans from access to land and resources and tore lives apart through displacement; influx control underpinned a coercive and exploitative labour system; job reservation denied access to better-paid skilled employment; racial classification objectified and dehumanised people of colour.[34]

More specifically, sociologists argued that violence was aggravated by social divisions among the urban working class between township dwellers and migrants, which had been exacerbated by apartheid policy and the 'reforms' of the 1980s, while widespread social deprivation and dislocation fuelled conflict over scarce resources.[35] In rural areas, conflicts often centred on land, water, employment and the alliances necessary to secure these, while in urban areas housing, access to residential sites and the taxi industry were central domains of conflict. Intense conflicts often encompassed hostel complexes and shack settlements, whose residents, many of whom were precarious migrants, experienced competition with more settled township residents for access to jobs, housing and other scarce resources. Competition over power and patronage in shack settlements was readily exploited for political gain: in Crossroads and Khayelitsha the state supported strongmen and vigilantes as adversaries to the local civic movement, while Phola Park became an ANC stronghold in the PWV's hostel wars.[36] These dynamics were echoed in densely-populated areas of Ciskei and

Bophuthatswana, where bantustan regimes employed violent repression to control patronage systems and reinstate headmen in efforts to undermine civic organisations aligned to the liberation movement.[37]

In urban townships, as in rural areas, the regime's security agencies - the South African Police (SAP); the SADF and various bantustan security forces - waged war on opponents of the regime through overt and covert means, the latter precipitating violence and aggravating conflicts across the country. The tumult and insurrection of the 1980s had generated warzones in many urban areas, where intimidation and the experience of violence divided communities, and militant and violent masculinities justified and rewarded physical violence. Dysfunctional policing and the absence of crime policing in urban townships allowed for predatory criminal gangs to proliferate in metropolitan areas, competing for power and meting out violence, while the trade of arms (or 'gunrunning'), which were imported in large numbers and circulated with little regulation, became a major contributor to violence during the 1990s.[38] While xenophobia and perceptions of ethnic difference informed understandings of conflict in the PWV, they were arguably not the principal cause of violence, nor were they 'primordial' as the government's rhetoric of 'black-on-black violence' alleged, but a consequence of competing African nationalisms mobilised by *Inkatha* and the ANC.[39] All of these elements variously underpinned political competition and violence which, in the main conflicts in Natal and the PWV, centred around the fault line between the ANC/UDF on the one hand, and the State and *Inkatha*, on the other.[40]

Gender and generation were critical dynamics in the violence. In Natal, generational divides shaped allegiances to *Inkatha*, with its traditionalist ideologies, and the UDF/ANC with its urban base and youthful 'comrades'.[41] Gender violence was an intrinsic aspect of the transition violence: in South Africa's patriarchal society, as violence escalated throughout the township wars so did sexual violence against women.[42] Violence against women became institutionalised in this militarised society, and militant masculinities promoted violence as a path to male power and status.[44] Security forces routinely employed sexual violence as a weapon to subvert women activists, while gender-based violence comprised an essential element of communal violence. As Karimakwenda argues, endemic violence against women stemmed from the violent and patriarchal masculinities borne of the struggle, which denoted women's bodies as men's property and women's sexuality as a 'form of wealth'. Amid unemployment, disaffection, widespread social violence, a climate of impunity, and what

some have termed a 'crisis of masculinity', exerting control over women's bodies through assault and sexual violence comprised a performance of male power and dominance within township hierarchies.[46] Sexual violence was commonly employed by predatory gangs, some, but not all, of which operated under a political flag. In some contexts, particularly in Soweto, urban youth gangs terrorised local communities through 'jackrolling': the violent abduction and gang rape of women and children.[47] As in many conflicts, abduction, rape and sexual violence were used as a weapon of war by competing sides.[48] While some women did perpetrate violence, sometimes in resistance to the threat of sexual violence and often adopting masculine identities in doing so, they were nevertheless in the minority, leading some to argue that women - invariably Black women - were the primary victims of the war in Natal and the townships.[50] Women's organisations were at the forefront of the campaign against political violence throughout the transition, yet they were marginalised from the national political sphere, including consultations on key initiatives such as the National Peace Accord.[51]

The Role of the 'Third Force'

The NP declared an end to political repression early in the transition, but this was little more than rhetoric. Leaders of the liberation movement soon blamed a shadowy 'third force' within the state for precipitating violence (Mandela) and accused the regime of adopting a 'twin-track strategy' of violence and negotiation (Chris Hani). The term 'third force' came into use in September 1990 amid violence in the PWV and horrific train attacks, which many saw as evidence of the state's covert destabilisation and repression. The term came to be used as a catch-all phrase for state-organised violence, however, it was somewhat misleading since there was no 'third' party.[52] Through an extensively decentralised network of covert operations, the existing organs of the security state (the SAP and SADF) fomented violence to undermine democratic mobilisation by intimidating, terrorising and murdering activists throughout the transition years, while arming and supporting rival groups, particularly *Inkatha*, to counter the influence and future electoral success of the ANC alliance.[53]

Repression through covert operations emerged following the declaration of the nationwide State of Emergency in 1986, as Botha's 'Total Strategy' was hardened into a war against the UDF in a so-called 'Total Counter-Revolutionary Strategy'. The question of establishing a

'third force' was discussed by the State Security Council (SSC): such a force should be 'mobile and have the capacity to wipe out terrorists effectively', one SSC document proposed.[54] In the event, it was decided that no such 'third force' was necessary: the SADF and SAP already had extensive capacity to conduct covert operations through a variety of special units and task forces.[55]

The 'Inkathagate' scandal of July 1991 provided evidence of what journalists and activists had long known: that the government was funding and arming covert units to wage war against the ANC alliance and to support its political adversaries. The *Weekly Mail* reported evidence from leaked police security branch documents that showed police generals had supplied Mangosuthu Buthelezi, head of the KwaZulu bantustan and leader of *Inkatha*, with weapons and cash.[56] Support for *Inkatha* was part of a wider covert military strategy to shape the outcome of elections in South Africa though violence, intimidation and the bolstering of electoral allies.[57] The South African government had given more than 36 million US dollars to support political parties to counter Sam Nujoma's South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in the run up to the 1989 Namibian election in what was known as Operation Agree.[58] This strategy had successfully diluted SWAPO's electoral majority and the government hoped that it might do the same to the ANC's likely victory.[59] As the process of change got underway in South Africa from 1990, the government sought to dissociate itself from the use of violence. The already-extensive, fragmented and covert military units of the SADF and SAP that had been created during the mid-1980s were granted greater autonomy and freedom from oversight.[60]

Covert operations were used extensively throughout the period of negotiations to destabilise and repress political mobilisation and to undermine the ANC and its allies. These operations were culpable for a great deal of the violence of the period.[61] Under the NSMS, subsidiary units - such as the Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB), Unit C10/*Vlakplaas*, 32 Battalion and SADF Military Intelligence (SADF-MI) - were given great autonomy. Military and police networks and their units developed in 'border wars' were deployed within South Africa against political opposition: for example, *Koevoet* officers were used extensively in covert operations, while *Inkatha* recruits trained by the SADF at Caprivi were deployed in Natal.[62] During the transition, hit squads operated extensively under the veil of front companies and through 'surrogate' organisations including *Inkatha* and the African Democratic Movement (ADM) in the Ciskei, which were decentralised and privatised to protect the political

executive and to sustain the impression that the regime had eschewed violence.[63] Some argued that the timing of organised state violence was strategic, being employed at key moments in the negotiations. Although this argument has not stood up to scrutiny, state complicity in the violence was nevertheless widespread and the unpredictable nature of violence has been understood as a deliberate strategy of destabilisation.[64]

It is commonly understood among researchers of the violence that covert state violence was sanctioned, if not always controlled, at the highest levels of government until late into the transition.[65] While De Klerk denied knowledge of the security forces' organised violence, the TRC later concluded that he had deceived the Commission.[66] It is the contention of Anthea Jeffery that the principal cause of transition-era violence was not state covert repression, about which those in power she claims knew little, but the ANC's revolutionary war. The methodology and interpretations supporting Jeffery's account have, however, been roundly criticised and largely discredited by historians.[67] Various government commissions, especially Goldstone (1991-4), revealed widespread covert activities and state complicity in the violence, yet they were criticised as mere exercises in public relations: the Harms and Kahn commissions were considered especially weak and flawed. Government initiatives to curtail the activities of security forces were largely ineffective, and, it was often argued, deliberately so: De Klerk's government relied on the security forces and, with their vested interests in the status quo, it was not in their interest to rein them in too stringently; covert operations also promised to undermine the ANC's election campaign, while bolstering the government's own allies. In the face of investigation, many security operations underwent further privatisation.[68] It was not until late 1992, following the Bhisho massacre which caused much reputational damage to De Klerk's regime in the international sphere, and the signing of the Record of Understanding thereafter (26 September 1992), that the NP indicated the demise of its political alliance with *Inkatha*. The government also committed to rein in the security forces with the appointment of the Steyn Commission, yet covert operations still escalated violence throughout 1993, waning only after the military generals lost interest in the programme of destabilisation in late 1993, acknowledging that their interests would be better served by supporting an ANC-led government.[69]

Tracing the Violence: Centres of Conflict

uDlame in KwaZulu-Natal

The battles lines between the UDF/ANC and *Inkatha* were drawn during the late 1980s as violent conflict escalated in the region of Natal and the KwaZulu bantustan (renamed after 1994 as KwaZulu-Natal). Once a Zulu cultural nationalist movement, *Inkatha* became marginalised from mainstream liberation politics and was exploited by Buthelezi in his expansion and militarisation of the KwaZulu bantustan state. First through the KwaZulu Police Force (KZP), and then through the expansion of *Inkatha* as a paramilitary organisation, Buthelezi's regime in KwaZulu consolidated territorial and political control by recruiting for *Inkatha* in the townships surrounding Durban and in the Natal midlands around Pietermaritzburg - where, by the mid-1980s, the UDF had developed a broad base of support - and by targeting and terrorising activists in these localities.[70] Cast as the ANC's enemies, *Inkatha* in turn saw the ANC as traitors and a threat to a 'true' Zulu nation. Narratives of Zulu traditionalism tapped into intergenerational conflicts that emerged amid agrarian change and urbanisation, pitting the sympathies and fears of an older generation against a relatively younger, frustrated and politicised generation of 'comrades'.[71]

Alongside the KZP, the SAP and SADF played a significant role in funding, arming and training *Inkatha* recruits, while providing arms to local traditional leaders as allies in the war. *Inkatha* recruits implicated in hit squad activities were trained at the SADF camp in Caprivi and received SADF salaries. Alongside operatives from the notorious Special Branch *Vlakplaas* unit, some of these 'Caprivians' became instructors in the IFP's training camp for 'Self Protection Units' (SPUs) at Mlaba, whose operations further intensified the conflict in the months before the 1994 election.[72]

Shortly after Mandela's release, in late March 1990, violence erupted around Edendale in the Msunduze valley, to the west of Pietermaritzburg. In what came to be known as the Seven Days War, 80 people were killed and 200,000 were displaced in an *Inkatha* offensive to claim the area. *Inkatha* failed in their offensive, and thereafter the ANC consolidated its support in this densely populated valley as in other urban areas. Meanwhile, *Inkatha* moved its sights further away from Pietermaritzburg, to Richmond, where it was met with a counteroffensive by ANC SDU cadres. The conflict enveloped rural areas as the ANC, under the leadership of Harry Gwala, attempted to make political ground in rural areas, while *Inkatha* fought to retain control.[73] This became a lethal struggle for space, power and existence that intensified through the transition, during which time the violence spread to encompass many of the

region's rural areas. Areas became territorially dominated by one side or the other; the struggle for control designated 'no-go' zones; civilians were caught up in the violence and people were killed for simply being in the wrong place.[74] The conflict soon became a spatialised, territorial war, where all living in enemy territory were targeted through arson, murder, and rape. The death toll of the war rapidly escalated: as Bonnin argues, '(f)rom the first, it was about killing'.[75] Between 1985 and 1994, it is estimated that more than 12,000 people died. Many thousands more were injured in the violence; raped; or abducted and never found.[76] Hundreds of thousands, perhaps as many as half a million people, were displaced from their homes and made refugees as a result of the conflict, which continued long after the votes had been cast in April 1994.[77]

Though hit squads were operating widely in the region and were responsible for the assassination of a number of prominent activists, and state security forces continued to support *Inkatha*, both *Inkatha* and the ANC committed atrocities in this war, and the latter played a significant role in sustaining the hostilities in the region.[78] Amid escalating violence, strongmen and warlords accumulated power and wealth through the control of territory and the extortion of protection money from residents. Although many commentators have associated such warlordism with *Inkatha*, Sarah Mathis has examined the emergence of powerful warlords associated with the ANC, to whom the organisation looked to further their influence in rural areas where *Inkatha* dominated.[79] Warlordism, and the profits to be made from the war, also shaped internecine conflicts between strongmen, as in the competition between SDU groups in Richmond,[80] or in taxi conflicts in the Western Cape.[81]

Recent historical accounts emphasise the importance of local dynamics in shaping and driving the conflict. Jill Kelly argues that the violence of the 1980s and 1990s in rural Natal must be understood not simply as a product of political rivalry between the UDF/ANC and *Inkatha*, but in relation to local contests over scarce resources (including land, water, and transport); and in the light of the local meanings and politics of land, belonging, and chieftaincy. In the context of enduring civil war and mass displacement, longstanding disputes over land and traditional authority in the Table Mountain area were cast into new relief by the bipartisan politics of the Natal war, yet local and national meanings of the war were not always closely connected.[82] Kelly's case study illuminates the complex, contingent and historical local alliances formed amid the war, the critical politics of displacement, and

the poverty of analysis that rests on a simplistic binary of political attachment to one side or the other as the prime motivation for violence.

'Hostel Wars' in the PWV (Gauteng)

The most widely reported conflict of the transition period was arguably the so-called 'hostel wars' between *Inkatha* and the UDF/ANC, which escalated soon after the beginning of the formal negotiations in 1990 and was famously reported by the photojournalists of the 'Bang Bang Club'.[85] As head of the KwaZulu bantustan, but with larger ambitions, Buthelezi sought to inflate his political position and vied for a position in national politics by aggravating and exploiting conflicts on the Rand through the launch of the IFP in 1990. As Murray argues, 'the political standing *Inkatha* was unable to achieve through friendly persuasion, it was able to acquire though an orchestrated campaign of social violence'.[86] The so-called 'hostel wars' emerged in urban areas across the PWV/ Gauteng region, with particular hotspots of violence in the East Rand townships of Katlehong, Thokoza and Vosloorus (collectively known as 'Kathorus'); and the townships of the Vaal, particularly Sebokeng. These townships, particularly those on the East Rand, included some of South Africa's largest hostel complexes, where Zulu-speaking migrants predominated among the residents. As the conflict escalated in 1991, the violence spread to other urban areas including Soweto, Alexandra, Tembisa and the West Rand. In short, this bitter conflict pitted the residents of hostels, most of whom were Zulu-speaking migrants aligned to the IFP, against residents of the formal townships, dominated by the ANC/ UDF. Although at a national level the political rivalry between the ANC and the IFP appeared to characterise and explain the conflict, historical explanations that consider local economic, social and cultural dynamics reveal a more nuanced picture of the escalation of this conflict and its longer roots.

Amid agrarian change, urbanisation, unemployment and the rising cost of living during the 1980s, social divisions emerged between migrants and township dwellers.[87] Migrant workers' livelihoods were being squeezed in urban and rural domains: in the city, they faced poor living conditions in the crowded municipal hostels and, amid labour restructuring in the mining industry, mass retrenchments. Meanwhile, in rural areas the intensification of poverty, land shortage and stock thefts all undermined the established practices of remittance and investment in cattle.[88] From the mid-1980s migrant workers experienced marginalisation

within the metal workers trade union movement. Zulu-speaking migrant workers had found themselves increasingly alienated from a union leadership that was dominated by English-speaking men from the townships, while the Congress of South African Trade Union's (COSATU) alignment with the ANC and their overt opposition to Buthelezi's *Inkatha* further estranged migrants, whose more prominent union leaders had been in the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and were themselves pushed out.[90] In response, *Inkatha* formed the United Workers' Union of South Africa (UWUSA), a new trade union directed specifically at Zulu migrants, to capture those defecting from the established unions. Migrant workers were repeatedly and violently intimidated while on their way to work during COSATU's stayaways during the late 1980s: as the most economically marginal group of workers, whose reciprocal networks were located far way in rural areas, many could not afford to lose wages and blamed the unions for factory closures and job losses. In July 1990, COSATU's stayaway directed against Buthelezi's 'reign of terror' in Natal magnified the political and ethnic divisions that had already emerged among the workers of the Rand and Vaal townships.[91]

In the townships of Katlehong and Thokoza on the East Rand, what became a conflict between the politically-aligned cadres of the IFP and the ANC/ UDF, began as a conflict in Katlehong in 1989 between rival taxi associations. Germiston and District Taxi Association (G&D) largely represented Zulu-speaking taxi owners and drivers living in the hostels, while the more recently-established Katlehong Taxi Association (KATO) found its membership among township residents of various ethnic identities. The associations competed for routes and customers: among marginalised populations, this profitable industry meant that the stakes were high for all involved. While the violence did not emerge as a consequence of political hostility, as the conflict developed the dominant political cultures of the hostels and the townships came to shape the rivalry itself and the division acquired both ethnic and political dimensions. Zulu-speaking hostel dwellers linked to the G&D became associated with *Inkatha* and directed their anger and violence at the 'comrades': young township activists associated with the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) and the ANC, who in turn targeted Zulu-speakers in Katlehong. Since taxi routes ran through Thokoza, this township was drawn into the violence.[92]

With the unbanning of the ANC, the return of exiles and the possibility of future elections, the conflict became more intensely and obviously politicised. The launch of *Inkatha* as a

political party, the IFP, at a rally at Sebokeng on 22nd July 1990 has often been seen as the inflammatory moment that intensified the conflict on the Rand, by implication attributing responsibility for the escalation of violence to the IFP. However, the Sebokeng IFP rally must be understood in the context of hostel dwellers' marginalisation and the ANC's own targeting of Zulu migrants and *Inkatha* supporters in the Vaal. A three-day stayaway was organised by the Tripartite Alliance (ANC/ SACP/ COSATU) in early July to protest Buthelezi's 'reign of terror' and *Inkatha*'s violence in Natal and KwaZulu. At an ANC rally on 3rd July in the Vaal, speakers urged supporters to remove *Inkatha* supporters from the townships, a call that was allegedly heeded by several youths who targeted and victimised those they believed to be *Inkatha*. A series of clashes ensued between ANC and IFP supporters and the houses of some *Inkatha* supporters were burned. *Inkatha* responded by announcing its intention to launch as a political party and organised a series of recruitment rallies across the region. It was in this rising heat that *Inkatha* organised a 'peace' rally at Sebokeng on 22nd July, to protest ANC violence and to launch the IFP.[93] Township youth stoned the buses of IFP supporters arriving at the rally. Afterwards, violence broke out between IFP supporters leaving the rally and township residents. Escorted by police to the Sebokeng Hostel, this group of IFP supporters confronted Xhosa hostel dwellers, who were aligned with the township youth, and a violent clash ensued.[94]

This event drew the battle lines in the region firmly between the IFP-supporting Zulu migrants, and a multi-ethnic township population (including Xhosa-speaking hostel dwellers) who supported the ANC. Violence erupted in August in Soweto, Sebokeng, Kagiso, Thokoza, Katlehong, Vosloorus, Krugersdorp and soon spread to other townships around Johannesburg.[95] In August and September 1990, as many as 4000 people died in this violence.[96] Elements within the security forces played a substantial role in the conflict, often favouring the IFP and aggravating violence by supplying weapons.[97] The violence that erupted in Sebokeng heightened tensions in and around the hostels on the East Rand and set the scene for a war that would continue throughout the early 1990s. Violence engulfed the hostels, and moved to the trains and taxis, where commuters suffered appalling attacks. Zulu hostel dwellers were outnumbered and surrounded by township dwellers and perceived a threat to their existence: ANC hostility and calls to drive *Inkatha* from the townships, proposals for housing upgrading which threatened the hostel complexes as they stood, and Zulu nationalist discourse all contributed to this widespread fear.[98] As Rueedi has argued, rumour and fear of expulsion played significant roles in motivating the violence, as hostel

dwellers mobilised around ethnic solidarity and victimhood, and justified violence as defensive.[99]

The shack settlement of Phola Park, an ANC stronghold, and the adjacent *Inkatha*-dominated *Khalanyoni* hostel, developed as a centre of violence on the East Rand. A powerful ANC SDU, operating from Phola Park, waged war with IFP members at the *Khalanyoni* hostel, while pursuing predatory, intimidatory and criminal violence within the settlement of Phola Park, in Thokoza and across the East Rand, which the ANC struggled to control.[100] Similar dynamics at the *KwaMadala* hostel at Sebokeng led to the horrific attack by IFP supporters on the community of Boipatong on the night of the 16-17 June 1992. The SADF unit 32 Batallion was clearly implicated in fuelling the violence at Phola Park, but while the ANC insisted that the police were to blame for the massacre at Boipatong, substantiating this claim proved difficult. [102] The TRC, while initially accepting this claim, later overturned it, with the Amnesty Committee concluding that the massacre had been carried out by IFP-aligned hostel dwellers without police assistance.[103] Nevertheless, evidence of police irregularities, destruction of evidence and failure to effectively investigate the massacre suggest some degree of complicity.[104]

While it has been often accepted that *Inkatha*, supported by state security forces, were the main aggressors in the violence, this perspective has also reflected the discursive dominance of the ANC narrative and the marginalisation of hostel dwellers' voices from the historical record including the TRC, which was boycotted by *Inkatha*. More recently, the role of ANC SDUs in the violence has been underscored by Kynoch, while Rueedi has illuminated the perspectives of Zulu hostel dwellers, whose experiences of marginalisation were given shape by *Inkatha*'s Zulu nationalist narrative of a battle for existence.[105]

The 'Homelands' of Bophuthatswana and Ciskei

The future of the bantustans was an issue of fierce contention throughout the transition.[106] The ANC wanted to reintegrate these widely-hated regimes, while the government continued to support them as repressive military partners and future electoral allies. The ANC sought to cultivate alliances in the bantustans, with mixed success: through the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESA) alliances were formed with chiefs in various of

the bantustans, especially those in the north.[107] Bantu Holomisa, military ruler of the nominally independent Transkei, actively supported the ANC and sheltered its MK cadres.[108] Meanwhile, Ciskei and Bophutatswana (two other 'independent homelands'), alongside KwaZulu and tiny Qwaqwa continued to oppose constitutional change that would dissolve their influence. Although state repression was subject to media scrutiny in urban areas, in the bantustans - particularly in Ciskei, Bophuthatswana and KwaZulu, where regimes were unreservedly hostile to democratic mobilisation - violence intensified against activists aligned to the UDF and ANC. Encompassing rural areas, attracting relatively less attention from the international media, and distinguished from Pretoria thorough their relative autonomy, these bantustan regimes became useful partners for the Pretoria regime, enabling decentralised repression from which the government could dissociate itself.

Under Lucas Mangope's regime in Bophuthatswana, the ANC and other political organisations were effectively banned: repressive security laws made gatherings illegal and activists were routinely harassed, arrested, detained and tortured. Those who refused to adopt Bophuthatswana citizenship were persecuted and deported.[109] In the eighteen months from February 1990 to September 1991, 23 were killed, 633 detained, and 481 injured in political violence in Bophuthatswana.[110] Amid widespread and ongoing repression by the Bophuthatswana Police, in March 1990 a protest of 20,000 people in Ga-Rankuwa marched to the local magistrate's court to demand Mangope's resignation and reincorporation into South Africa. The police opened fire on protesters, killing seven and injuring more than 450, which only served to deepen public anger. Mangope declared a State of Emergency and the South African security forces stepped in to bolster his regime.[111] Repressive state violence against communities at Winterveld, Braklaagte, Leeuwfontein, Thahung and Phokeng, continued: they had since the late 1980s resisted the incorporation of their land into the bantustan, and refused to adopt Bophuthatswana citizenship.[112] As a consequence of mobilisation, the government persecuted them, denying access to state pensions and schooling.[113]

In late 1990 and early 1991, as the ANC began launching branches in Bophuthatswana's rural villages, reports emerged of attacks upon ANC supporters at Braklaagte and elsewhere, by vigilantes calling themselves '*Inkatha*'. Aided by the Bophuthatswana police, armed vigilantes torched the houses of ANC sympathisers. Local headman were accused of colluding in the violence, while three died and more than 50 were injured.[114] This episode is

continuous with patterns of violence in KwaZulu and Ciskei, where units of the security state bolstered 'homeland' regimes by arming militias to support local headmen.

Throughout the transition political prisoners, who had been arrested in an attempt to oust Mangope in 1988 and who faced horrific prison conditions, waged a campaign of hunger strikes to demand their release and to draw attention to repression in Bophuthatswana. Many were hospitalised as a result.[115] Activists in Bophuthatswana, as in Ciskei, were frustrated with the ANC national leadership for failing to adequately support activists and for neglecting the situation of violence and repression in the bantustans.[116]

In the small, nominally independent but weak Eastern Cape 'homeland' of Ciskei, the repressive and corrupt regime of Lennox Sebe was ousted in a military coup in March 1990, which brought Brigadier 'Oupa' Gqozo to power. Gqozo initially made overtures to the democratic movement, promising freedom of expression and support for democratic reform in the Ciskei, acknowledging the legitimacy of the civic movement which in many localities had assumed control over local affairs.[117] No sooner had the celebrations ended than Gqozo made a rapid about-turn against the democratic movement, reinstating headmen and employing repression to silence political opposition and undermine strikes by civil servants. In late 1990, a 'silent coup' brought the Ciskei's military government under the control of SADF Military Intelligence (SADF- MI). Through covert operations, the latter bolstered the formation of the African Democratic Movement (ADM) in the Ciskei, a vigilante organisation modelled on *Inkatha*. As in Bophuthatswana, the regime in Ciskei prevented the ANC's new branches from mobilising peacefully: the Ciskei Police intimidated activists and used force to break up meetings and marches, while the hits quads of the ADM terrorised activists and their families in rural communities.[118] The Border region had long been identified by South African military strategists as the heartland and 'powerbase' of the Charterist movement. According to their longstanding counter-insurgency doctrine, this region was the principle battleground in the war for South Africa.[119]

Amid repression, ruthless hit squad violence and mounting public anger, violence escalated across the region. It was also no doubt intensified by the efforts of MK to train and arm young militants to defend communities in the Ciskei.[120] Throughout 1991, there developed a pattern of retributive violence, involving attacks by Ciskei police and the ADM on ANC supporters, coupled with reprisals and attacks on headmen, Ciskei officials and ADM supporters, which was escalating into an unacknowledged civil war.[121]

Following the unbanning of the ANC, the Border region ANC had rapidly translated broad-based democratic mobilisation into formal party membership, becoming second in size only to the densely populated Transvaal ANC.[122] A series of large, well-attended democracy marches had taken place during the late 1980s and early 1990s across the towns and cities of the Eastern Cape region. In the Border, in March and April 1992, the regional ANC leadership headed a militant and well-supported local campaign to oust Gqozo from power. The Ciskei regime took a hard line, teargassing demonstrations and denying activists from staging symbolic protestsin the capital of Bhisho. This only served to heighten frustration and strengthen the campaign.

During the winter of 1992, the CODESA negotiations had broken down over fundamental constitutional issues and divisions within the Alliance, while animosity and distrust festered between the main negotiating parties following the massacre at Boipatong in June. Seeking to capitalise on COSATU's mass action campaign, and to turn this to political advantage, frustrated parties on the left of the Alliance organised a week of mass action in early August 1992. On 4th August 1992, c.40,000 people marched from King William's Town to Bisho, in a march organised by the ANC regional leadership, to demand Gqozo's resignation. At the Ciskei border, marchers were met by a heavy contingent of the Ciskei Riot Police and its Defence Force (CDF) who threatened to shoot protesters should they continue. Violence was narrowly averted following negotiations between Chris Hani, Cyril Ramaphosa, Foreign Minister Pik Botha and Gqozo, and the marchers were permitted to enter the Bhisho stadium just across the border on the grounds that they proceed no further. This campaign against Gqozo, the 4th August march, and the context of low level civil war in which they took place, provide critical yet little known context for the fateful day of 7th September 1992.[123]

Eventually responding to the ongoing campaign by the regional ANC leadership to draw attention to the situation in the Border, the ANC national leadership looked to the Ciskei as the weakest of the 'homelands', and sent a committee to assist in the organisation of another march on its capital. As predicted and feared, for Gqozo continued his hard talk, the march on 7th September saw a massive turnout. 80,000 peaceful demonstrators, this time joined by national leaders on the left of the Alliance, marched from King William's Town to Bhisho, demanding free political activity, immediate reincorporation and Gqozo's removal. They were determined that this time they would reach the Ciskei government buildings in Bhisho to hold a People's Assembly. At the Ciskei border, they were met again by the troops of the

CDF, who again corralled them into the Bhisho stadium. This remarkable march ended in tragedy: a group of marchers led by ANC official Ronnie Kasrils and others overstepped the conditions of the march to remain within the stadium, and took a group towards the government buildings. In response, the CDF opened fire on protestors, killing 29 people and badly injuring more than 200. Amid horror and fury, retributive violence and repressive action again escalated the conflict in the region, which continued throughout 1993, reaching crisis point as public anger exploded and violent reprisals ensued following the murder of Chris Hani by racist right-wingers in April 1993. Hani had enjoyed widespread, perhaps unparalleled, support among the 'grassroots' of the liberation movement, not least in the Eastern Cape. Following his death, many feared the new negotiations might fail amid public anger and violence: these dynamics were pronounced in the Border region. [125]

Like the Boipatong massacre of June 1992, the Bhisho massacre has often been narrated as a moment of violent interruption to the national story: if Boipatong marked the breakdown of negotiations, so the narrative commonly proceeds, the shooting at Bhisho was the prompt to politicians to resume the formal negotiations. Some even argued that 'for all its brutality, [the violence at] Bisho was just what was needed to get negotiations going again.'[126] Detailed historical research is needed to reassess the meanings and significances of these and many other violent moments. The massacre caused political damage to De Klerk, who had sat back and allowed the Ciskei regime to follow through with its threat of violence. The quiet negotiations that had been developing between Cyril Ramaphosa (ANC Secretary General) and NP 'Young Turks' Roelf Meyer and Leon Wessels carried a new weight and urgency: on 26 September the ANC and NP signed the Record of Understanding, signalling renewed commitment to negotiations towards a constitutional assembly. Snubbed by its former ally through this bilateral agreement, Buthelezi's *Inkatha* and other bantustan regimes thereafter looked to the far-right Conservative Party and the following year formed the Concerned South Africans Group (COSAG), committed to protect at all costs these minority interests against the constitutional changes being swiftly shaped at the MPNF.

The Bophuthatswana crisis in March 1994 sealed the demise of Bophuthatswana and Ciskei as 'independent' entities. Amid strikes by civil servants, militant popular campaigns for reincorporation and mutiny by the 'homeland' police, Mangope called in assistance from the militias of the far-right *Afrikaner Volksfront* and *Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging* (AWB). In response to the brutality of white militias, who attacked civilians amid ongoing unrest, the

Black soldiers of the Bophuthatswana Defence Force (BDF) turned against Mangope and threatened to attack AWB soldiers.[127] Scenes of the so-called 'Battle of Bop', as members of the BDF turned on white AWB soldiers, were reported across the international media, warning of 'chaos' and 'anarchy' should the negotiations fail.[128] Having gravely miscalculated his political strength by assuming the continued loyalty of the BDF, Mangope swiftly resigned. With civil service strikes and a mutiny in Ciskei strengthened by the turn of events in Bophuthatswana, Gqozo also resigned.[129]

APLA Attacks

Amid organisational disunity and an ambivalent attitude towards negotiations, the liberation group Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), refused to suspend the operations of its armed wing, the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) until very late in the transitional process. Justified by a militant Africanism that looked to the overthrow of the white regime, throughout the early 1990s APLA carried out violent raids on members of the security forces and on white farmers, and conducted terror attacks at a number of prominent public buildings.[130] Mainly in the Eastern Cape and in Cape Town, these armed attacks resulted in many deaths and injuries, and included shootings at the King William's Town Golf Club (28 November 1992); at the Highgate Hotel in East London (1 May 1993); upon a congregation at the St James Church in Cape Town (25 July 1993); and at the Heidelberg Tavern in Cape Town (31 December 1993) all of which caused multiple fatalities. While these events were widely reported, in part because they comprised shocking violence against white civilians, APLA's violent attacks were not only levelled at whites: in March 1994, just weeks before the scheduled election, APLA operatives opened fire on a bus carrying Da Gama Textiles workers, and on members of the Bahai'i faith at Mdantsane, and clashed with ANC SDU cadres at Lusikisiki.[131] APLA's violence contributed to the collapse of the PAC as a political force during the period of negotiations.[132]

Consequences and Legacies of Transition Violence

The legacies of violence in post-apartheid South Africa were profound: the new democracy faced rates of crime, homicide and rape among the highest in the world.[135] In KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), where violence continued long after the formal elections, the social and economic impacts of the conflict were overwhelming.[136] Protracted violence devastated the livelihoods of communities who had limited economic reserves and few safety nets, further entrenching poverty in the region. Amid repeated attacks and raids, households incurred losses through damage and looting, while displacement disrupted livelihoods, prevented accumulation of wealth and imposed social and economic vulnerabilities. Women bore the biggest burden of care and household reproduction amid the impoverishing conditions of the conflict.[137] High levels of sexual and gender-based violence, which peaked amid the political conflict of the transition years, have endured in a deeply patriarchal society where a capacity for violence remains a key element of dominant masculinities.[138]

Enduring violence also had profound and widespread psychological impacts, both on active combatants and among the communities impacted by violence. Social psychologists reported the widespread incidence of post-traumatic stress among adults and children.[139] More recently, Mxolisi Mchunu has examined the psychological and emotional impacts of the experience of civil war in Natal and KwaZulu. While accounts of the war often foreground the actions of the men who dominated the violence, Mchunu traces the disruptions to daily life and schooling; the witnessing of brutal violence; the intimate experiences of bereavement; and the displacement caused by the war, which shaped the lives of women and children whose formative experiences were defined by the war.[140]

Transitional violence also shaped South Africa's political culture. Forms of contemporary township protest employ the confrontational and sometimes violent repertoire of resistance developed in the late apartheid period: in social protests over 'service delivery', arson and the targeting of local councillors are not uncommon, while a number of contemporary vigilante groups and gangs share a history of non-state policing in the upheavals of township violence.[141] The ANC in government was shaped by its struggle against the white regime, during which time, although not the primary aggressor, it also employed the use of violent methods to achieve political ends and promote personal interests.[142] The legacy of this history may be seen in the government's willingness to employ violence against demonstrators, as in the brutal repression of shack dwellers movements; the use of violence to break the strike by platinum miners at Marikana; and in political killings in KZN informed by competition for

local power and control over resources. As Kynoch argues, 'many ANC officials and supporters continue to view violence as an acceptable and effective tool for advancing party and individual interests, and the evidence suggests that the ruling party has yet to abandon the violent practices that crystallised in the transition period.'[143]

The political conflicts of the transition transformed and increased opportunities for criminal gangsterism: while the context of violence and lawlessness enabled armed groups to control territory, extorting money for protection, political conflicts offered justification, foil and opportunity for predatory gangs and organised crime. The proliferation of firearms within South Africa during the transition fuelled an enduring legacy of violent crime. Glaser argues that paramilitary structures, demobilised from a political conflict, turned their attention to competition for local resources, and, amid rising unemployment, with the demobilisation of political structures some young people drifted into gangs as one of the few opportunities for status and financial profit.[145] Former employees of the state police and military also reorganised into private security companies, often with criminal interests, as in the case of Johannesburg's 'bouncer mafia' and their control of the illicit drug trade.[146] Preoccupied with political policing, the post-apartheid state was unprepared for the rise of organised crime in the 1990s.[147] Whatever the perception among the privileged, Black South Africans resident in urban townships are still those most likely to be the victims of violent crime.[148]

Discussion of the Literature

Concern among politicians and researchers to track the alarming rates of violence during the transition led to the frequent practice of analysing violence in extraction from historical context. Bonner and Nieftagodien argue that the TRC's aggregated statistics on human rights violations prevented the development of more illuminating analyses of 'causation and motivations behind the violence', as violent episodes were 'grouped into categories and abstracted from their historical sequence and context'. This, they argue, was the 'fatal flaw' of the TRC's report, hindering its explanations for political violence.[149] While the TRC should perhaps not be criticised too sorely for its lack of satisfactory historical method - for the Commission's mandate to research, explain and reconcile far exceeded its institutional capacity - the ontological and methodological limitations of the prevailing approaches to

violence should be borne in mind by historians seeking more thorough explanations through a critical assessment of the sources.

Recent histories of the violence demonstrate the limiting ontological assumption that the violence was narrowly political in cause, nature and meaning. Gary Kynoch's work has shown how crime and warlordism were significant sustaining dynamics in transition-era violence. The township revolt of the mid-1980s, coupled with state-sponsored vigilantism, turned many townships into warzones. In this context, criminal gangs flourished: political factions on all sides recruited criminals; opportunities for criminal activity increased; and in this environment it became easier for politically-motivated groupings to employ predatory violence.[150] As Kynoch argues, 'the larger [political] struggle provided a perfect arena for opportunistic criminal gangs.'[151] The failure of policing - the absence of civil policing by the state, and the failure to prosecute politically-motivated crimes - led people to seek protection from political parties.[152] Kynoch demonstrates how the apparently politico-communal conflict of the hostel wars was sustained by criminal networks and the emergence of warlordism among gangs aligned to both *Inkatha* and the ANC.[153] 'Political rivalries and objectives were paramount on the macro level, but acquisitive criminality and local antagonisms often determined conflict on the ground,' he argues.'[154]

If sociologists and political economists writing in the 1980s and 1990s emphasised the structural and economic factors that exacerbated and underpinned social conflicts, more recently historians have sought to understand the local politics, meanings and historical development of these conflicts, which became politicised during the transition period. As Jill Kelly's research reveals, the conflicts of the 1990s in rural Natal must be understood not simply as a product of rivalry between the UDF/ANC and *Inkatha*, but also in relation to the politics of land and belonging, and contests over resources and the chieftaincy, in a context of enduring civil war and related mass displacement.[155] Local histories of power and contestation, and of violence, loss and retribution, were significant dynamics of the violence. The meanings of violence mattered, and they shaped its dynamics, as Rueedi's work on rumour in the PWV and Mchunu's work on ritual killings in Natal also demonstrate.[156]

Narratives of South Africa's transition have often depicted a national story of negotiations, punctuated and interrupted by violent events. In such narratives, these events figure as 'flashpoints': moments when violence that otherwise was local, broke through to disrupt, accelerate or augment the dynamics of national proceedings. The prevailing narrative of the

events of 1992 is a case in point: the massacre at Boipatong is understood as having sealed the breakdown of negotiations, while the shock and horror of the Bhisho massacre led to the signing of the Record of Understanding, the common commitment to resume negotiations once again.[157] In their extraction from the local conflicts of which they were part, the meaning of these events is narrated as of significance only to the national story, and as such their history, and historical significance, is distorted. More than flashpoints in a national tale, violent events such as the massacres at Boipatong and Bhisho need to be examined within their immediate context and their wider meanings in relation to the dynamics of the transition re-assessed.[158] One moment that demands further critical scrutiny is the Shell House Massacre on 28th March 1994, in which security guards at the ANC's Johannesburg headquarters opened fire on IFP supporters during a march to support the Zulu King Zwelethini. Many died in the violence that ensued and a State of Emergency was declared on the East Rand and in Natal in the month before the scheduled election. While the ANC resisted a full investigation, the IFP exploited the incident to justify retributive violence. Many questions surrounding this event remain unanswered.[159] Historical explanations of transition-era violence may be most illuminating when such events and episodes are embedded and analysed within understandings of local power dynamics and when violence is analysed in its multiple dimensions through historical narrative, rooted in time and place, with attention to local meanings. Such historical accounts can revise our understanding not only of the nature of particular violent events and conflicts, but of the fundamental dynamics of the transition.

Acknowledgements

Primary Sources

Research on violence in the transition years is hampered by the deliberate efforts of the apartheid and post-apartheid governments to restrict access to state archives. During the late

apartheid period, organs of the security state engaged in the systematic and large-scale destruction of their records. This accelerated during the transition years, especially in 1993 in anticipation of elections.[160] Although vast swathes of official documentation were destroyed, some still exists and is held in the repositories of the South African National Archives.[161] After 1994, the records of the TRC were to be preserved, catalogued and made available to the public. However, the ANC government has stood in the way of granting this public access: while large swathes of the TRC's records were transferred in good faith to the National Archives in Pretoria, these have been secreted from public access. As Pickover argues, the TRC archives 'remain unprocessed and deliberately buried in what is essentially an inaccessible and closed archive guarded by the Ministries of Justice, National Intelligence and Arts and Culture.'[162]

The independent South African History Archive (SAHA, Johannesburg) has played a critical role in opening access to TRC materials through ongoing campaigns, formal freedom of information submissions and legal representations.[163] SAHA's Special Report database comprises a searchable digital archive of TRC documentation and footage from the original South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) weekly television programme. This is a crucial resource for any study of violence in the transition period.[164] SAHA also holds a variety of materials relevant to the TRC, including those in its Freedom of Information Programme collection.[165] In recent years, SAHA has also succeeded in winning a long battle for public access to the TRC's Human Right Violations database.[166] The University of the Witwatersrand's Historical Papers Research Archive has also been critical in opening access to TRC materials and in making available alternative archival materials through its 'Traces of Truth' project.[167] Historical Papers hold collections (some of which are digitised) on government commissions on violence, in particular the Harms Commission and the Goldstone Commission, and the records of various monitoring organisations, including the Independent Board of Inquiry into Informal Repression (IBIIR) and the Ecumenical Monitoring Programme in South Africa (EMPSA).[168] Their Missing Voices Oral History Project collected oral histories from former members of SDUs on the East Rand and former members of SADF/SAP units including 32 Battalion, 31 Battalion and *Koevoet*.[169] Historical Papers has recently opened access to the Heymans Collection, which comprises official documentation concerning security force involvement in violent repression and executive governmental discussion of these matters.[170]

The UWC- Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archive at the University of the Western Cape has rich holdings on the late apartheid period, with an emphasis on popular movements and the collections of the UDF.[172] The Nelson Mandela Foundation Centre of Memory Archive in Johannesburg has extensive holdings, some of them digital, concerning various aspects of Mandela's political life, including the transition period, and their website includes a database of relevant holdings elsewhere.[173] The Liberation Movements Archive at the University of Fort Hare (Alice), includes records of the ANC foreign missions alongside other liberation movements, and personal archives of leaders in the liberation movements. There has been a major project to digitise ANC archives in this collection; a selection is now available via the ANC's public website.[174] A new archive at the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg promises to open research into other aspects of the violence of the transition period. The archive comprises the records of the National Peace Accord; CODESA; the MPNF; the Independent Electoral Commission; the Transitional Executive Council; and records documenting the making of new constitutional structures and processes.[175] The personal research archive of peace activist and academic, Padraig O'Malley, is an extensive digital open-access collection for research on the transition period. The collection includes a large archive of illuminating interviews with political activists, leaders, commentators and public figures from across the political spectrum.[176] International monitoring organisations of European Union, Commonwealth and United Nations, whose presence in South Africa was stepped up from the second half of 1992, as well as a wide range of independent international human rights organisations, possess records and reports on violence and repression during the transition that will further enrich historians' understandings of global perspectives on the local situation in South Africa.

The South African transition and its violence were widely reported in the South African media and in the international press and broadcast media. These media sources, many of them now available digitally, are invaluable sources for research on the transition.[177] South African political pamphlets and paraphernalia can be accessed at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's open access Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA), also available via Aluka/ JSTOR's Struggles for Freedom: Southern Africa archive.[178]

Alongside archival sources, oral history remains an important dimension of research on violence in the transition, providing invaluable new insights for recent contributions to the

literature.[179] Oral history research remains critically important for exploring 'hidden voices' as well as the meanings, memories, subjectivities and legacies of this traumatic history.[180]

Links to Digital Materials

(in order of mention above)

[National Archives and Record Service, South Africa](#)

[South African History Archive, Johannesburg](#)

[Truth Commission Special Report Digital Archive (SABC/ SAHA)](#)

[Historical Papers Research Archive (University of the Witwatersrand)](#)

[UWC- Robben Island Mayibuye Archive (University of the Western Cape)](#)

[Afravision: History Uncut](#)

[Nelson Mandela Foundation Centre of Memory Archive, Johannesburg](#)

[Fort Hare Liberation Archives (University of Fort Hare, Alice)](#)

[ANC Archives](#) (public webpage)

[Constitutional Court Online Exhibition: Negotiating Our Freedom](#)

[Padraig O'Malley Archives: The Heart of Hope](#)

[SALDRU Clippings Collection, University of Cape Town](#)

[University of Cape Town, Special Collections](#)

[Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA), University of Kwa-Zulu Natal](#)

[Aluka Struggles for Freedom Collection](#)

Further Reading

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Notes

[1] Estimates of the number of people killed in the violence are difficult to reach and vary wildly. A commonly-cited estimate is 15,000 deaths from politically-related violence during the period 1990-1994. See Adrian Guelke, "Interpretations of Political Violence during South Africa's Transition," *Politikon* 27, no. 2 (2000): 241. However, some scholars cite figures as high as 28,000 for the same period. SAHA, Sally Sealy Collection, cited

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[3] Niel Barnard, *Peaceful Revolution: Inside the War Room at the Negotiations* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2017); Patti Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle: The End of Apartheid and the Birth of the New South Africa* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).

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[7] Vishnu Padayachee, "Private International Banks, the Debt Crisis and the Apartheid State, 1982-1985," *African Affairs* 87, no. 348 (1988): 361–76.

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[11] *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report: Volume 2* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 583. According to Gerhard Maré, between 1985- 1989, 5,400 were killed in political violence; in 1989 alone, 1400 died. From 1990- March 1994, 14,211 people died: 2101 in 1990; 2582 in 1991; 3499 in 1992; 4398 in 1993. Most of these fatalities were in Natal and KwaZulu. Gerhard Maré, "Civil War Regions and Ethnic Mobilisation: Inkatha and Zulu Nationalism in the South African Transition to Democracy," in *Reaction and Renewal in South Africa,* ed. Paul Rich (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 25.

[12] John Aitchison, "The Origins of the Midlands War" and "KwaZulu Natal: The Pre-Election Wars of the 1990s" in *The Role of Political Violence in South Africa's Democratisation*, ed. Ran Greenstein (Johannesburg: Community Agency for Social Enquiry, 2003): 47- 72; 73- 94.

[13] Franziska Rueedi, "The Hostel Wars in Apartheid South Africa: Rumour, Violence and the Discourse of Victimhood," *Social Identities* 26, no. 6 (2020): 756-73.

[14] Laura Evans, "The Bantustan State and the South African Transition: Militarisation, Patrimonialism and the Collapse of the Ciskei Regime, 1986–1994," *African Historical Review* 50, nos 1-2 (2018): 101-29.

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[16] Maré, "Civil War Regions,"p. 25.

[17] Groote Schuur Minute, 4 May 1990, accessed 1 March 2022, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/ZA_900504_Groote%20Schuur%20Minute.pdf

[18] Rueedi, "Hostel Wars," 760.

[19] Pretoria Minute, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/ZA_900806_The%20Pretoria%20Minute.pdf

[20] Jackie Dugard, "South Africa's Internal Low-Intensity Conflict," in *The Role of Political Violence,* ed. Greenstein, 22- 46; Stephen Ellis, "The Historical Significance of South Africa's Third Force," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, No. 2 (1998): 261-299; Craig Charney, "Vigilantes, Clientelism and the South African State," *Transformation* 16 (1991): 1-28; Peter Stiff, *Warfare by Other Means: South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s* (Johannesburg: Galago, 2001).

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[22] Liz Carmichael, *Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in South Africa: The National Peace Accord, 1991-1994* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2023); National Peace Accord, accessed 1 March 2022, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/ZA_910914_National%20Peace%20Accord.pdf; Chris Spies, "South Africa's National Peace Accord: Its Structures and Functions," *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*, no. 13 (2002): 20- 25; Phiroshaw Camay and Anne J. Gordon, "The National Peace Accord

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[24] Hilary Lynd, "The Peace Deal: The Formation of the Ingonyama Trust and the IFP Decision to Join South Africa's 1994 Elections," *South African Historical Journal* 73, no. 2 (2021): 318-60.

[25] Maano Freddy Ramutsindela, "Afrikaner Nationalism, Electioneering and the Politics of a Volkstaat." *Politics* 18, no. 3 (1998): 183-84.

[26] The TRC described a 'spiral' of violence on the East Rand, suggesting the dynamics were beyond explanation. Philip Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien, "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Pursuit of Social Truth: The Case of Kathorus" in *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, eds Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2002): 189.

[27] Thotse and Grobler, cited in Kynoch, *Township Violence*, 8-9. The main monitoring groups included: The Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE); the Human Rights Commission (HRC); the Independent Board of Inquiry into Informal Repression (IBIIR); Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) and the Legal Resources Centre (LRC).

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[30] Kynoch, *Township Violence*, 10.

[31] Bonner and Nieftagodien, "The TRC and the Pursuit of Social Truth," p. 177.

[33] For political explanations see Stuart Kaufman, "South Africa's Civil War, 1985–1995," *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 24, no. 4, (2017): 501-21; Daniel Douek, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in South Africa* (London: Hurst, 2020).

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[41] Gibbs, "Inkatha's Young Militants"; Catherine Campbell, "Learning to Kill? Masculinity, the Family and Violence in Natal," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 3 (1992): 614-28.

[42] Sheila Meintjies, "Political Violence and Gender: A Neglected Relation in South Africa's Struggle for Democracy," *Politikon* 25, no. 2 (1998): 102.

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[50] Emily Bridger, "Soweto's Female Comrades: Gender, Youth and Violence in South Africa's Township Uprisings, 1984–1990," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 44, no. 4 (2018): 559-574; Simpson, "Jack-Asses and Jackrollers".

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[52] Ellis, "Historical Significance," 261; Chris Hani (September 1992), cited in John Kane-Berman, *Political Violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1993), 16.

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[55] O'Brien, *The South African Intelligence Services*, 159-61.

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[64] For discussion see Taylor and Shaw, "The Dying Days of Apartheid," 16.

[65] The weight of historiography supports this interpretation. See e.g. Taylor and Shaw, "The Dying Days of Apartheid." .

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[77] Kelly, *To Swim With Crocodiles*, 191.

[78] *TRC Report, Volume 3*, 214-15.

[79] Sarah Mathis, "From Warlords to Freedom Fighters: Political Violence and State Formation in Umbumbulu, South Africa," *African Affairs* 112, no. 448 (2013): 421-39.

[80] De Haas, "Violence in Natal and Zululand," 915.

[81] Jackie Dugard, "From Low Intensity War to Mafia War: Taxi violence in South Africa (1987 - 2000)," Violence and Transition Series, Vol. 4 (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2001).

[82] Kelly, *To Swim With Crocodiles,* 167-218.

[85] Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva, *The Bang Bang Club: Snapshots From a Hidden War* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

[86] Martin Murray, *The Revolution Deferred: The Painful Birth of Post-Apartheid South Africa* (London: Verso, 1994): 106-7

[87] Morris and Hindson, "Political Violence".

[88] Philip Bonner and Vusi Ndima, "The Roots Of Violence On The East Rand, 1980-1990," University of the Witwatersrand Institute for Advanced Social Research Seminar Paper No. 450 (18 October 1999): 1-7; Lekgoathi and Ndlovu, "Political Violence", 973-4.

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[91] Bonner and Ndima, "The Roots of Violence," 7-10. See also Jason Hickel, "Subaltern Consciousness in South Africa's Labour Movement: 'Workerism' in the KwaZulu-Natal Sugar Industry," *South African Historical Journal* 64, no. 3 (2012): 664-84.

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[93] Bonner and Nieftagodien, "The TRC and the Pursuit of Social Truth," 184-5.

[94] Kynoch, *Township Violence*, 31.

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[97] David Everatt, "Analysing Political Violence on the Reef, 1990 to 1994," in *The Role of Political Violence*, ed. Greenstein, 95- 142.

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[100] Kynoch, *Township Violence*, 48-9; 63-5.

[102] Kynoch, *Township Violence,* 114-15.

[103] *TRC Report, Volume 6*, 585.

[104] Taylor and Shaw, 22.

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[119] L. Flanagan, "Covert Operations," 192.

[120] White, "The Rule," 122; Patrick Mangashe, "Operation Zikomo: The Armed Struggle, The Underground and Mass Mobilisation in South Africa's Border Region, 1986-1990, through the Experiences of MK Cadres," *South African Historical Journal* 70, no. 1 (2018): 42-55.

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[122] Peires, "The Implosion", 377.

[123] Laura Evans, "The Mass Action Campaign of 1992: The Ciskei Crisis, the Collapse of Negotiations and the African National Congress in Transition" (in process).

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[131] *TRC Report, Volume 2*, 685-692.

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