

Alternative Policing Structures? A look at youth defense structures in Gauteng in 1995

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As is the case nationally, in Gauteng, defense structures such as Self Defense Units (SDUs) and Self Protection Units (SPUs) take on a variety of forms. They are in no way uniform from area to area – rather they are varied based on local conditions; the experiences of the members as residents of particular townships; the nature of violence in the areas concerned; and the type of political organisational structures that exist in these areas. Consequently, it is very difficult to make any generalisations regarding these youth formations. This in itself has implications for any developmental programmes that are taken up either nationally or provincially which attempt to target youth who have been engaged in defense activities. Nonetheless, provisional research done around defense structures in Gauteng, could provide some preliminary insight into these structures and the needs of the youth who play central roles in defense activities in local areas.

Organisational Structure

The Gauteng province has a high proportion of youth who are armed, and are either formally or informally organised into structures of defense. In many areas, youth are part of Self Defense Structures (generally seen to be associated with the ANC) or part of Self Protection Units (generally associated with Inkatha). There are also smaller groupings of youth who are part of formations organised by Azapo and the PAC.

The types of structures which exist are largely dependent on the political terrain of local areas, and the types of violence experienced by these communities. For the most part, according to office bearers of the ANC Youth League in the Gauteng Province, SDUs have historically formed as underground structures which emerged when violence surfaced, and dissipates when "violence dies down".

There are a number of areas in Gauteng where defense units exist in a relatively permanent and organised form:

The Vaal area

In the Vaal there is a co-ordinating body of youth who perceive themselves as bringing together, and co-ordinating activities of SDUs; they call themselves the Vaal Commanding Unit of SDUs. This executive/co-ordinating body consists of ten members and is meant to oversee the activities of all SDUs in the Vaal area. According to commanders from Sebokeng township, these units were initiated by the ANC Youth League in 1990. However, a number of members active in this unit are from other political groupings such as the PAC and AZAPO. The majority of active members, however, are "ANC people". In all, according to members of the co-ordinating structure, there are about 600 active members of the defense unit in this area which includes Sebokeng, Boipatong, Evaton, and Sharpeville. This was an estimated guess since no-one was entirely certain of the exact number of youth engaged in defense activities in the area.

According to the commanders interviewed, there are mainly males active in these units. It was believed that this was the case owing to the fact that females perceive their key responsibilities as lying within the domestic realm and in attending school. However, even at the executive level, there was a woman represented who held the position of secretary.

While the ANCYL initiated this structure, this organisation no longer controls and manages the unit in the area. Instead, an executive body is responsible for co-ordinating activities of the units in the various townships which constitute the Vaal. The executive holds meetings for all members once a month. However, what became apparent in speaking to members of the executive is that outside of Sebokeng, defense unit structures are disorganised and there are no clear lines of authority and accountability.

Youth in this area were mobilised subsequent to the unbannings in 1990 as a response to threats from the "third force" and Inkatha. The Boipatong massacre which took place in June 1992, where informal settlements were attacked by hundreds of unidentified armed men, and at least 39 people brutally slaughtered. As a result of this carnage, youth in Boipatong organised themselves to "defend the community" against what became to be known as the "third force". While these activities were initially directed by political parties such as the ANC, this no longer appears to be the case. Consequently, by 1994, defense structures and activities were largely "self controlled" with little or no input from political organisations in the area.

Soweto area

Soweto is a large area made up of about twenty townships and a large number of informal settlements. Defense structures exist in some townships of this area, particularly where there are hostels nearby residential areas. Defense structures are particularly prevalent in the informal settlements throughout Soweto owing to their vulnerability to outside attacks, attempting to destabilise these areas. There appear to be about 13 visible defense structures in the Soweto area. These exist in Senoane, Dlamini, Meadowlands, Pimville, Emdeni, Dobsonville, and in the informal settlements such as Chicken Farm, Kliptown squatter camp, Power Park. However, it remains unclear as to where these structures are

and when they will mushroom as a result of political and social conditions. For example, when speaking to provincial executive members of both the ANC and the ANCYL in February 1995, neither mentioned defense units Diepkloof township. But, the *Star* (24/07/95) reported that "more than 200 heavily armed members of the Self Defense Units laid seige to the Orlando police station ... demanding to be integrated into the restructured **South African Police Service** ... SDU members came from the informal settlements of Elias Motsoaledi in Diepkloof ...". It is accordingly very difficult at any point in time to identify all areas where youth defense units are operative, or how many youth are members of such formations.

Initially the majority of the members of these structures in Soweto were members of organisations such as the Congress of South African Students and the ANC Youth League. However, it was noted by a number of individuals from Soweto that this may vary from township to township. It was stated that in Doornkop, for example, there is currently a power struggle over who controls this unit. It was stated that in this township, members have joined the National Party and are being used to destabilise the community.

An interesting aspect of defense structures in Soweto is that some of these units were most operative on the trains when members of the community were attacked while commuting to work. These units organise on the trains and do not have commanders at a local level. According to Sandile Ndlungwane, a provincial organiser for the ANC, many of the members of defense structures in Soweto are Xhosa speaking. A number of these people have been forcibly removed from the hostels, and there is consequently, according to Sandile, a lot of antagonism toward Zulu speaking people in the area.

In the entire Soweto area there are only about 200 people (the majority of which are male) who would openly declare themselves members of Self Defense Units. Most of these people are said to be armed and in some instances are part of gang formations. Despite the fact that political organisations in Soweto have called for people to hand in their guns, most are still in possession of arms and appear to have no intention of releasing these.

While it was noted that there are other units in Soweto, particularly linked to Inkatha, there was no formal contact between these units and the SDUs in Soweto. By late 1994, it was still argued that a conducive environment had not been created for meetings between defense units linked to different political parties. A mediating body, IMMSA, is supposed to be facilitating a meeting between the ANCYL and the Inkatha Youth Brigade in Soweto.

While the majority of members of SDUs in Soweto are member of the ANC, there is no central command system in the area. Members of defense formations often do not take instruction from political structures. According to local youth in the area, most of the members of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) who initiated these units in 1990 are now in the new SANDF and are not available to give guidance and training.

The East Rand

The East Rand is probably the most well publicised area with regard to SDUs and SPUs. In this area there appears to be a large number of youth who are organised into defense structures. In most townships in the East Rand there are both Self Defense Units and Self Protection Units which are active. In one particular area of the East Rand, Katorus (consisting of Katlehong, Tokoza, and Vosloorus) there is a presidential lead programme with one of its aims being to integrate members of defense units into a police reservist programme, and in the long term, to reintegrate them into the community. This programme was initiated as a result of the high levels of conflict in the area amongst youth from different political groupings, as well as between youth from Self Defense Units themselves.

Because of the general informal manner in which these units operate, no-one is exactly sure as to how many youth belong to such structures. When the reintegration programme began in September 1994, there were, according to Jabu Dlamini – a field worker for Peace Action, about 1 945 members of both formations submitted their names for both the reservist and permanent services. By July 1995, according to Dlamini, there were 1041 reservists and 904 permanent workers trained and employed by the **South African Police Service** in the Katorus area. These numbers included members of Inkatha aligned Self Protection Units. However, according to Jabu, despite these large numbers, there are still many youth claiming to be part of defense structures who have not been incorporated into the programme from Katorus. There is also conflict in Katorus between those members who chose to be part of the reservist programme and those who did not. This has in fact proven to be a causal factor for violence in the Katorus area.

When examining the East Rand, one needs to acknowledge that there seems to be a split between Katorus, and what has come to be known as the Far East Rand. Thembisa, Daveyton, Ivory Park and Rabie Ridge, for example, falls into the Far East Rand or Mid-rand area, and programmes developed for Katorus have not been extended to include the Far East Rand. This has created tension between the townships which form part of Katorus and those which do not.

In the Katorus area, there are command structures through which SDU members are supposed to operate. But, even those defense unit members who have been incorporated into the reservist training are at times ill disciplined and have been described as "trigger happy". According to Jabu, when problems emerge from youth who claim to be members of SDUs, commanders from different units blame one another or disclaim that the "problematic individuals" concerned are members of any particular SDU.

In Thembisa, an SDU structure exists and operates in all zones of the township. The overall unit is known as the Thembisa Self Defense Unit. According to members of the unit, it has historically been influenced significantly by Umkhonto we Sizwe and is said to have a military structure. According to residents interviewed, all SDU members have at some point received training by MK. Some MK members are still in the township and are leading the

SDU in the area. This means that most members have been trained to use weapons, unlike ANC marshals who constitutionally are not allowed to possess or use weapons.

Interviewees noted that within Thembisa itself, it is not possible to state definitively how many youth are active in the unit. There is, in Thembisa, as is no doubt the case in other townships in Gauteng and the country at large, both an above-ground and an under-ground structure. It was stated that when violence prevails in the township, the majority of youth who reside there take part in "defense activities". The majority of members of the unit in Thembisa are members of either the ANC Youth League or the Congress of South African Students (Cosas). This is undoubtedly the case since Thembisa itself is an ANC stronghold. The commanders in the area are said to be activists in the ANC.

Within Thembisa there are individual youth who are identifiable as commanders of the SDU. However, according to residents of Thembisa who have close links to the unit, the SDU was formulated with no clear rules or proper structures. It was stated that there is an element of independent activity that takes place in these structures; there is no way of controlling all the activities taken up by SDU members. When the SDU faces a crisis in terms of activities which are to be taken up, they "run to organisations like the local civic and ANC for assistance".

Within Thembisa, there are a number of other defense structures operating. There is a Task Team which is aligned to the PAC. However, very few people are part of this structure and members of the Task Team tend to participate in SDU initiated activities. There is also an IFP aligned Self Protection Unit in Thembisa. This seems to be rather small and is similarly organised to rural defense structures which have chiefs and subordinates. The SPU in the area is mostly led by elder men who are hostel residents. The relationship between the SDU and the SPU in Thembisa is an antagonistic one. It is only commanders from these two structures who meet; in general the two structures do not have a collaborative working relationship. Interaction only takes place on a leadership level.

The West Rand

The key Self Defense Units operating in this area are located within the informal settlements such as the Lusaka squatter camp. In the Lusaka area, an SDU was established in 1990 by the ANC as a result of Inkatha violence in the area. It was stated by member of the Lusaka SDU formation that this unit continues to exist as a result of potential threats from Inkatha. There are about 100 people active in the Lusaka SDU. There are commanders in the area, and the unit holds general meetings once a week. These meetings are meant to establish whether or not any action needs to be taken by the SDU. The unit in Lusaka has strong relationships with the ANC branch in the area; in fact, most SDU activity falls under the "safety and security department" of the ANC branch. Members of the unit are willing to take orders from the local ANC branch.

There are also very small units operating in Swaneville and Bekkersdaal on the West Rand. According to Thami Luphoke, a provincial organiser for the ANC, all members of these units belong to the ANC. At times, however, according to Thami, members of these units become "dissidents" and do not want to take direction from the political structures in the area. Thami stated that the control mechanisms of these units is unclear and any control that historically did exist appears to be slowly disappearing.

The areas already documented have relatively visible, though poorly structured and guided, structures of youth dealing with "defense". There are in these areas definite structures which can broadly be called Self Defense Units or Self Protection Units. However, there are areas in Gauteng where such structures are far less tangible or distinct.

Pretoria

In Pretoria there appears to be no real defense structures to speak of. According to Kiba Kekane, a personnel officer at Get Ahead Foundation in Pretoria and an ANC executive member of the sub-region, SDUs in Pretoria are about "excitement". In Pretoria, there were no serious attacks on communities. Kiba believes that violence was centred on the East Rand whereas "Pretoria is seen as a safe place with no real need for structures defense units". Furthermore, the hostels in Pretoria are not Inkatha based. People who occupy the hostels in Pretoria are generally from the Northern Transvaal and the Cape Provinces; these hostels are seen to be part and parcel of the communities. Even the civic structures have included hostels in their forums and in any decision making. In Mamelodi township, defense is discussed, but there are no formal organisational structures. Youth take initiatives which may involve violence, but these are generally not coordinated efforts.

In the Pretoria area, defense units were not encouraged by political organisations. Any so-called SDUs in the area are deemed to be "self governed" and undermining of the political structures in the area. Political leadership have never been part of any defense units that may exist in Pretoria; when these formations did occur, they were spontaneous in nature. It is believed that if groupings in this area refer to themselves as SDUs, they are generally constituted of "tsotsi elements" who make use of the word SDU to legitimise their possession of arms. For Kiba, encouraging SDU formations in Pretoria is encouraging tsotsi phenomenon.

Alexandra Township

In this township, defense units as such were never formally set up by the ANC, as was the case in other areas such as the East Rand. Youth became involved in defense activities, particularly when informal settlements, such as Beirut, were attacked. In Alexandra, there is an executive portfolio in the local ANC branch to co-ordinate defense activities in the township. There are, according to Musi Ziqubu (an executive member of the ANC branch in Alexandra), about 30 people who are coordinated by this body. Musi, however, believes that most defense activities are organised through underground mechanisms which usually

occur as a result of an incident of violence. Musi stated that in Alexandra, he has never seen a women involved in defense activities.

There are in Alexandra also Self Protection Units which are primarily based in the hostels in the township. No-one could give any clear estimation as to how many people are part of these units. The relationship between the "SDU structure" and the SPU structure is very conflictive. According to Sandile, a Gauteng ANC organiser, "members are still killing each other and are unable to work together".

The Alexandra case (and to some extent the Pretoria case) in itself provides a number of implications for examining youth defense structures. While it is difficult to speak of A DEFENSE UNIT in the area, this does not mean that youth in Alexandra are not engaged in acts of "defense". In fact, youth have been at the forefront in fighting violent attacks on the community from opposing political parties throughout the nineties. Many youth, therefore, may perceive themselves as "defenders of the community" but are not necessarily part of a proper, discernible defense unit/structure.

The consequence of the above is that anyone trying to work with these youth or develop programmes dealing with youth who have been involved in para-military activities, need to make use of a conceptualisation which is broader than that of SDUs or SPUs. There is also a great danger in speaking about structures which may not necessarily exist. More creative mechanisms of referring to youth who are engaged in such activities should to be established. For example, it has been suggested that one refer to these youth as "militarised youth" or youth who are "victims and perpetrators of violence".

Age and Employment Status

Members of communities who have been involved in defense activities (whether formally part of defense structures or not) vary in ages. For the most part they are young males aged between 16 and 26. However, this is not uniform in all areas. In Soweto, for example, while most "defenders of the community" are said to be between the ages of 16 and 25, there are a number of elder men who have been engaged in defense activities. As was noted above, this was particularly true of train commuters who acted against train violence on their way to and from their places of employment. The majority of youth who participate in these activities from Soweto are school-going youth. Those who are not school-going are unemployed.

In Pretoria, youth who have been involved in defense activities are said to be largely in their early twenties. They are for the most part unemployed, and are perceived of as "anti-schooling". According to Kiba Kekane, this is "due to not having experienced proper schooling and due to the entire breakdown of schooling and families". In Alexandra, on the other hand, people involved in defense activities range in age from 18 to 50. However, the majority, according to Musi Ziqubu are in the age bracket between 18 to 22.

On the North East Rand, active members of defense units are aged between 17 and 30. This is similar to the Vaal area where the majority of youth in the Self Defense Units are in their twenties. In the Vaal, these youth are either school-going or unemployed. On the West Rand, according to commanders in the unit, members are between the ages of 18 and 40. However, the majority of these people are said to be between the ages of 30 and 40. They are mostly unemployed. However, "there are people who want to go to school but are unable to as a result of not having money; this includes people over the age of 18."

While the ages of these people differ from area to area, there are two patterns which emerge as relatively consistent in the Gauteng province. Firstly, the majority of these "community defenders" are in their early to mid twenties. They are for the most part unemployed. There are a small number of these young people who want to go back to school. In the main, these young people are desperate for employment opportunities and further training for job creation.

Educational Levels

Generally, the degree of formal education acquired by these young people is low. In Soweto, the majority of youth in defense structures are said to have no secondary schooling experience at all. A percentage of these youth, particularly in informal settlements, are in fact illiterate and would probably gain from Adult Basic Education Programmes. On the West Rand, a similar picture emerges. The majority of defense unit members have only primary school education. Youth in the area are currently trying to set up a night school. There are a minimal number of youth in this area who are unable to read or write.

On the East Rand, most members of Defense Units are said to have passed standard eight or nine. A few members are even said to have matric certification. Similarly in the Vaal, most members are said to have a standard eight or nine pass. Commanders interviewed were unaware of any members who had matric certification in the area. For the most part, however, these young people in the Vaal "are not keen to go back to school since they feel they are too old for the classroom and want to develop their lives as independent young adults". In Alexandra too, most young people in defense structures have some secondary education. However, as seems to be the case in most areas, there are people in Alexandra who have never been to school and are unable to read or write.

Aside from the Vaal area, most of these young people have a poor track record in terms of formal schooling. Most have had some level of secondary schooling, but a very small minority have achieved matric certification. The fact that in all areas there are young people in defense structures who are functionally illiterate is cause for concern. Furthermore, it should be noted that while many of these young people have a scarcity of formal educational experience, they have a number of important skills which need to be tapped. These include negotiating skills; communication skills; organisational skills; paramilitary training; and often insightful understandings of power relations and community needs and problems.

These informal educational achievements can only be gleaned through individual interaction with these young people. These skill should be utilised and further developed where possible. A narrow focus on formal educational achievements, while necessary for programme development, is short sighted and needs to be reconceptualised in order to benefit these young people and their communities.

Relationships with the South African Police Service

While the creation of Self Defense Units and other such structures is a phenomenon of the nineties, it should be reiterated that youth in the townships historically played a central role in defending their communities, particularly during the height of repression in South Africa in the eighties. On the one hand, they operated in both defending communities against the repressive agents of the state such as the police and the military. On the other hand, they took it upon themselves, together with other community structures such as street committees, to protect residents from perceived and actual criminals in the townships.

Youth in African townships were often responsible for identifying and punishing individuals or groupings in these areas for committing such crimes as theft, murder, and rape. In so doing, they often become alternative policing and justice systems. The controversy surrounding such activities is undeniable. However, these structures and activities were the result of a deep mistrust for the police and justice system. For the most part any alternative policing that took place during this period was done in a manner which was both antagonistic, and in direct opposition to the South African Police Force.

Since the unbannings of political organisations in February 1990, and consequently the negotiations process and the formation of a Government of National Unity, communities and police have been requested to develop co-operative working relationships. Political organisations urged defense units to disband and work collaboratively with the "new" **South African Police Service** (SAPS). The ANCYL in the Gauteng province, for example, has publicly stated that Defense Units should be disbanded completely. The ANC itself has argued that members of Self Defense Units should, as far as possible, become police reservists or form part of recognised and legitimate neighbourhood watches in their areas.

The newly conceived relationship between the police and the communities has proved to be exceptionally difficult for both parties concerned. Community Police Forums (CPFs) have been set up in local areas, primarily since the development of the Interim Constitution in 1993, to facilitate interaction between the police and the communities which they serve. CPFs have in fact been set up in most areas but are only functioning effectively where both the community and the police have taken "ownership" and are jointly controlled and managed.

Despite the creation of CPFs and the internal changes attempted by the SAPS, defense units continue to exist and operate in many areas of Gauteng, as we have seen. This is the

case for a number of reasons. Firstly, the existing police service does not have the capacity to absorb the numbers of youth involved in defense structures and activities into their reservists programme. Secondly, there is still suspicion and mistrust of the police amongst some of the defense structures. Thirdly, in some areas such as the Vaal, members of defense units believe that threats from other forces continue to prevail and, that the police service is not adequately dealing with these. Fourthly, the majority of these members are armed either with guns or traditional weapons (particularly in informal settlements and the hostels), and there is a reluctance to give up these arms given the perceived threats. Fifthly, for many of these youth, participation in these structures gives them a sense of identity and purpose in their daily lives.

Given the fact that these structures continue to exist, recognition has been conferred in many areas for the need to include defense structures as important community groupings within CPFs. However, the relationship between the police and SDUs vary from area to area; in some areas they work collaboratively and harmoniously together with an underlying assumption of the necessity for both organisations to exist for safety and security to prevail within local communities.

In the Far East Rand, for example, SDU members from an informal settlement, Ivory Park, work very closely with the police service in the area. In fact it was reported in the Star on 04/05/95 that SDU members in Ivory Park were responsible for identifying and arresting a number of car hijackers in the area and giving them over to the police. The police in this area have publicly lauded these youth for their contribution to combatting crime. Consequently, in this area a structure called the North East District Joint Structure has been set up which represents defense structures from all political parties, together with the police and political leaders. The objective of this joint structure is to initiate community policing between and within the various organisations/structures. Members of community organisations were nominated to enrol on a voluntary basis to serve as reservists in the SAPS. These selected individuals, it is hoped, will be trained as police reservists, and work for the police service as representatives of their respective structures in the community.

The case of the North East Rand, however, is not one which is generalisable to the province. There are still many areas where defense structures work in conflict with the police. In Katorus, for example, some members of SDUs have been embroiled in infighting in the area which has led to a number of deaths in Katlehong. What is even more alarming is that a number of these youth are themselves PAID reservists of the SAPS. They have also demanded (and received) firearms from the police service which they take home and are in their personal possession even when not on duty. The fact that these youth are armed members of the reservist programme of the SAPS and remain functional members of defense structures has led to a number of problems in the Katorus area.

According to Obed Bapela, spokesperson for the ANC in Gauteng, quoted in the *Sunday Times* on 06/05/95, there are two key causes which can be identified for this problem.

Firstly, these reservists follow lines of authority of the police while on duty, yet follow commands of the SDUs while off duty. The two lines of command at times conflict with one another. Secondly, the SDUs themselves are said to have been infiltrated by criminal elements in the area. The problem of criminal elements within youth defense structures is common in areas of Soweto and the Vaal; it is not unique to the Katorus area.

Furthermore, in some areas of Gauteng, policing is completely ineffective and inadequate. This has caused militarised youth to feel responsible for taking up the role of policing in its totality. In Orange Farm, an informal settlement in the Vaal, there is no police station at all. At night there is no police presence in the settlement. Consequently, these youth have taken it upon themselves to patrol the area and act with violent force when they deem this to be necessary. The role that these youth play in their local areas is seen as positive and necessary by many residents. However, this situation is not desirable for youth themselves (who are given no recognition in terms of status or financial remuneration), or to the police service who feel undermined.

The relationship between these youth and the police service is precarious. Not only do the police have a past record which is inauspicious and needs to be reckoned with, but many youth have come to see themselves as "defenders of the community". Being unemployed and having no real education and training experience, for the most part, this identity gives them a sense of importance and purpose in their communities. Depending on the nature of the local police in their areas, their role and identity can potentially be either recognised and valued, or sidelined and undermined. The relationship between the police and young defenders needs to be examined locally as a complex web which explores the nature and history of the police service; the role that these youth have historically played; the extent to which defense structures have been infiltrated by criminal elements; the leadership and organisation of these structures; and local perceptions of members of the community towards both the police and youth defense structures.

Goals and Aspirations of Militarised Youth

Initially when a research programme was undertaken to examine youth defense structures in Gauteng, there was an assumption that all members of these structures aimed at becoming members of the **South African Police Service**. It was assumed that since these youth had been involved in what could be termed "alternative policing" that the next logical step for their reintegration would be their inclusion in some way or the other into the police service. On conducting research in local areas with commanders of these structures, a different understanding of these youths' hopes for their own futures emerged.

A central theme in all areas was that these youth felt neglected by the new government. Reverend Dandala of the Central Methodist Mission who has worked extensively with

SDU/SPU structures on the East Rand noted the following in a memorandum sent to MEC Jessie Duarte in February 1995:

The cry for someone to care for them is critical. I believe that if such a person were from the Government structures it would help them not to feel that the status they enjoyed and the contribution they made are being ignored as worthless ... the crisis of having no immediate income is making itself severely felt in their predicament.

The reservist programme in the Katorus area has caused discontent toward the government in areas where such programmes have not been established. Youth in Soweto expressed the following "warning" in response to what they perceived as the ad-hoc response of the government to the problem of "militarised youth":

Youth and SDU members in Soweto have seen what has happened in the East Rand with regard to the police reservist training. They are angry that the focus was only on the East Rand. Soweto is currently seen as a neglected area. While Soweto has always been seen as the forefront of struggle, they are no longer a focus point and have been neglected in terms of resources and programmes of development. This appears to be making youth in Soweto angry at what could be called relative deprivation. We are sitting with a time bomb with regards to Soweto. The government is seen as acting as firefighters. They

react as opposed to act. In order for attention to be given to a particular area, dramatic action has to proceed this.

The sentiments expressed by reverend Dandala were echoed in all areas of Gauteng. The following represent the key concerns emanating from local areas:

1. While some members of these structures do want to become members of the police service, their main concern is that these youth want some form of employment that will generate income. As Kiba Kekane from Pretoria stated:

Many do not necessarily want to become part of the security forces. However, no alternative was given. People are not able think beyond their limits. Everything has become an issue of income.

A similar sentiment was expressed in the Soweto area:

The central issue that these members want is some form of money. Some have engaged in gangster activities as a basic means of generating income.

2. The dire need for employment was directly linked to the need for education and training programmes for these youth. SDU commanders in the Vaal stated in this regard that:

We want skills that at some point will lead to employment. Members want to further their vocational opportunities in some way or another. Any

course they do should have a certificate which is of value in terms of job seeking.

Similarly, Musi Ziqubu from Alexandra township stated:

SDU members require training. Some would like to become policemen while others simply want any form of employment they can get. Training should ultimately be aimed at employment. Many are interested in being trained as bricklayers, security company workers, or plumbers.

3. While many members of defense units felt that they were too old to go back to school, there are a number of these young people who would like an opportunity for formal education. As commanders from the West Rand stated:

We want to be educated and have the opportunity to go back to school. People want to further their studies.

The need for basic adult education for some youth in all areas was strongly conveyed. For example, SDU members in Alexandra stated that:

It would seem that for those youth who are illiterate, basic adult education would be the most appropriate starting point.

4. It was also recognised that many youth have been both perpetrators and victims of violence. These youth have consequently experienced severe trauma and are in need of psychological counselling. Jabu Dlamini stated the following of youth who have been involved in defense activities in the Katorus area:

Firstly, they need counselling with regard to trauma particularly since they were involved in very violent situations. They have seen people being killed and have killed people.

Reverend Dandala also expressed strong views in this regard:

Clearly a process aimed at helping communities to reach appropriate "closure" on the past (as opposed to the denial that we currently see) will need to operate at both a macro and a micro level. In communities where violence has been particularly protracted and intense, we can perhaps look at individualised solutions such as the establishment of individual and group counselling programmes. At a community level, it is my strong contention that community leaders should go through a programme aimed at providing basic counselling skills as well as information about information about the available social services and resources to which people can be referred.

Commanders in the Vaal area suggested that youth from defense units be trained in peer counselling and be assisted in setting up their own advice centres to assist the community.

5. In undertaking any work with these young people, it was stressed on numerous occasions that attention needs to be given to both the historical role that these youth have played in their communities, as well as their self-identities as "defenders of the community". As ANC Youth League executive members in Soweto stated:

The only reason why SDU members want to become part of the police is because they believe they have been doing police work for many years. Part of their identity is as defense workers.

Members of the defense units in the Far North East Rand believed that:

Many members of defense units want to become part of the police or military. This is because they are prepared to address crime and in doing so, risk their lives.

The sentiment from Kiba Kekane in Pretoria was similar:

These youth feel they have been involved in war activities. They see themselves as having being a part of military or policing structures.

This key identity held very dearly by young defenders, is central to their daily lives. They have, in fact, given of their time, energy, and even schooling opportunities for what they believe to be in the best interest of their communities. This has led to a resistance amongst

these youth to give up this central role that they believe themselves to have played both historically and at present. As Reverend Dandala notes:

Commanders are reluctant to give up the roles they have played within their communities. The requirement that they project themselves into a future in which they are not commanders implied the loss of this identity (and all that comes with it) with no clear sense of what might replace it. It seemed to me that this prospective loss also resonated with the multitude of losses that these men have already experienced What emerged was a sense that the contribution that they had made to the past (and the losses and sacrifices that this had required) was not recognised and that in the quest for a new future there was no opportunity to come to grips with and mourn the losses of the past.

While it is true that in some areas, young people who consider themselves as defenders of the community are currently involved in criminal activities, the reasons for this need to be explored. Furthermore, many of these young people have played a historically important role in securing their communities; this has to be acknowledged in any process of reconciliation. Given both the past role of these young people and their current life situations, "SDU bashing" and demands for disarming are unlikely to be successful or productive.

A proper look at these individuals' life histories, self-identities, and future prospects need to be explored. A combination of job creation; trauma counselling; education and training; and the possibility of formalised reservist police opportunities need to be developed. At the end of the day, these "defenders" have to be conceived of as young adults who wish to pursue normal lives where they are able to be productive, establish their own families, and deal constructively with their traumatic and deprived pasts. This needs to be done regardless of political affiliation, and organisational membership or status.

Provincial or National Problem

This paper has focused on the Gauteng province, since this was the basis for the research done by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. However, there is little doubt that the issues raised in Gauteng are "mimicked" in other provinces in South Africa. Research as to what is happening in other provinces needs to be executed to facilitate a proper national understanding of militarised youth in our country.

While a number of similarities will no doubt be evident in other provinces, there will also be peculiarities in different provinces as a result of their political and socio-economic make-up. From very scant research conducted by the Centre in the Western Cape, a slightly different picture emerged with regard to youth in defense structures. In this province, according to Prof. Wilfred Scharf of the Institute of Criminology at the University of the Cape Town, there are far less youth involved in such structures.

According to Scharf, even though there is a very high level of militancy in areas such as Nyanga, there are no real SDU structures. This, however, he says, does not mean that youth in the area are not engaged in "defense activities". He estimated that currently in the province, there are only about 300 youth who are formally part of defense structures. He believed that "there are certainly no more than 50 members of the core group of these structures. The rest only surface during action; action itself leads to the spreading of these units".

Prof. Scharf noted that there is a good relationship in the province between existing SDU structures; the police; and the community. SDUs in the Western Cape, he stated, have been particularly active in working against the activities of hit-squads. Like in the Gauteng province, most of these units have been trained by MK people, but are not necessarily accountable to the ANC structures. These units are not directed by provincial or national leadership or structures.

In the Western Cape there are currently processes underway which aim to integrate SDUs into the police service. According to Eldred de Klerk of the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR) in the Western Cape, this organisation was approached by the ANCYL in the province to integrate SDUs into the police service. Bilateral discussions between the police and the SDUs emerged and are being facilitated by the CCR together with the Urban Monitoring and Awareness Committee (UMAC).

However, this process has not been a smooth one as a result of the following reasons. Firstly, according to Eldred de Klerk, there is no clear method of deciding who should be included in these processes. Secondly, the Ministry of Safety and Security in the Western Cape has not been willing participate in this process. Thirdly, the **South African Police Service** are unable to deliver what they are promising i.e. that these units will be integrated into the police service in some form or another. This inability to meet promises is leading to

frustration on both the side of the SDUs and the police as well as the organisations who are trying to facilitate this relationship.

Fourthly, according to Prof. Scharf, the Ministry of Safety and Security in the Western Cape is not seen as legitimate by members of the defense units. It is seen as a continuation of the old police service. Consequently, some SDU members do not want to become full members of the police force as it exists currently. At the same time, the police service has not clearly articulated what they want to do with the SDUs or their capacity for any programmes. This problem is intensified by the fact that the police in the Western Cape are said to have low morale, poor capacity and a high turn-over rate.

In the Western Cape province itself, there is a low ratio of police to citizens. This has led to almost no formal policing in the townships. Consequently, within the communities, SDUs and civic structures have acquired a large degree of status. The Weekly Mail and Guardian (12/05/95) in fact reported in this regard that communities have taken over from an "impotent police force". The article reports that:

Do-it-yourself policing is spreading across the Cape Peninsula as communities organise themselves to do the tasks their understaffed police stations cannot. The Mitchell's Plain Neighbourhood Watch has 10 units in the sprawling dormitory town, with membership currently at 4000 and climbing steadily. Its 400 active members patrol the neighbourhoods in Mitchell's Plain every weekend, some of them armed and ready for any situation. The watch was launched in 1990, in response to local police's inability to deal with local crime.

The crisis in policing in the Western Cape has clearly led to civilians in the province fulfilling basic policing work. According to Stef Snel of UMAC, all the problems and developments in the Western Cape have given rise to a mushrooming of defense structures in the province. He believes that as a result of the problems in policing in the province, as well as these youths' experiences historically, defense activities are perceived as the first option for employment. However, he stated that this is not necessarily the desired option. Youth in

these structures, he believes, "are primarily concerned with getting jobs but there is no systematic programme in the province or country at large to assist this process".

Similarly, Eldred de Klerk asserted that "disillusioned youth are the greatest threat to safety and security in our country. This is a known fact but has not been made a priority by the government to date. This problem needs to be firmly placed on the national agenda".

In the Western Cape there seems to be a clear focus on attempting to integrate SDUs into the police structure. However, this has seemingly proven to be extremely difficult. Furthermore, while this is the case currently, it was stated categorically by Prof. Scharf that ultimately what these unit members want is respect, jobs, and status. This, of course, resonates with the basic demands been made by militarised youth in Gauteng.

"Alternative policing" by youth defense structures in the Western Cape is primarily the result largely of poor policing in the province, as well as impatience amongst the youth concerned regarding the slow pace at which processes of development are happening. Entering the police service, appears to be the most logical step forward for youth in this province who have historically, and continue, to play a key role in providing safety and security to their communities.

The quest to incorporate militarised youth in this province into the police service is likely to prove problematic. Firstly, there is almost no chance that the service will be able to absorb these young people into their organisational structure given the lack of resources in the police service itself. Secondly, the option of reservist training does not deal with the basic problem that most of these youth confront – that of unemployment and lack of purpose in their day-to-day lives.

Conclusion

There are many thousands of young people in Gauteng who perceive themselves to be responsible for defending their communities. Some of these are formally members of defense structures, but many of them are not. Their role in such activities arises primarily from the historical inadequacies and partisan nature of the police force in South Africa. These youth are generally armed; they have carried out acts of violence against perceived threats and enemies. They have also to a large extent been the victims of violence, particularly at the hands of the security forces.

These youth believe themselves to have played a central role in protecting their families and residents in their areas; in many instances they have forsaken their own basic needs in the interest of the broader community. They are consequently poorly educated and trained, and are generally unemployed. Their prospects for the future appear dismal if their basic needs are not attended to in the near future.

Aside from these youth presenting their own real needs and frustrations, the fact that they are armed, combined with the lack of leadership and guidance, is alarming. But, the fact that these youth perceive it as necessary to continue playing a policing role in their communities should alert the police service to its own inadequacies, and in some instances their continued image as "illegitimate". However, these youth, if not given the necessary attention, pose a great threat to safety and security in our country.

While they have in the past (and in some instances continue to do so currently) played a central "policing" role in their communities, these very activities could prove to be obstacles to formal policing in South Africa. In the Gauteng province, even where defense units work collaboratively with the police in community police forums, they constantly place on the agenda of their own plight and need for recognition. These youth have every right to raise their concerns and hopes for the future in these forums. However, it is unlikely given the current internal problems facing the SAPS that their grievances can be dealt with adequately by the police service or the Ministry of Safety and Security.

Militarised youth need to be targeted by the government across departments and ministries as a key grouping for develop and re-integration. Their needs include job creation; education and training; psychological services; and basic health and welfare. Concerned individuals, non government organisations, and the national government (in particular the RDP office) need to develop a comprehensive programme for dealing with all youth who are "militarised". Finally, any programme that is considered for these young people needs to take into account the self-identities of these youth as "defenders of the community" and give recognition to them for the key role they have played in our country. Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) should be utilised to develop and implement pilot developmental projects for militarised youth. Government should give their full support to any efforts made by NGOs in this regard. However, what cannot be denied is the fact that the government is the only institution which has the capacity to implement large scale and properly funded programmes for these young people.

In the final analysis, these youth are the real victims of apartheid; their current status and activities are a result of a history often not of their own making. It is their futures which are now at stake, and their future is the future of our society at large.