Political Violence: 1990

Introduction

The decade preceding 1990 witnessed a dramatic escalation in violent conflict in South Africa. It has been argued by many that this period was most appropriately described as an intensifying civil war. From at least the mid-1970s, with the rise of President PW Botha, government rhetoric, although attempting to redress this popular perception, effectively reflected this reality. 'Total onslaught' symbolised the militarist ideology of an externalised enemy which threatened the security of the state and of white political power and privilege. The banned and criminalised popular organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) were vested with the status of 'external enemy'.

Yet February 1990 appeared to have changed all this. With a certain flourish and at the stroke of a pen, President FW de Klerk legalised the ANC, the PAC and the SACP. Rights to political protest were in some respects restored and within weeks Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada and a host of other leaders of the liberation movement were released from prison. Perhaps most symbolically, the previously exiled leadership of the 'external enemy' were allowed slowly to make their way back into the country of their birth. Initially with the exception of Natal, the state of emergency in place since November 1985 was lifted. The ANC suspended its commitment to the armed struggle. The political shackles of the past were off and, to all intents and purposes, the way was paved for the 'normalisation of the political process' in South Africa.

The period since De Klerk's February speech, however, has been characterised by extreme and brutal violent conflict. The carnage and destruction which has left few of South Africa's black townships untouched, is virtually unparalleled in this country's bloody history. The politics of transition have resulted in ruptures in the very fabric of
apartheid society. One of the consequences has been a dramatic escalation in violence in almost all dimensions of the society – within the community, the workplace and the home. This has been not only a quantitative increase in levels of violence, but also a qualitative shift in the forms and brutality of the conflict.

Politicians, commentators and analysts have increasingly talked of a 'culture of violence' in South Africa and some have sought its roots in the legacy of apartheid – 'a ghost returned to haunt its creators'. This legacy is one of uneven social and economic development, of white privilege and black deprivation. It is a history of 'Bantu education', and of influx control, which created black dormitory townships whose residents were temporary sojourners in 'white' South Africa. The legacy of apartheid is the long-term retardation of economic growth with the consequence of deepening recession and mass unemployment. Perhaps most significantly, the legacy of apartheid is one of political intolerance and domination, in which political power is maintained through resort to violence, which generates violent resistance.

Through decades of state repression, violence has gained social sanction as a means of maintaining political power. So too, in the resort to armed struggle as a means of resistance, in the calls for 'people's war' and 'township ungovernability', violence has been accorded pervasive social acceptability as a legitimate means of attaining change. The consequences of this historical process manifest themselves not only in the formal political arena, but are displaced into all spheres of life. Hence it seems appropriate to talk of a culture of violence, the systematic intrusion of violence, political at origin, into every dimension of South Africans' lives.

Before it is possible to focus on the comparatively narrow concern of violence resulting from political differences or the competition for political power, one must take fuller cognisance of this broader definition of political violence as a social phenomenon. In so doing, it will become evident that the process of transition heralded by De Klerk's February speech has witnessed a dramatic increase in social violence as South African society turns itself inside out, grappling with the deeply rooted ideology and social practices which have so dominated its past.

The Introversion of Political Life

In many respects the legalisation of the previously banned political movements has replaced the externalised enemy with an enemy within. The consequence seems to have been a more introverted form of politics: the central political problem of the day has become how to maintain stability in the midst of the politics of transition.

To the extent that Minister Barend du Plessis's 1991 budget can be seen to reflect many of the central political concerns of the preceding year, it offers a symbolic reflection of both the internalisation of violent conflict and the government's primary obsession with maintaining 'stability'. The significant decrease in the budget of the South African Defence Force reflects the de-escalation of the border war with an externalised enemy. However, the parallel increase in the finances allocated to policing reflects both the shifting emphasis to a kind of internal militarisation as well as the quest to keep control during the transition process.
This shift in the form of politics and, indeed, of political conflict within the country during 1990, has had a pervasive social and psychological effect as well. The social-psychological trauma which accompanies the uncertainty of transition is often most dramatically experienced by those confronted with a loss of control in society. The consequence is frequently displaced aggression, expressed outside the formal political or economic realm. The victims of this displaced violence are often those who are most vulnerable in society or over whom control is most easily, symbolically reasserted. They are often women, children, or elderly people who are subject to violent abuse both within and outside the private domain of the domestic arena.

Merely to exclude violence of this sort from a definition of political violence would be to deny the fundamental nature of the power relations which are being played out in this arena of society. Furthermore, it would also belie the pervasive social effect of more narrowly defined political processes. Indeed, it is argued here that the dramatic increase in violence against women, children and the elderly (as well as in violent crime more generally) in the course of 1990, is an accurate barometer of the social and political dislocation of a society in transition, as well as of the introversion of political conflict in South Africa. If this is true, then the indicators which follow are of great relevance to an understanding of political violence in 1990.

Violence Against Women

If one accepts the National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Rehabilitation of Offenders’ (NICRO) estimation that only one in 20 rapes are reported in South Africa, then as many as 300,000 women are raped each year. Stated differently, there are 63 rapes per 100,000 people in South Africa. Despite reports by the South African Police (SAP) that the national incidence of rape decreased by 0.67 per cent (137 cases fewer) from 1989 to 1990, the Minister of Law and Order reported that in 1990 rape of ‘young girls’ increased by 23 per cent over the 1989 figure.

Child Abuse and Violence Against the Elderly

According to the Minister of Law and Order, reports of serious assault of children under 14 years of age increased by close to 55 per cent in 1990. Furthermore, 688 white people over the age of 50 reported that they were attacked in their homes in 1990, compared to 476 in the previous year. This represents an increase of 44.5 per cent.

Family Murders

Statistics for family murders in 1990 are not readily available. However, it is reported that 223 people died in family killings from 1986 to 1988, during which period there was approximately one family killing per month.

Of the 126 reported family killings between 1983 and June 1988, only two involved black families and 90 per cent involved Afrikaans-speaking families. A 1990 report suggests that 13 black families were involved in family murders in the second half of
that year alone.\textsuperscript{14} The latter development is significant in that it suggests that the anxiety and social dislocation felt by black families during this time of massive social change and civil war, is increasingly played out in the form of displaced aggression within the family. This may culminate in a desperate attempt to assert the ultimate control over one’s domain – the (usually male precipitated) family murder.

Violence in the domestic arena is also of particular significance where it takes the form of racial violence. Evidence suggests that in 1990, particularly after 2 February, saw a remarkable increase in violence by white homeowners against their black domestic workers. Motsei argues that this violence was particularly symbolic of white South Africans’ insecurities in a period of political flux and uncertainty, where the ‘most dangerous enemy’ was the ‘enemy within’ – those black South Africans who had easy access to their white oppressors.\textsuperscript{15}

Another arguably important indicator of broadly defined political violence is more generalised violent crime. The centrality of unemployment, economic recession, relative deprivation and poor education to explanations of crime suggests that the burgeoning crime rate is inextricably linked to the legacy of apartheid. Here it is also important to recognise the fine dividing line between political and criminal violence. The state’s historical role in the criminalisation of political opposition makes this a somewhat thorny issue to deal with. Although the statistics cannot adequately reflect this complexity, it must once again be stated that they project a general trend of increased social violence in the country during 1990.

Overall statistics on crime differ substantially. One report suggested that crime on the Reef had risen by 55 percent in 1990 when compared with the previous year.\textsuperscript{16} Other reports suggested a more moderate increase varying from 14 percent to 30 percent more than the 1989 figure.\textsuperscript{17} South African Police statistics argued that ‘serious crime’ increased by 8.5 percent in 1990, which was the highest annual increase for 10 years.\textsuperscript{18} However, the same article suggested that ‘violent crime’ had increased by 49.89 percent between 1989 and 1990.

Compared to 1989 figures, public violence was up by 50 percent, arson by 57 percent, illegal possession of firearms by 45 percent and illegal possession of explosives by 57 percent. The murder rate also increased by 25 percent from 39 murders per 100,000 people in 1989, to 49 murders per 100,000 people in 1990.\textsuperscript{19} According to \textit{The Star}, this is six times the United States’ rate of 8-9 per 100,000.\textsuperscript{20}

Although many of the categories mentioned above fall outside the formal political arena, it is arguable that their increase can be traced, or is integrally related to, the political processes set in motion early in 1990.

\textbf{Defining Political Violence}

Innes bases his definition of political violence on ‘all those who have died either as a result of action by the security forces or as a result of black on black violence’.\textsuperscript{21} On this basis he concludes that South African political killings ‘which rival the numbers to have died in the fighting in Lebanon, do not only reflect a society in turmoil; they suggest that this society is engulfed in a civil war’.\textsuperscript{22}
This definition makes it relatively easy to quantify political violence in South Africa in 1990. All that is required is to establish the number of deaths in political unrest. However, this is just one approach in defining political violence. After exploring it in more detail, three other approaches will be investigated.

Deaths in Political Unrest

Innes suggests that political violence has been on the increase since at least 1987, when 661 people died, to 1988 when 1,149 died and to 1989 when 1,403 people died. In 1990, however, there was a dramatic increase in political violence. According to Innes, in the first six months alone, 1,591 people died as a result of political violence – more than in any other year. This was followed by the deaths of 144 people in July of 1990, 709 in August (520 in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging [PWV] area alone), and another 369 people in September.\(^2\)

Innes’s figures differ considerably from those given by Lieutenant J. A. van der Westhuizen, a security police researcher. The latter suggests that only 454 people died in political unrest in 1987, 652 in 1988 and 659 in 1989. According to Van der Westhuizen, a further 2,403 died in the eleven months to 30 November 1990.\(^2\) Statistics presented in the commercial press differ markedly from those of both Innes and Van der Westhuizen.

It is clear that problems of definition plague even the most basic attempt to quantify political violence, making even a simple body count controversial. An indisputable trend in each of the set of statistics, however, is the dramatic increase in the number of people who died in political conflict in 1990.

The problem with Innes’s approach is that it ignores the fact that not all political violence results in the death of its victims. For this reason, it may arguably be more appropriate to quantify political violence in terms of unrest incidents rather than deaths resulting from those incidents.

Incidents of Political Unrest

Police statistics suggest that the number of incidents of unrest in 1990 more than doubled in comparison with the 1989 figures. The number of unrest incidents were reported as follows for the years 1984 to the end of November 1990:\(^2\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2,433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>17,188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>14,977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>4,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>5,208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>8,137</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

However, as in the case of political violence, it seems that there are certain problems of definition surrounding the phrase ‘incident of unrest’. Included in Van der Westhuizen’s definition is ‘roof’ (robbery), for which there were 120 incidents in 1990. Another category is ‘slagsspreuk’ (slogans) of which there were six reported ‘incidents’
in 1990. Finally, Van der Westhuizen also included 'pamflette', of which there were six reported 'incidents', in his breakdown of unrest incidents in 1990. Once again, it is evident that statistics reveal different facts, depending on what questions are asked.  

Costs of Political Unrest

The comparative financial costs incurred as a result of political unrest are another quantitative barometer of political violence.

Estimates made before the outbreak of the conflict in the Transvaal townships suggest that the South African economy has lost as much as R3 billion as a result of:

- the premature deaths of 1 800 people;
- the hospitalisation of those injured in the violence;
- destruction of about 2 000 shops and factories;
- expenditure on deployment of the security forces;
- destruction of personal property; and
- production loss due to national and regional stay-aways.  

Utilising more limited statistics, one police source evaluates only the economic losses incurred through damage to buildings and vehicles in the course of unrest over the last seven years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount lost (in rands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>27 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>93 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>94 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>41 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>14.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>34 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If one extrapolates from these and Innes’s figures, it is probably no exaggeration to say that in 1990, at a time when South Africa could least afford it, political violence cost the country nearly three times as much as either of the preceding two years—and these costs substantially outweighed any of the positive benefits of the contributions made by government and other agencies to social welfare and development.

Towards a Qualitative Definition

Despite the usefulness of these statistical surveys, they all remain plagued by definitional problems. At best they explain only that violence was on the increase in 1990, at worst they mask thorough analysis by presenting description as explanation. A perfect example of this resides in Innes’s reliance (along with almost the entire commercial press) on the notion of ‘black on black violence’ in his definition of political violence. This term, itself a part of South Africa’s racial legacy, so clearly fails to pierce the veil of apartheid as to make its regular usage appear to be ideologically manipulative. Far from offering an explanation of violence, this term does more to disguise causation by reinforcing the camouflage of racial stereotypes.31

The basis for a more workable definition of political violence could arguably be the following: violence which occurs between individuals or groups where the dominant motivation is based on political difference or the competing desire for political power. So as not to lose sight of the dynamic nature of politics and social process, the following needs to be added: a directly political situation may develop a dynamic and momentum of its own and certain violence may thus be political in origin, although the original motives have become displaced. For example, political violence may become entwined with motivations of personal or collective revenge and retribution in which, over time, politics become largely symbolic, resulting in shifting boundaries of political violence.

The main advantage of this definition is that it points to the central feature of political developments in 1990, the beginnings of transition and the politics of negotiation.

Violence at a Time of Negotiation

One of the important factors explaining the outbreak of political violence in the Transvaal during 1990 was the context of negotiation. For almost all of South Africa’s political interest groups, talks of negotiation raised the vital issue of political credibility upon which could be based legitimate claims to a seat at some future negotiation table. For perhaps the first time, ‘representivity’ became a vital feature of political legitimacy in South Africa, and the terms in which different organisations could claim to be representative of substantial numbers of South Africans was, of necessity, changing dramatically. Accordingly, in a quest for political credentials appropriate to the new era, 1990 saw the National Party declare itself a non-racial organisation – no doubt leaving many of its former leaders feeling decidedly uncomfortable.
Equally significant was the transformation of Inkatha from a culturally oriented organisation, with a distinct identity, to a political party with a national rather than regional pretensions. Like the National Party, Inkatha, if it was to win the credibility required of a negotiating the 'new South Africa', sought a support base to justify that image. In short, both Inkatha and the National Party had to gain support which extended beyond both their prior ethnic limitations to gain support which extended beyond both their prior ethnic limitations and, most importantly in the case of Inkatha, which extended beyond the boundaries of a particular region. It is in this context that Innes explains the 'leapfrog' of the war in rural Natal into the urban townships of the Transvaal: 'The answer lies in a few short words: Inkatha is trying to extend its influence outside Natal.'

The irony is that at the very time at which almost all the country's political interest groups were talking about prospects of peace and a negotiated settlement, unprecedented violence exploded in the Transvaal. Worst affected was the East Rand, where 61 percent of the Transvaal deaths occurred – mainly in the townships of Thokoza, Vosloorus and Katlehong. Soweto accounted for 21 percent of the Transvaal deaths, the Vaal Triangle 8 percent, and the West Rand and Johannesburg 5 percent each.

However, even in this irony, one can trace the roots of apartheid's legacy: political intolerance and selective repression under successive states of emergency. The long-term restrictions on organisations such as the United Democratic Front (UDF), the Congress of South African Students (Cosas) and the ANC, to name a few, left an organisational vacuum which unaffected organisations such as Inkatha were able to fill to some extent. The inevitable result was that the unbanning of these organisations, designed to pave the way towards the normalisation of the political process, created a highly antagonistic and contested political terrain in areas which previously may have been relatively unified.

It is clear that it is the very prospect of negotiations and the associated loosening of the shackles of political control in South Africa which defines the forms, intensity and extent of political violence in 1990. It is therefore appropriate to focus attention on the various political actors to establish to what extent, if at all, their interests have been served by this violence.

**The National Party**

Whatever allegations of state involvement in the orchestration of the violence during 1990, it is difficult to argue conclusively that the violence simply served the interests of the National Party.

Firstly, while the party could easily sustain its political programme in the face of a rural war between rival black political forces in Natal, De Klerk's initiatives, particularly with regard to recultivating foreign investment and breaking the stranglehold of economic sanctions, were potentially less compatible with a full-scale violent conflict at the centre of the country's industrial heartland. Secondly, at a time when a new-look National Party leadership had publicly committed itself to a negotiated process, it was not necessarily in the party's best interests to appear unable to control the escalation of political conflict. Finally, and related to the latter point, the escalation of wide-scale
violence was also damaging to the party's electoral support base within the white constituency, given the rise of the parliamentary right wing in the previous few years.

However, this ought not to detract from the political benefits which the National Party reaped from the havoc of 1990. In the context of anticipated negotiations, it was clear that the escalating violence was having the effect of disorganising and disrupting the ANC. To the extent that the ANC was identified as the main adversary of the National Party in the prospective negotiations process, it suited the government to face a weakened rather than well-organised adversary. Furthermore, the government's culpability must extend to its failure to act, as much as to any action which it did take. In this regard, there can be little doubt that De Klerk's failure to act against hit squads, the Civil Co-operation Bureau (CCB) and members of his own party, in the wake of irrefutable evidence of their complicity in perpetrating acts of extreme violence and political destabilisation, necessarily taints him and the government which he represents.

The National Party did not by any means cease to be a direct agent of political violence in the course of 1990. Through its legislative and administrative control as the government in power, the party continued to operate the machinery of political repression. The laws such as the Internal Security Act of 1982 and the Public Safety Act of 1953, employed by the government to repress political opposition in the past, remained on the statute book during 1990, although the application of these measures did change. The nationwide state of emergency was lifted on 7 June 1990, but continued in Natal. Furthermore, from 27 August, the enabling legislation of the Public Safety Act was used to declare 'unrest areas' in 27 townships in the PWV area.

Detention without trial under state of emergency or unrest areas legislation also continued, along with detentions under the Internal Security Act and similar legislation in the various 'homelands'. In all, 1,1671 people were detained without trial in 1990, 608 of them in Bophuthatswana. This figure is more than twice that for 1989.34

Of these detentions, 217 were under the notorious section 29 of the Internal Security Act. Many detainees were ANC members, despite the unbanning of the organisation. Some right-wingers were also subject to this treatment during 1990.

Three deaths in detention were recorded in 1990, and six section 29 detainees laid charges of assault whilst in detention. Two right-wingers were amongst those alleging torture and citing the use of electric shocks, blocked gas masks, and canvas bags placed over their heads and into which insecticide was sprayed.35

Public gatherings were also still subject to state repression in the course of 1990 and a ban on all outdoor gatherings under the Internal Security Act was renewed for a year on March 30. Police intervention, sometimes violent, was used to break up gatherings for which no permission had been granted.36 Finally, despite the fact that there was a moratorium placed on executions, judicial killing remained a prospect, especially with the lifting of the moratorium early in 1991.37

The Right Wing
The Independent Board of Inquiry into Informal Repression (IBIIR) monitored 28 extra-parliamentary right-wing organisations and movements as well as joint commando units. No political interest groupings, either inside or outside Parliament, gained as unequivocally from the high degree of political violence which characterise 1990.

There are various reasons for this. Firstly, unlike primarily black political organisations, white right-wingers have largely been spared the social trauma of being victims of the violence. Secondly, these political groupings stand to gain from the fear which media portrayal of township violence has stirred within white South Africans. This is because the extreme 'black on black' violence resonates with white South Africa's worst fears of the consequences of reforms such as those implemented by FW de Klerk, driving more whites to ultra-right-wing organisations. Finally, the presentation of township violence as an exclusively ethnic phenomenon also appears to vindicate right-wing political ideology and the old-style separatist apartheid solutions.

Perhaps because their political interests are so obviously served by a process of violent disruption, right-wingers have been extremely active perpetrators of violence. In particular, in the period after 2 February 1990, right-wing violence became more organised. Isolated racist attacks on individuals were quickly eclipsed by mass right-wing confrontations. Two thousand Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) and Boerestaat Party members marched to protest the unbanning of the ANC. This trend was continued when 5 000 AWB supporters marched in Klerksdorp in support of police action.

The Human Rights Commission alleges that, in the second six months of 1990, there was at least 45 right-wing attacks countrywide. These resulted in the deaths of 26 people and injuries to a further 138. More than 33 percent of these attacks took place in the PWV area, although the largest number of resultant casualties were in the Orange Free State and Natal. The ultimate expression of right-wing sentiment was probably best illustrated by the violent confrontations in the Orange Free State town of Welkom.

The African National Congress

During 1990 it became increasingly evident that the ANC was caught unprepared by De Klerk's speech of 2 February. After decades of repression, the organisation was required to make a swift transition from being an underground movement with a clear commitment to armed struggle, to a legal political party. As an absolute priority, this required the resuscitation of grassroots structures which had been systematically undermined by successive states of emergency.

The violence which broke out in the subsequent months did much to thwart the process of rebuilding the ANC. It prevented the organisation from taking full advantage of the changed context in which it operated. Moreover, the focus on the ANC was shifted from rebuilding local-level organisation to defensive manoeuvring, as many ANC constituencies were faced with daily battles for survival. Despite the establishment of joint working and monitoring groups, and the formation of defence committees, the ANC seemed unable to formulate a systematic and coordinated response to the crisis. Within weeks of earning the status of a legal organisation, the
ANC was confronted with the expectation that it would resolve burgeoning violence which had its roots in the preceding decades, during which time the movement itself had been actively excluded from political participation.

The ANC's organisational problems were exacerbated by the timing of the violence, since the outbreak of conflict in the Transvaal townships coincided with the controversial decision to suspend the armed struggle. More than anything else this decision, and its timing, forced the ANC to face the contradictions of its own political discourse as well as those of its conflicting needs. On one hand, its political commitment to the negotiation process necessitated the cessation of the armed struggle. On the other hand, in order to maintain its mass-based constituency, the organisation need to sustain its image as the embodiment of a radical solution. The major difficulty for the ANC was in maintaining an assertive posture in the pursuit of a democratic society, while at the same time demonstrating a commitment to peace and non-violence.

Predictably, the tightrope the ANC was walking and the retreat from armed struggle, did not got down will with militant sections of the organisation's youthful support base which perceived itself as under attack and unprotected. 'Where are you when we are getting killed?' they asked. 'Give us guns and we will sort out the Zulus,' they said. The ANC's inability to maintain control over sections of its constituency and to provide a clear direction during the violence led to criticism from the media and other parties. The violence also made a significant impact on the image of the organisation in the eyes of the public. The criticisms came equally from within:

**Generally speaking the vision of the unbreakable strength of the movement nurtured over the years was dented. Instead people felt that the ANC was displaying a political paralysis and had fallen prey to De Klerk's sweet talk.**

The continuation of the violence, which led to the increasing prominence of Inkatha in the political scenario, also elicited further contradictions for the ANC. The widespread winner-takes-all perception of the negotiation process which had gained precedence within much of the ANC's support base, became impracticable in the face of Inkatha's growing presence. Both to Inkatha's and the government's advantage, the fact of continuing violence effectively made negotiation with Inkatha an inevitability. Any refusal to talk to Inkatha would easily be interpreted as a form of political intolerance and an endorsement of the violence. Yet for many militant ANC supporters, especially in Natal, Inkatha had always been seen as the enemy.

Unlike the National Party or the right-wing organisations, the ANC was badly bruised by the violence. Understandably, the ANC claimed that much of the violence was orchestrated and aimed at undermining its position at the negotiation table:

**We see the violence as an organised act of counter-revolution similar to the strategy of Renamo in Mozambique. We believe that it is orchestrated by forces within the state or linked to the state.**
The violence was seen as an attempt on the part of the state to make itself indispensable in the process of change and the creation of a peaceful society, whilst loading the negotiation process against the ANC:

The regime would prefer to negotiate with a relatively weak ANC. The violence is an attempt to prevent the ANC developing into what promises to be a vibrant organisation. The violence can isolate us from our constituencies as well as weaken all democratic organisation allied to the ANC.\textsuperscript{45}

Inkatha

Inkatha, unlike the ANC, remained unaffected by government repression in the 1980s. Free to organise and to expand, the organisation was also allowed to occupy centre-stage, at least on the black political stage generated by the commercial media. As a result, the events following 2 February posed two central problems for Inkatha. Firstly, the organisation was confronted with the dilemma of prospective negotiations together with the issue of its ethnic and regional constraints. Secondly, the unbanning of the ANC freed the latter movement to contest Inkatha's claimed hegemony, both ideologically and in terms of its competing credibility as an organisation with mass support. In short, in the media hype which accompanied Nelson Mandela's release and the rebirth of the ANC, Chief Buthelezi and Inkatha were quickly removed from centre-stage.

At its congress on 14 July Inkatha launched its new strategy to redress these problems, renaming itself the Inkatha Freedom Party, shedding its mantle as a Zulu cultural organisation and, instead, adopting the trappings of a conventional political party, open to people of all races and cultures and seeking nationwide support. It was as a part of this strategy that the new party immediately launched a recruitment drive in the Transvaal.

Significantly, the first outbreak of violence between Inkatha and ANC supporters was only a few days later, on 22 July at Sebokeng. A total of 29 people died in that encounter.

It is evident that the recruitment drive was launched into a particularly hostile political environment. A survey, conducted by Market Research Africa just one month before the outbreak of the Transvaal conflict, calculated Inkatha's support outside Natal to be as low as 2 percent.\textsuperscript{46} This was followed by a survey of political opinion in the black townships of the PWV by the McCann Advertising Agency, which found not only a very low level of positive support for Inkatha in these regions, but a very high degree of active antagonism to the organisation. As Sue Lerena of McCann Advertising said:

While it was expected that a certain resentment of Inkatha would come out of research conducted only in the Transvaal, what was staggering was the degree of this
resentment. Blacks outside of Natal, including many Zulus, seemed almost to consider Inkatha a greater danger than many radical white right-wing movements. 47 

In this context the allegations made by John Aitcheson of Natal University are apposite. Assessing an Inkatha recruitment campaign in September 1987, Aitcheson dubbed it a process of 'enforced recruitment', claiming that Inkatha's tactics in areas controlled by the KwaZulu administration involved threatening people with eviction from their homes unless they joined Inkatha and paid a subscription fee of R5 by October of that year. 48 It is therefore of special significance that similar allegations of enforced recruitment were widespread amongst township residents in the course of the relaunch of the Inkatha Freedom Party in the PWV townships from July 1990.

One central difference, however, was that whilst Inkatha enjoyed the status of a mini-government in KwaZulu, and was therefore able to assert significant administrative pressure in order to coerce membership of the organisation, the Inkatha Freedom Party could not wield this administrative weight in the Transvaal. It has been suggested that the result was a much greater initial reliance on direct physical coercion of membership – beginning in the primarily Zulu hostels of the East Rand townships. 49

Yet Inkatha blames the ANC for the violence, arguing that the ANC refuses to tolerate any political alternatives to itself. Thus Themba Khoza, Inkatha Youth Brigade leader stated:

First and foremost we have all identified apartheid as the cause of violence amongst the people, if this was not the case I don't think violence would have occurred. What is presently happening is that the ANC is using its might to crush all forms of opposition to its views by fighting to become the sole representative of the people. If an organisation or individual does not want to follow the ANC's line, it is then labelled as an enemy of the people and attacked. 50

It may be argued that in the highly publicised meeting between Buthelezi and Mandela which eventually transpired early in 1991, some of Inkatha's urgent political needs were realised. Publicly it was acknowledged as necessary to the resolution of the problem of township violence, if not to the long-term success of multi-party negotiations. Whether this meeting at leadership level could achieve anything in terms of resolving the political violence remains to be seen. What is evident, however, is that whether by coincidence or by design, the violence serviced some of Inkatha's most pressing political needs.
By the middle of August the East Rand townships of Thokoza, Vosloorus, Duduza, Katlehong, Wattville, Tembisa, Daveyton and Kwathema were embroiled in internecine violence. Soon after this, hostels in other areas like Soweto were also affected. After 10 days of fighting between hostel dwellers and the township residents in these areas, the death toll reached 500. The injured numbered well over 3,000. Why is it that the hostels became, and still remain, the flashpoint of conflict during the ongoing Transvaal war?

Several elements explain their centrality in the mayhem. Importantly, the genesis of the hostel system was integral to the engineering of the apartheid city. Ingredients for the conflict were created by the apartheid ideologues not only by removing migrant workers from the ‘white’ inner cities, but also by creating two communities with distinct social identities within any particular township. From the outset, the sources of tensions in hostel life have been manifold.

Hostel dwellers have been viewed as outsiders and have been subject to scorn and ridicule from their urban counterparts. Political organisations have often overlooked their significance in urban struggles and have made few meaningful attempts to harness their political participation. In the preceding decade, politics in the townships have been dominated by youth with a clearly urban focus and little or no sensitivity to the interests of the hostel dwellers. A further divisive ingredient in hostel life was the state-enforced principle of ethnic categorisation within a hostel, which encouraged the development of robust ethnic identities.

Whilst formal ethnic divisions have been dispensed with, ethnic and cultural identities have remained a coping mechanism in the hostile urban context. Hostels are thus an important target for boosting political support. Inkatha’s practice of politicising ethnic affiliation and manipulating it in the contest for political power strikes a powerful chord within the migrant population. Many Zulu migrants are already drawn informally into Inkatha structures through a system of patronage that operates in KwaZulu.

The irony of Inkatha politics lies in the fact that its strength as a ‘new’ non-racial party is primarily dependent on a traditional and strongly ethnic hostel-dwelling constituency. Inkatha’s practice of coercive recruitment method has arguably been central in the hostel-related violence. The Independent Board of Inquiry into Informal Repression cites the hostel as having been ‘precipitated by a brutal and aggressive recruitment campaign initiated by Inkatha’. As one hostel dweller claimed:

**We have been forced to join Inkatha otherwise we would be killed. We were forced to wear red headbands indicating our Inkatha membership . . . . Even non-Zulu-speaking hostel dwellers have been forced to join Inkatha. Either you join or you leave the hostel.**

The ease with which hostel dwellers have been manipulated has been facilitated by existing structural conditions in the hostels themselves. Conditions of hostel life facilitate the rapid escalation of violence. The lifeless, prison-like structures, which house only men, are the breeding grounds for an aggressive and machismo culture unconstrained by the stabilising presence of family life. Appalling living conditions
contribute to the high levels of frustration and the ease with which antagonisms can develop. As migrants, most hostel occupants are contract workers and thus occupy the lowest rung of the economic ladder.

During the 'Reef hostel war', as it has come to be known, the hostels were used as sites from which to launch attacks. Their fort-like structures made it easy to plan and initiate attacks from within, while also providing a secure place to which to retreat.

Shadowy external forces have been instrumental in fomenting conflict between hostel dwellers and the neighbouring township residents. Evidence suggests that the violence in many instances has been orchestrated. *Agents provocateurs* moved into areas and, in the turbulent political climate, were able to convince the hostel dwellers that their lives were in danger. The battles which ensued with surrounding township residents are explicable in the context of the longstanding tensions and antagonisms which persisted between these two communities.

As in the case of the violence more generally, it would be simplistic to identify causal factors to explain the origin of the violence and then merely to assume consistency as the process unfolds. It has been noted already that the violence developed a momentum and dynamism of its own, a fact that was also true in the context of the hostels. The initial period of violence was almost inevitably followed by a series of revenge killings. During September and October, this developed into a spiral of violence, the victims of which became increasingly arbitrary. Incidents of the sort described below became commonplace:

**In apparent revenge attacks following the killing of an Inkatha member the previous day, at least 16 people were killed and 33 injured in a series of random attacks in Soweto. Police said the only motive seemed to be revenge. In one incident, 6 men were walking through Naledi in Soweto, in an area adjoining the Merafe Hostel, at about 20:15 when gunmen opened fire, killing all six. AK-47 and 9mm cartridges were found at the scene.**

The Security Forces

The spiral of violence described above poses fundamental questions about the capacity of the South African Police to contain and prevent such brutality. Once again the legacy of apartheid policing has continued to plague South Africans. For decades the security forces, controlled by the National Party, have served the ends of maintaining apartheid and upholding exclusive white privilege in South Africa. In short, the highly politicised role of policing has resulted in the long-term breakdown of the black community’s trust in the South African Police as a legitimate law enforcement or crime prevention agency. The inevitable result of this, in times of increased social insecurity or heightened conflict, is an inclination towards 'self-help' on the part of embattled township residents. Revenge and retribution have consequently become
commonplace, with resultant violence which regularly spans the gap between crime and political activism.

During 1990 the Harms, Hiemstra and Goldstone Commissions of Inquiry all pointed to the appalling inadequacies in the security forces in upholding professional neutrality and in carrying out their role as custodians of the nation's freedoms. The Goldstone Commission investigated the events that occurred at Sebokeng and other Vaal townships on 26 March 1990, when 281 people were injured and 17 killed. Justice Goldstone referred to the police using force 'quite immoderate and disproportionate to any lawful object sought to be attained'.

Perhaps more importantly, all three commissions pointed to the existence of sinister right-wing elements in the security forces who seemed to be following their own agendas. Although there may be truth to this suggestion, it should not detract from the regular political partiality allegedly shown by the police more generally in their management of township conflict over the past year.

The Independent Board of Inquiry into Informal Repression (IBIIR) has claimed that there is conclusive evidence of the police siding with Inkatha during the recent violence on the Reef. Apart from many sworn affidavits in which individual township residents claim a close association between Inkatha and the police in the perpetration of acts of violence in the townships of the Reef, the IBIIR also cites evidence of partisan police involvement in some of the central events in the escalating violence in the region during 1990.

From 22 July, when the violence on the Reef really exploded, the IBIIR claims that police were accompanying Inkatha marchers and made no attempt to disarm them during their attack on the hostels in Sebokeng in which 21 people died. Referring to this incident, a spokesperson for the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) said:

**When Inkatha did attack, the police made no attempt to stop them using weapons including firearms. It is clear to us that the police were criminally negligent and are actively collaborating with Inkatha as they have done in Natal.**

On 14 August, it is alleged that police parked Casspirs 200 metres from the Phola Park squatter camp in Thokoza, but failed to intervene when hostel residents attacked Phola Park residents. The police also allegedly escorted and then allowed Inkatha members, most of whom were armed with pangas, knives and axes, to enter the hostel until their numbers had grown from about 200 to 2 000. Twenty people died in the fighting in Thokoza that day.

It was claimed that on 16 August police in Soweto sided with the hostel dwellers of Merafe in a violent conflict against the residents of neighbouring Mapetla. M. Maleho of Mapetla said, 'I saw police arresting a resident after throwing teargas at us. These people are siding with the [hostel] inmates.'

The list of similar allegations, cited by the IBIIR, are too long to detail here. It should be noted, however, that similar allegations were also made in the commercial press at the time, and even by several policemen who have sworn to affidavits alleging police involvement with Inkatha. In particular, attention was drawn to the failure of the
police to disarm marauding Inkatha supporters on the basis that they were only carrying 'traditional weapons'.

In response to many of these allegations, spokesperson for the SAP have generally offered categorical denials of police involvement in the instigation of violence in the Transvaal townships. In particular, police have called for evidence to back these allegations and have undertaken to investigate any substantial claims thoroughly.

The Human Rights Commission Review of 1990 claims that a total of 323 people were killed by police in the course of the year, and a further 3,390 injured. By contrast, police statistics suggest that 203 people were killed by the security forces (up to the end of November 1990) and 1,229 injured.

'Third Force' Arguments

Nelson Mandela highlighted a particularly disturbing feature of the political violence of 1990 when he alleged the involvement of a sinister 'third force'. Despite the dismissive attitude of government officials, evidence of such a sinister force mounted in the course of the year.

On one hand, there were allegations of the involvement of white men in 'black on black' township conflict. White men with blackened faces were allegedly involved in an attack on Sebokeng. Furthermore, residents of Phola Park claimed to have seen the killing of a white man while he participated with Inkatha supporters in an attack on the squatter camp. They also suggested that police removed the body, but police denied having done so.

Perhaps more revealing were allegations on the nature of some of the attacks which took place in the course of the year. The random, rather than political 'selection' of victims characterised by the 'Denver train massacre' on 13 September, suggested that the only possible political motive in the attack was destabilisation or disruption. Furthermore, the entire operation was carried out with a military precision which suggested a high degree of planning and professionalism. The attack reportedly took place in absolute silence on the part of the killers, involved two groups of well-coordinated attackers on the train and at the station, and seems to have been undertaken with professional skill characteristic of trained soldiers rather than untrained gangs.

There were also allegations of a military based called Hippo, in the Caprivi strip, where Defence Force personnel are alleged to have trained an elite unit of Inkatha members in the use of AK-47s and guerrilla warfare. At best this suggested that there were elements within the security forces who, disapproving of De Klerk's reform initiatives, were determined to derail the negotiation process. At worst, these forces might have been operating with the covert support of the National Party 'reformers' themselves, in an attempt to disrupt the opposition and influence the balance of power in the lead-up to any negotiated process. What was clear was the similarity between this sort of internal destabilisation and that which characterised South Africa's relations with its neighbours in the course of the 1980s.
However, merely to identify a nondescript grouping who are thought to have a political interest in disrupting the political process, and to label it a ‘third force’, may be to underestimate both the complexity of its question as well as the legacy which apartheid's civil war has left to South Africans of 1990.

The term 'warlords' has been used extensively in the Natal context to refer to township persons who wield considerable power by virtue of their access to the weapons of war. Warlords, of whatever political persuasion, wield power, assert political control and generate wealth through their strategic position within the violent conflict. They buy and sell arms, trade in assassinations and buy and sell protection. Like mercenaries or Mafia-style gangs the world over, they move from one war zone to another. Where conflict does not exist they will often generate it, because of their dependence upon it. In short, war generates a series of vested economic interests – whole sub-communities with a material interest in ongoing violent confrontation.

For many of the functionaries within these groupings, their initial active involvement in the commission of violent acts may have been the result of an act of retribution or a response to some personal hurt. However, once the psychological and moral constraints on acts of violence have been violated on one occasion, it becomes much easier for individuals to become more regularly embroiled in violence as a means of resolving social, political and economic problems. Many such people, in particular the unemployed and under-educated black youth, therefore develop a material interest in disruption – as distinct from those who have a political interest in disruption. It is only once this vital distinction is grasped, speculative as it may seem, that one can redefine the notion of a ‘third force’ (if indeed this terminology is appropriate at all) with the complexity which it requires.

The Role of the Youth

There is little doubt that another central factor in the escalating violent conflict during 1990 was the role played by large numbers of black youths. In the case of Natal it has been suggested that generational factors have been at the heart of the conflict, with the more politicised ANC-aligned youths conflicting with older, more 'traditional', Inkatha forces.  

During 1990 the heightened expectations which resulted from the unbanning of the mass-based organisations, the prospects of political transition, and a new sense of latitude in the political arena, were a source of zeal for young activists. Yet the slow progress made in the political process, coupled with unrealistic expectations of short-term advances in housing, education and an improved lifestyle, rapidly turned zeal into frustration.

Ironically, the re-entry of the ANC and the PAC into daily political life fed into these frustrations. The new leadership in many respects sidelined the youth from their former position of political prominence in the heady days of 'people's war', and demanded of them a diplomatic patience somewhat incompatible with the calls for action of the 1980s. This process added significantly to the frustrations of a generation characterised by low levels of tolerance and a sense of their own omnipotence. The consequence was a propensity for violent resolution of immediate
problems – a methodology which in preceding years had won social acceptability as a means of attaining change.

The propensity for violence was fuelled by the rapidly deteriorating socio-economic circumstances which impacted most directly on the youth. No only were youths commonly perpetrators of crime, but it seemed that criminals were getting younger and younger. Whilst the average age of criminals was 22 years old in 1988, in 1990 the average age was 17 years old. The increased unemployment levels and incidents of youth crime, the fact that the number of children out of school was far greater in 1990 than in previous years, as well as the more general deterioration of the material conditions in black communities, swelled the number of marginalised youths who were ready to engage in violent actions. Participation in fierce fights in defence of one's community could momentarily overcome the sense of lack of purpose and direction facing young people.

If the black youth were prevalent in the escalation of violence in 1990, then it was because, more than any other social category, they represented the barometer of frustration, deprivation and impoverishment of black township residents under the legacy of apartheid. Worse still, in their needs and aspirations, they possibly presented the most difficult challenge to politicians across the political spectrum on account of their significance for the future.

Conclusions and Solutions

Explaining political violence in South Africa is almost an impossibility in a single chapter. In 1990 perhaps the single most important explanatory factor in the unfolding violence was the process of transition, which itself raised many complex issues. What is clear and uncontroversial is that political violence in South Africa can never be reduced to moncausal explanation. Its origins are as numerous as are the range of political interest groups involved. Equally important, the violence itself has an independent dynamic.

For these reasons, potential solutions are as numerous as the causes. To the extent that the uncertainty and insecurity of the transition and the negotiation processes lie at the root, a rapid political settlement – or at least a visible move towards one – is an essential part of any solution. To the extent that the legacy of repression is a causal factor, the rebuilding of local-level organisation with an established and respected leadership able to assert discipline, is also indispensable.

If biased policing or a lack of community trust in the police as a credible law enforcement agency is contributing to the spiral of violence, then the rebuilding of consensus-based policing, in which the new force is more accountable to civilian structures, becomes essential to resolving the lawlessness. If poverty, unemployment and relative deprivation feed the problem, then the new South Africa will have to look to planning for a comprehensive welfare system.

Furthermore, to overcome the violence, South Africans need to generate a culture of democracy based on political tolerance. In the meantime, those responsible for violent action must be held accountable for their actions – and justice must be seen to be done.
Notes:


2 This was as central to President De Klerk's Christmas message at the end of the year as it was to his speech opening parliament on 2 February 1991.


4 The authors are aware of the methodological problems associated with statistics, particularly crime statistics such as those referred to in the next section. Statistics from different sources are seldom uniform. Despite this, and other problems such as those of under-reporting, the available statistics on violent crime do at least give some indication of a trend.


6 *The Cape Times* 10 October 1990.


12 See note 11.


16 *City Press* 30 December 1990.


18 *The Star* 26 November 1990.

20 Based on SAP figures quoted in *The Star* 28 January 1991, and *The Financial Mail* 15 February 1991. Whether these figures are based on the number of incidents reported, the number of convictions or the number of arrests is not clear from the reports.


24 See note 23.

25 See note 23. The total number of deaths since 1985 is estimated by Innes to be 7 768.

26 JA van der Westhuizen 'Geweld in Suid-Afrika', report to the Klerksdorp Magistrate's Court in *State v Smith and Mailane*, 10 January 1991. Van der Westhuizen argues that the total number of deaths since 1985 stood at 5 964.

27 See note 26.

28 Another variant on the theme is the qualification of political violence in terms of 'acts of terror'. According to Lieutenant-General Basie Smit, then head of the security branch of the SAP, there were 254 'incidents of terror' in 1990, compared to 200 in 1989; *The Star* 28 January 1991. Minister Vlok noted that there was an increase in the number of people arrested in connection with 'acts of terror', from 158 in 1989 to 341 in 1990; *The Star* 7 February 1991.

29 See note 23 at 32.

30 See note 26.


32 See note 23.

33 See note 23.


35 See note 34 at 4 – 5.

36 See note 34 at 14. The issue of the role of the security forces in the political violence of 1990 is dealt with below, along with the difficult question of the extent to which one can deduce the ruling party's political interests from the actions of the various security agencies.
See note 34 at 12. At the end of December 1990 there were 325 people still on death row, 55 of whom were described by the Human Rights Commission as political prisoners. A total of 25 political prisoners were released from death row in 1990, including 12 in the Ciskei.

See note 34 at 18.

See note 34.

See note 34 at 19. Where the line is drawn in defining right-wing violence is unclear. The figures cited above exclude statistics of 'vigilante related attacks' for the period under review.

For a summary and analysis see Back to the Laager – The Rise of Right-wing Violence in South Africa, LEAP publications, Institute of Criminology, University of Cape Town (1991) at 66-73.


See note 42.

Report by the ANC National Executive Committee, 18 September 1990.

ANC Joint Working Committee on Violence, Report to the ANC, 18 September 1990.


Quoted in Innes, note 23 at 34.

Quoted in Innes, note 23 at 33-34.

More recently, it appears that Inkatha has campaigned to gain a substantial foothold within the Black Local Authority structures on the Witwatersrand.

New Nation October 1990.


The Star 29 October 1990.

See note at 15 – 16.

See note 34 at 16. Despite the evidence led before the Harms Commission that the CCB had been disbanded, the Human Rights Commission alleged that there is 'much evidence of hit squad activities continuing.' It claimed that 21 people were killed and 13 injured by hit squads between July and the end of 1990.
See note 51 at 6: 'They were dancing and threatening to kill Xhosa people in the hostel.'

See note 51 at 11.


Government Notices issued in August under the Dangerous Weapons Act prohibited the possession of listed weapons and firearms to participants in gatherings in unrest areas. In the same month, the National Code of Zulu Law amended to allow the carrying of 'traditional weapons'.

See note 60 at 15.

See note 26.

See note 23 at 36.

These allegations are referred to in the Human Rights Commission reports and in Innes' paper.


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