

Article

Legacies of political violence: an examination of political conflict in Mpumalanga Township, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa¹

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Introduction

Whenever political disagreements between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in the province of KwaZulu-Natal become too heated, some member of the provincial parliament threatens us with the possibilities of returning to the violent politics of the 1980s. This politics was characterised by violent political struggles between supporters of the ANC-aligned United Democratic Front (UDF) on the one hand, and the Zulu ethnic movement, Inkatha, on the other.

Tensions between Inkatha and community groups later affiliated to the UDF began to surface in the early 1980s. In the wake of the murder of local UDF leader Victoria Mxenge, these tensions deteriorated into open and violent conflict between Inkatha and protesting youth. Thereafter Inkatha seemed increasingly determined to rein in all opposition to its leadership and policies. Starting with schools, local leadership, on instruction from above, began demanding that youth declare their political affiliation. Those who refused were labelled as part of the opposition and chased away from the area, under threat of death. UDF-aligned youth refused to accept Inkatha's attempt to control the political terrain and the conflict soon turned bloody. Thousands were killed, yet more thousands became internal refugees fleeing their homes as political violence engulfed most of the province, from the large urban townships around Durban to small rural villages in the north and south of the province. The province became spatially divided between areas under control of Inkatha and others under control of the UDF/ANC and it was dangerous for someone unknown to those who lived in that area to enter (see Kentridge 1990, Minaar 1992, and Jeffery 1997, for

more detailed accounts of the political violence during this period). These no-go areas remained in force long after political violence had abated from the levels of intensity seen during the 1980s and early 1990s. Even the most recent local government elections were marked by areas that declared themselves for one or other political party; those from other parties were threatened to prevent them from campaigning there.

These threats (both the specific and the more general) remind us of the historical continuities in patterns of political contestation. Despite the relatively peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy at the level of national politics, there remain pockets of territory in which non-democratic and violent modes of political behaviour persist and where apartheid-era conflicts have not been resolved. If there is an area in which the compromises and bargains of the transitional period are most likely to unravel, it is KwaZulu-Natal. The potential for violence in this region reflects deep-rooted patterns of collective action that have not been easily re-channelled and contained by formal political structures and rules. To be sure, the threats and reminders of violence which simmer beneath the formal level of politics reveal the fragility of South African democracy. However, they also offer an opportunity to analyse the obstacles to building a democratic culture rather than simply democratic institutions. This exercise requires a fine-grained examination both of the ways in which local level political conflict articulated with provincial and national dynamics, and of the ways political violence then became socially rooted and validated at the local level.

In this paper I argue that violence is embedded in the complex relationships between, on the one hand, political interests, social groups and organisational forms, and on the other, the dynamics of gender and generation within particular communities. These relationships are explored through an investigation of local level political violence in Mpumalanga Township, located about half way between Pietermaritzburg and Durban, an area that was acutely enmeshed in political violence in the 1980s. This closely-focused case study provides an opportunity to examine continuities and shifts in the nature of violence, the ways in which conflicts played out on the larger regional political stage act to shape local-level interests and alliances, and the ways in which political identities are shaped by the relationships people build in the particular spaces of households and neighbourhoods.

Constructing the space of the township

Mpumalanga Township was established in 1968 as a result of two immediate imperatives – the need to provide accommodation for the workers and their families employed in the Hammarsdale border industry, and the desire to regulate the large ‘squatter’ population renting on African-owned freehold land.² Once the KwaZulu homeland was established in the early 1970s, direct control of the township administration was transferred to the newly formed homeland government. However, the state’s task was broader than establishing its authority through new forms of local administration. The creation of a new township enabled the state to direct and regulate social relations in the region in ways that it had not been able to do before. Despite this, as I discuss below, a range of prior identities, privileges and relationships of and between residents affected the state’s ability to do so effectively. The residents of the new township were not homogeneous in class status, although all were officially considered to be ethnically Zulu. The reorganisation of the social landscape would also serve to facilitate the remaking of people’s identities – as urban township dwellers with a loyalty to Ulundi³ – and to a particular kind of Zulu identity.

Mpumalanga was constructed as a model working class township underpinned by a vision of Zulu nuclear families headed by men who worked in local industries. Public and domestic space was carefully organised and regulated. The township was built between 1968 and 1972 and divided into four units. Houses were built to uniform four-room specifications and were available for rent but not ownership. The township itself was designed according to Department of Bantu Administration regulations and while its road and footpath systems might have facilitated easy access to transport routes and were seen by the authorities as ‘ideally suited to the Bantu’s way of life’,⁴ this set of spatial arrangements also allowed for easy surveillance and monitoring. Each unit was clearly defined and marked off by ring and collector roads. Units were divided into three super-blocks, with ‘well-defined’ open spaces forming the nucleus of each, interconnected by a series of pedestrian ways. These open spaces would, it was anticipated, ‘provide for recreation and social contacts with inhabitants’.⁵ In later years they would also serve as gathering places for groups of armed men prior to the launching of an attack. What was planned as Unit Five was cleared but was left undeveloped. Under its former name of Woody Glen the area was occupied by squatters during the late 1970s.⁶ From the beginning these

squatter residents had acrimonious relations with the Mpumalanga Township Council.

The removal of residents from former freehold areas to this township imposed upon social relations in the township, a particular brand of ethnicised patriarchal gender relations. In addition to ethnic criteria, the state established new gender rules of occupancy: having earlier decreed that only Zulus could be employed in Hammarsdale, it now specified that only male household heads formally employed in the burgeoning industrial area of Hammarsdale qualified for housing. In order to qualify for a house, couples had to produce their marriage certificate, while 'unmarried' parents and single women were obliged to depend on an employed son for access to housing. Many women in the *kholwa*⁷ (mission-educated Christian) area of Georgedale had been exempt from the provisions of the Natal Code⁸ and hence had been landowners and household heads in their own right. They now lost all rights to establish their own households, being obliged in some cases to accept the authority of their sons in order to secure a house in the new township. The provisions of the Natal Code also prevented them from acquiring business rights. The township was formally gazetted in 1972 and once the KwaZulu Homeland was established, direct control of the township passed from Pretoria to the KwaZulu capital Ulundi. A township council, under the control of the Department of Community Affairs in Ulundi, was established in 1976.

Edging towards political violence

To understand the roots of political violence in the KwaZulu-Natal province in the mid-1980s, it is necessary to grasp the ways in which national and regional political interests impacted on local configurations of power. In accordance with the apartheid state's homeland policy, the Zulu Territorial Authority was established in 1970. Its purpose was to co-ordinate the 196 tribal authorities in KwaZulu and to provide a higher tier of government (see Maré and Hamilton 1987). In 1972, in terms of the 1971 Bantu Homelands Constitution Act, KwaZulu was granted its own legislative assembly with its own constitution. The KwaZulu Legislative Assembly (KLA) was composed of members of the former Zulu Territorial Authority – the *amakhosi* and their representatives. Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, also leader of the present-day Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), headed the KLA. Buthelezi immediately went about constructing a discourse that closely knitted together the Zulu nation, Inkatha and the KwaZulu Homeland

(Maré and Hamilton 1987). Ethnic identities, access to services and resources, and political affiliation thus became closely intermeshed.

This intermeshing of identities and access was accelerated with the formation of Inkatha in March 1975, a strategy that many claim was tacitly approved by the ANC (see Maré and Hamilton 1987:77-78). It was formed as an exclusively Zulu organisation. From the beginning Inkatha's structures were intricately bound to those of the KLA (Maré and Hamilton 1987:83-88). The close and overlapping relationship between Inkatha and the KLA was to define Natal and KwaZulu politics. The homeland bureaucracy was to offer job prospects to those who would repay the emerging power elite with loyalty, respect and obedience. Membership of Inkatha was viewed as proof of this loyalty. As we have suggested elsewhere, 'the KLA and Inkatha withheld or provided services, jobs and tenders according to political loyalty' (Bonnin et al 1996:168). In addition, the embeddedness of Inkatha in apartheid-created institutions also meant that any opposition to those institutions was interpreted as opposition to Inkatha, the KwaZulu homeland (defined as the Zulu nation) and Buthelezi.

In the first few years of its existence, Inkatha was considered part of the anti-apartheid fold. Until the 1980s, the ANC regarded the issue of participation in state-created structures as a question of strategy not principle (Maylam 1991, Seekings 2000), and the formation of a strong movement in Natal that would draw on state resources was seen as a positive development. Buthelezi was treated as an ally by the ANC in exile. However, in 1979 the informal relationship between Inkatha and the ANC ended in acrimony (Maré and Hamilton 1987). Both the ANC and Inkatha became more outspoken in their criticism of the politics and position of the other. This power struggle filtered down to the local level of politics, fracturing communities that had until this point accommodated associational diversity. Throughout the province, not only political but civil society participation was increasingly determined by allegiance to one or other of the two main antagonists.

This process of fracturing is clearly evident in Mpumalanga Township, where the vibrant and diverse organisational life evident during the early 1980s was replaced by a narrowing of the organisational spectrum as membership of *all* organisations took on increasing political significance. Tensions between political organisations increased to the point where there was sporadic violence against identified members of other organisations. A range of political and civic organisations had become active in the township.

An Inkatha branch was established in Mpumalanga soon after the launching of Inkatha in 1975. Inkatha's membership mainly comprised older people but it also had a vibrant and strong youth component. Many residents had joined Inkatha to affirm their cultural identities. While Inkatha was the main political organisation in the township at the time, it was by no means the sole organisation. The Mpumalanga Residents Association (MPURA), for example, was launched by the local business community and attracted small traders who felt that Inkatha did not represent their interests. MPURA increasingly drew support from a wide range of residents across gender, age and class backgrounds. It was not affiliated to any political party although many MPURA members were also Inkatha members. It has been suggested that most MPURA members who joined Inkatha did so as a strategy to subdue Inkatha's animosity towards them (and vice versa) and relations between the two organisations were not cordial (Interview, Reverend X, April 25, 1999). Both organisations contested Township Council elections. Inkatha won the first election but in the 1981 elections MPURA won control of the Council.

A third important organisation in Mpumalanga in the early 1980s was *oQonda*.⁹ This was a community-based group active in enforcing law and order. *oQonda* was primarily composed of older men who made it their job to patrol the streets and ensure that crime did not thrive in Mpumalanga. Students, workers and women were well-organised in Mpumalanga and among these organisations too there were considerable political differences. The Congress of South African Students (Cosas), a national organisation aligned to the Congress movement, developed a presence at secondary schools in the township. A fourth important organisation was the Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo),¹⁰ which introduced black consciousness politics into Mpumalanga Township. A local branch was initiated in late 1982. Its membership was primarily male and youthful, drawn from all sections of Mpumalanga. Frequently school-based networks drew in the youngsters. The branch grew quickly; estimates of active paid-up members soon reached four hundred-odd plus a support-base of over a thousand. It was suggested to me that in time their support eclipsed that of Inkatha (Interview, Mqadi, August 1, 2000). Azapo launched its own student wing, the Azanian Student's Movement (Azasm) in 1983.

Many Mpumalanga residents worked in the Hammarsdale industrial area and were trade union members. Given the predominance of textile mills, most were members of the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW), an

affiliate of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu). Other large employers were the Rainbow Chicken factories at Cato Ridge, organised by another Fosatu affiliate, the Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union. Finally, in 1986 a branch of the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) was established in Mpumalanga (Interview, Zondo, March 25, 1999). NOW, a regional affiliate of the UDF that represented women, provided a platform for women to become involved in community life and politics.

Despite this wide range of organisations, in the early 1980s township politics appeared to be the preserve of older, primarily male residents. Men had initiated and participated in *oQonda*. The Inkatha leadership and that of MPURA consisted of older men. However within a few years this was to change. MPURA became defunct as many amongst its leadership took up new positions within the Township Council. Within Inkatha itself the older leadership was displaced by younger, more militant, men. A few prominent women had been active in MPURA and despite its demise these women retained the profile of community leaders, with some becoming involved in NOW. The group most marginalised across this organisational landscape was young women. The few who participated in Azapo meetings were usually the sisters or girlfriends of male members (Interview, Mqadi, August 1, 2000). This situation was common across youth politics countrywide (see Seekings 1993). In many organisations those who were most active were male and young.

While the presence of these different organisations attests to the active and vibrant political life extant in Mpumalanga Township, the relationships between them were complex. At one level they barely tolerated each other – they presented different ideologies and they clashed, sometimes violently. However, despite these clashes, there was also at the local level an atmosphere of relative tolerance and debate was possible. Not only did friendships cut across political affiliation but within the organisations, such friendships were accepted. Conflict (occasionally violent) and a level of tolerance coexisted in Mpumalanga in ways that were not necessarily unique, although other studies of youth and organisational politics suggest that friendships across organisations were not common at the time (see Carter 1991, Naidoo 1991, Seekings 1993).

But Mpumalanga Township could not remain isolated from the political tensions governing the rest of the country. The coexistence of conflict and tolerance, always a volatile balance, was stretched tighter and tighter as the

1980s progressed. Shifts in national and regional political dynamics raised the stakes at the local level. Inkatha tolerated the coexistence of other organisations as long as its own dominance was unthreatened. Losing the Township Council elections in 1981 to MPURA-backed candidates demonstrated that they did not have overwhelming support amongst the adults. Then it appeared they were also losing support amongst the youth, where jockeying for membership was most intense. Inkatha began to lose its youth membership, initially to Azapo and then to the Hammarsdale Youth Congress (Hayco). Moreover, all parties were facing the pressures ‘from outside’ – that is, they were under pressure to ‘deliver’ local constituencies to the regional political organisations. The regional Inkatha leadership was not comfortable with Azapo’s presence and growing support in Mpumalanga. They were even less happy with personal friendships across party divisions. Azapo’s national policy opposed collaboration with homeland leaders such as Buthelezi and local Azapo leaders were under pressure to demonstrate that their branches were not out of line with organisational policies (Interview, Mqadi, August 1, 2000). Moreover, the national leadership of both Azapo and the Charterists (ANC supporters and those subscribing to the non-racial and social democratic values of the Freedom Charter)¹¹ were in political competition and their public disparagement of each other’s positions (see Seekings 2000) also reverberated across extra-parliamentary politics at the national, regional and local levels.

These tensions heightened with the national launch of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in August 1983.¹² The formation of the UDF coalesced the majority of Natal-based organisations opposed to the homeland government under one organisational umbrella. This common opposition brought together residents’ associations, youth organisations and women’s organisations into a Congress-aligned movement. Nevertheless, in the early 1980s the UDF in Natal was weak, as was the Charterist tradition outside of the older townships surrounding Durban. The majority of UDF affiliates were from the Durban area (Seekings 2000:77) and according to Bonnin et al (1996:163) the UDF in Natal/Kwazulu was controlled by relatively few activists, most of whom were based in the Natal Indian Congress (NIC). The youth organisations that emerged in the wake of the UDF’s formation were active amongst the African urban youth. Their membership ‘gave [the UDF] a political presence and the illusion of vibrancy’ (Bonnin et al 1996:163) although the relationship between organisations based in Indian and African

areas was weak (Bonnin et al 1996, Seekings 2000). The Natal UDF organised a few high profile campaigns but most of its organisational energy was utilised in national campaigns and agendas and it did not develop a coherent grassroots approach to consolidate a base in Natal or KwaZulu. Despite this, Inkatha began to perceive the UDF as an increasing threat to its hegemony in the province.

Divisions in Mpumalanga were also solidifying. In October 1983 students at the University of Zululand who were opposed to Inkatha were attacked, leaving five dead and hundreds injured in what came to be known as the Ngoye Massacre. Inkatha members from Mpumalanga were apparently part of the group bussed to the university campus to attack the students (Interview, Ngubane, July 28, 2000). A commemoration service for those who had died in the massacre was organised by Reverend Ben Ngidi of the Apostolic Church in Mpumalanga's Unit One and the meeting was addressed by Archie Gumede, former ANC leader, Robben Island prisoner and regional chairperson of the UDF in Natal. This meeting introduced the UDF into the township in a very public way.

During 1984 and 1985 there was also heightened jostling for membership and increasing hostility between Azapo and Inkatha in Mpumalanga. These tensions, including the potential for violence, were publicly signalled at a series of public meetings organised by both Inkatha and Azapo. The result of each of these meetings was a shift in membership away from Inkatha towards Azapo (and later from Azapo to the UDF), frequently accompanied by either threats of or actual violence. On August 5, 1985, regional UDF leader Victoria Mxenge was murdered outside her home in Umlazi township, south of Durban.¹³ The response to her death was almost immediate; the youth took to the street protesting and attacking government buildings (see Sitas 1986). Within a few days the street protests, burning and looting had spread to most African townships around Durban. Inkatha marshalled its *amabutho* (age regiments) in order to restore law and order. In Mpumalanga township the Inkatha Youth leader, Nkehli, managed to convince the Council and business people that the violence and looting being experienced in Durban's townships could reach Mpumalanga. They allowed him to erect roadblocks at the entrance to the township. Cars with Durban registration plates were targeted and turned away.

Soon thereafter the Azapo leadership came under attack. They were assaulted and their homes were burnt. Azapo claimed that the names of their members appeared on a hit-list and they were being targeted by vigilantes

(*The Natal Witness*, September 11 and 13, 1985). Rumour had it that the Inkatha Youth leader, Nkehli, was behind the attacks. These attacks threw Azapo into crisis, and the organisation was not sure how to respond. Even though it was an organisation of young people, age influenced positions taken in the subsequent debate. The students within Azapo, members of Azasm, wanted to avenge the attacks. The leadership felt that it would be suicidal to engage Inkatha unless they had access to weapons. Finally, they decided to exercise restraint, unless Inkatha actually killed one of their members. In addition, they would retreat from the public life of the community. Nevertheless, relations between Inkatha and Azapo continued to deteriorate (Interview, Mqadi, August 1, 2000).¹⁴

In November 1985 Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, Chief Minister of the KwaZulu Homeland and President of Inkatha, approached the state for military support that would include an offensive or attacking capacity. Earlier that year, in the light of increasing support for the UDF, Inkatha had taken a decision ‘to turn the whole of KwaZulu and Natal into a “no-go area” for the UDF’ (TRC 1997b:8). This request was approved by the South African government’s State Security Council in February 1986. Attacks by local Inkatha members on the Azapo leadership in Mpumalanga continued. Approximately six houses were attacked with petrol-bombs (Interview, Mqadi, August 1, 2000). By early 1986 Inkatha was beginning to dominate public space in Mpumalanga. Azapo had decided not to confront their increasingly violent tactics and had withdrawn from the organisational terrain. The Township Council had acquiesced to Inkatha controlling the streets in the aftermath of Mxenge’s assassination. This signified the beginning of the reconstruction and redefinition of space in Mpumalanga.

This reconstruction was being driven by male youth: both the Inkatha-of-Nkehli (in effect the Inkatha Youth Brigade) and Azapo, as well as another newly formed organisation (the Hammarsdale Youth Congress or HAYCO), were all dominated by male youth. The decision of the Azapo leadership not to fight back had angered and alienated many of the younger student members. They looked towards the UDF and many joined the UDF-aligned Hammarsdale Youth Congress (Hayco), the formation of which in mid-1986 was a response to this situation. Youth activists associated with Congress politics had also fled Mpumalanga. Many were living in Umlazi Township but travelling daily by train to school in Mpumalanga. These train trips became the site of heated political debate where the launch of the new youth organisation was discussed (Interview, Mqadi, August 1, 2000).

Deciding that they would not let Inkatha go unchallenged, tensions between youth aligned to the UDF and those belonging to Inkatha increased, exacerbated by the rapid growth of Hayco, which drew not only disaffected Azapo members but also those from the Inkatha Youth Brigade (*The Weekly Mail*, February 27-March 5, 1987). One of Hayco's first activities was to organise a schools boycott demanding free stationery and books. The boycott lasted three months and at least one school was petrol-bombed (*Pace*, November 1988:63). Hayco had been formed by young militant male youth who, unlike the Azapo leadership, were not prepared to strategise a third-way with Inkatha. It is unclear as to whether their *raison d'être* was to fly the UDF flag or to take on Inkatha. Nevertheless, tensions escalated and positions hardened on both sides.

In mid-1986, Inkatha and the South African Defence Force implemented Operation Marion.¹⁵ In June of that year, two hundred men were secretly transported to Durban and flown to the Caprivi Strip in Namibia. They received training by the Special Operations component of Military Intelligence and the Special Forces. Here they were introduced to Dulaxolo Luthuli,¹⁶ initially their political commissar but later to become their military commander as well. All trainees received basic training. They were then divided into four operational groups – offensive, contra-mobilisation, defence and VIP protection – and they received specialised training accordingly. Inkatha's intention was not just to insert a military capacity into local communities. This capacity was also to be integrated into its existing political networks to bolster them. From recruitment to deployment the existing networks of patronage were strengthened. Militant Inkatha members, in many respects embryonic warlords, were used to select men on the ground and then infiltrate them back into the community. In Mpumalanga this task fell to Nkehli. Dulaxolo Luthuli was instructed to lead the fight against the UDF in Mpumalanga Township and it was he who supplied the trainees with arms and ammunition.

New dimensions of violence

The political violence that the population of KwaZulu-Natal witnessed and participated in from 1987 to the mid 1990s was fundamentally different to anything that had gone before. Prior to 1987 conflict in the region was not unknown. However, it had never reached this scale in terms of deaths, arson and rape. Neither had the geography of the countryside been politicised in such a way that violence served to 'reterritorialise' the province, turning

areas into no-go zones for supporters of one or the other political grouping. Furthermore, during this earlier phase young men were not the leading political actors of the day. After 1987 all this was to change.

The year 1987 marked the beginning of a major shift in both the form and character of the conflict in Mpumalanga Township. Political violence transformed and disrupted the township. The discussion that follows argues that the new forms of conflict can be grasped by deploying the concept of spatiality. This concept denotes something different from space and spatial form although it is related to these concepts. Although there is a connection with physical space, I am using the term spatiality to refer to a form of territoriality that is inscribed with meaning and produced through discourse. There are three spatialities – the body, the household and the neighbourhood – intruded upon by the violence. The discussion describes shifts in the spatialised form of the violence from an attack on individuals, to attacks on households, to the pursuit of territory. It also describes how as the violence articulated with age and gender, it entered new spatialities and drew a wider range of residents into its web.

The first spatiality entered by the political violence was that of the body. Attacks on the body were not necessarily new – witness the earlier attacks on Azapo members, and the alacrity with which *oQonda* beat any male youth suspected of criminal activity. However, what was notable from February 1987 onwards was the voracity of attacks against the body, the intention being to kill. The targets of these attacks were Hayco members, the perpetrators those Inkatha-aligned youth controlled by Zakhele Nkeli. In turn Hayco responded by killing known Inkatha members. Between February and March 1987 at least 13 Hayco and five Inkatha members were killed.¹⁷

Interviews and newspaper reports suggest that the schools were the first site of contestation. It was here that both sides tried to recruit members to their respective organisations. Boys were targeted to declare their political allegiance. As one young woman observed, ‘when the violence starts, they were dealing with boys, they just don’t recognise girls’ (Interview, MM, April 11, 1999:9). Later the schools served as conscription points for the armies of thugs who would carry out attacks, and they were easy picking grounds in the campaign to eliminate those of the opposing political group. Inkatha-linked groups invaded the schoolyards and classrooms, seeking ‘comrades’ and publicly kidnapping them and/or executing them. These attacks began to transform the nature of the conflict, the intention being to

kill those perceived as being politically ‘other’. The schools soon became a space that was unsafe for, and hence deserted by, boys.

Inkatha elders were not unconcerned at the situation of escalating violence amongst the youth and debated their response to the attacks by UDF-linked youth. One section of Inkatha under Zakhele Nkehli, known as *oTheleweni*,¹⁸ was propagating the violence but not all Inkatha members supported these actions, with many ordinary members reluctant to endorse a violent response. The parents of UDF supporting youth were also concerned and called community meetings. They wrote letters of complaint to the KwaZulu Government requesting an end to forced recruitment and asking that particular Inkatha officials, like Nkehli, be restrained from violating their rights (Interview focus group Mthembu, October 16, 1993:23).

In order to convince ordinary Inkatha members of the need for a violent response, the ‘Caprivi trainees’ under the command of Dulaxolo Luthuli embarked on a covert strategy to demonstrate the danger posed by the UDF group. By posing as UDF and attacking Inkatha-supporting families they hoped to convince the ‘Inkatha group’ of the need to fight the UDF (TRC 1997a:28). Through a combination of subterfuge and intimidation the ‘violent’ *oTheleweni*, led by warlords like Nkehli and youthful both in leadership and membership, were able to win the day and convince other Inkatha members of the need to eliminate the UDF. However, in the process a number of the older Inkatha members withdrew their active support from the organisation.

As a result of these attacks the Hayco leadership fled Mpumalanga, taking refuge in Clermont, one of the older townships of Durban and home to Archie Gumede, regional chairman of the UDF in Natal. Around mid-July Hayco members returned to Mpumalanga in order to defend their families from attack and the violence resumed with even greater ferocity. By August 1987 there were indications that the violence had moved into a new spatiality – no longer simply targeting individuals but also households. As such, the targets of the violence were no longer only young male UDF members. Youth now went looking for those they wanted to kill at their homes and neighbourhoods. The families of the targeted youth were seen to share their political affiliations. When they did not find the youth they wanted both the house and the other members of the household came under attack.

Young men brought home the political identities they had acquired in the schoolyard or street, and the entire household was judged to share it, making

all its members vulnerable to attack. As Beall et al (1987) found for the Durban townships at the time, for many older women their knowledge about the conflict and indeed their politicisation came through their role as mothers. In Mpumalanga, the intrusion of political stances held by the youth and brought into the domestic space of the home also unsettled the practice of *hlonipha*¹⁹ and patriarchal gender relations. Many parents, in particular fathers, were indignant that the youth should be defining the politics of the household. Interviewee TN2 explained the situation in her family. All except her elder brother supported Inkatha, which caused divisions amongst her family. They were forced to flee their home as other Inkatha supporters labelled them a UDF household and their house was fire-bombed. While her mother was inclined to support her elder son, her father was angry with him, saying: 'Don't do that because you sell us. They are going to kill you on your side' (Interview, TN2, March 18, 1999:8).

There were three distinctive features of these attacks. Firstly, sexual violence and rape against women became common. Most of those interviewed asserted rape was commonplace and described it thus:

... first they come to grab boys and leave the women and the children as the time goes on they change their minds. What they are doing now, they get in the house and grab the girls, not the women, they grab the girls and stay with the girls. Who is going to disturb? Who is going to stop because once you open your mouth you be found six feet underground. Once you open your mouth, you close your eyes. They take the girls and go with them to the camp. What's happening at the end of the day, most of the girls became pregnant, whenever that girls became pregnant, that guys told the girl if ever you say to your mother that I'm the cause of that rubbish you'll find yourself in hell. (Interview, NL1, April 9, 1999:6)

Second, theft often accompanied these attacks – alongside the attacks were demands for money. Third, there were opportunities for personal grudges to be settled. It became easy to deal with a 'problem' neighbour by labelling them UDF or Inkatha.

The streets also became dangerous and unsafe places. Walking along the streets meant being vulnerable to attack. Well-known Inkatha warlords cruised the streets in their familiar cars, identified by nicknames. While their purpose might have been to kill specific 'comrades', they also abducted girls for sex. Gender and age impacted on the ways in which different groups managed access to the increasingly unsafe space of the street. Groups of mostly male youth gathered on street corners, ready to

accost and attack those suspected of supporting the other party. They challenged the right of others to pass, refused them access, observed and challenged passers-by, and called on girls for sex. Boys on both sides of the political divide expected girls to be sexually available on demand. Reluctantly many girls acquiesced, concerned about the effect of a refusal on the safety of their family at home:

I was so scared to go outside ... I was so scared, because once we were getting outside, you were having a problem with the guys. Maybe they come to you and talk about things to you. Maybe some of them touch you, you see. And some often rape you. (Interview, TN1, March 27, 1999)

The street became reconstructed as a site of masculine power, whether it was an area controlled by the UDF or Inkatha (or the police who also moved across these spaces). Boys – whether Inkatha or UDF – patrolled and guarded the street, challenged strangers to declare their politics, and asserted their gender power by ‘proposing’ or abducting young women and raping them. As masculine protectors of this space they protected houses from attack, and guarded the integrity of women – albeit selectively – by escorting them to and from potentially unsafe places as well as running errands (Interview, MM, April 11, 1999:9-11).

Paradoxically, the withdrawal by UDF-aligned youths from these public spaces made them more vulnerable to attack. Many women described the period before UDF-aligned youths returned to take control of their neighbourhoods, as the time of greatest chaos and most frequent rape. In an attempt to protect their households from attacks and arson young men returned from ‘exile’. Groups of male youths located themselves in abandoned houses or moved into households near ‘the border’. Their job was to secure these boundaries, to watch out for and repulse attacks from Inkatha. Through these battles the violence began to redefine the geography of the area.

Violence crossed the gender boundary before the generational boundary although the two were sometimes linked. MM explained that when they slept away from their house, it was their granny who would go back to check if it was safe for the family to return (Interview, MM, April 11, 1999:7). But as political violence entered the space of the household and the street, the number of attacks on older people increased as well.

The escalation in political violence to a war-situation also saw the end of public governance in Mpumalanga Township. The adult men and women

who had been in the MPURA leadership and were then elected to the Mpumalanga Township Council were excised from shaping the public life of the community. Young men were now key in shaping the politics of the community and politics dominated every aspect of community life – public and private. As the violence increased in intensity township management disappeared along with the rule of law. The Township Council no longer met. Administrative responsibility was assumed by township superintendents, who invariably followed the politics of the unit in which they lived (Interview, Sishi, April 26, 1999:1-3).

During 1988 the spatiality of the political violence shifted once again. Instead of focussing on particular households, the objective of the different political groups turned to the capture of whole areas of territory. In the process there was an intensification of the violence and a wider range of players were drawn into it. Despite, or perhaps because of the use of the Caprivi trainees and *kitskonstabels* (instant constables), the UDF were winning the sympathies of the residents. Large areas of the township became known as UDF areas and as Inkatha saw it, they were now 'losing the war'.

As the spatiality of violence extended to the capturing of territory, the political identity of individuals and households become synonymous with the area in which they were located. Mpumalanga Township divided up as follows. Unit One North and sections of Unit Four and Unit Six, along with Woody Glen were Inkatha areas. To all those who lived there was ascribed the political identity of Inkatha. Unit One South, Unit Two South, Unit Three, sections of Unit Four and Unit Six, along with Geordedale, were controlled by the UDF. All those who lived there acquired this political identity. Thus the geographical area in which the individual lived, determined their political identity and, in a situation where the residential areas were being divided up between the parties, it was impossible to avoid being aligned with one or other political group.

This process, whereby political affiliation and hence identity became fixed according to residential area had implications for residents' lives. MN reiterated the point:

... you must have to join one of the parties. Not two of them. You must join the one ... the party of one north, the main party is Inkatha. Inkatha Freedom Party. At one north you must be joining Inkatha. If you ... live at one north, you say 'I'm ANC', you must leave there. They're going to fight you and to burn your house and to kill your family persons. Yes.

You must live there as you are Inkatha. You like it or you don't, you must live there as Inkatha. (Interview, MN, April 9, 1999:4)

She indicated that her family moved from Unit One South (a UDF area) to Unit One North (an Inkatha area) in 1987. Her mother was an Inkatha member and they moved 'because I'm safe when I'm in there'. From the other camp DM said that as the ANC became stronger in Geordedale so Inkatha supporters were forced to run away 'to the Inkatha place where Inkatha lives' (Interview, DM, April 6, 1999:6).

For many residents these divisions created secure enclaves of safer spaces:

There was still violence, but it was not the same, because ANC rules now. The ANC ruled there. So it was better because we were in school safely but we knew that we mustn't go [out] at half-past five or six o'clock, we must be at home at three or four o'clock. It was not safe because IFP came over our areas at night to find those people who are walking on the streets late and kill them. But it was safe during the day, like afternoon or morning or whatever. It was very safe. (Interview, MM, April 11, 1999:9)

Borders between UDF and Inkatha areas were rigidly enforced. If shops, schools or churches were out of the area, then they were out of bounds, with the boundaries being enforced by both sides. If the access road out of the township crossed another area, it was difficult to get to work or even to buy food. Eventually public transport, buses and taxis also stopped crossing the boundaries. People had to find another – usually longer – way around, run the risk of being killed by sneaking through, or else lose their jobs. Relations between neighbours who had been friendly for years were disrupted and they became bitter enemies. Families were torn apart. There are horror stories of brother shooting brother because one was Inkatha and the other UDF, but for many families it was the physical boundaries rather than conflicting personal loyalties that divided them. They were not able to attend funerals of family members killed on the other side of the boundary. Other family ceremonies were also inaccessible. Love affairs and friendships were broken (see Bonnin 1997 for further elaboration of these arguments). Everyday routines and tasks, such as washing clothes or sweeping the yard, were altered. However, it was not only daily routines that were affected by the violence; the rituals that marked other life cycles were also disrupted. Birthday parties, weddings, coming-of-age ceremonies were all indefinitely suspended as surviving the violence became an all-consuming preoccupation.

The economic consequences of the violence for household livelihoods were devastating. Breadwinners lost jobs or were killed. Household possessions were lost through looting, theft or arson. Household members fled their houses, only to find on their return that their house was now occupied by other people or it had been systematically stripped of doors, windows, roof-sheeting, light fittings and contents. Many households relied on informal activities to supplement formal sector income, for example selling of chickens, blankets and duvets, cold drinks and food. These activities ceased as it became too dangerous to pursue them. Additionally, the capital equipment needed for the success of these entrepreneurial activities, for example deep-freezes, was looted (see Bonnin 2001).

Late 1989 saw a number of major battles for the control of territory. Primarily initiated by Inkatha but occasionally by the comrades, these were all out attempts to oust the other groups from the territory they controlled. On November 30, 1989 Inkatha and UDF leaders in Mpumalanga signed a cease-fire agreement. This included the appointment of a monitoring committee to investigate any violation of the agreement and a commitment to further peace-talks. The agreement held with no reported incidents of violence until the end of January 1990. Thereafter, amid increasing incidents, the committee attempted to contain the violence until in April 1990 the township once again imploded with invasions of UDF areas. In the wake of these invasions large sections of the township became deserted as residents who had fled as refugees, did not return to their houses after the initial attacks. Slowly talks between the two sides began again. There were united efforts to isolate those associated with covert security force activity in the area (TRC 1997a, 1998). Residents began to return in early 1991 amid indications that the peace agreements were holding.

Conclusion

This discussion of political violence in Mpumalanga traces, at local level, the formation and activities of key political organisations involved in the struggle for power in the anticipated post-apartheid dispensation in KwaZulu-Natal. In the early 1980s it was possible for these organisations to co-exist despite tensions that might have existed between them nationally. The reason lay partly in the friendships that existed between members within the township, but mostly in Inkatha not feeling its hegemony was threatened by any of them. However, when Inkatha lost membership to Azapo, which then

began to dominate politics in Mpumalanga, the situation changed. It was not a situation that Inkatha (nationally) was prepared to tolerate and the organisation began to compel the local branch to take action. The action against Azapo had unexpected consequences. On the one hand, it resulted in the withdrawal of Azapo from the political space of Mpumalanga. On the other hand, it brought the UDF directly into Mpumalanga through the launch of Hayco, with the expressed intention of meeting Inkatha's violence head-on.

Inkatha was not just concerned with opposition in Mpumalanga but throughout the province and thus had approached the state for covert military assistance. This request resonated with sections within the apartheid regime and found support amongst the proponents of a counter-revolutionary warfare position. The state was prepared to assist in giving Inkatha covert military capacity in order to 'restore law and order' in the province. However, the impact on local politics and local residents was devastating as Inkatha used Operation Marion to bolster and strengthen its existing political networks. Individuals were both recruited and then re-infiltrated into areas using loyal subjects who had already shown they were not adverse to violent conflict, escalating local tensions into political violence.

Recourse to assistance from the state increased political bifurcation in Mpumalanga, linked in turn to territoriality. Once the Caprivi trainees were back in Mpumalanga, they used trickery and subterfuge to convince those Inkatha members opposed to violent conflict of its necessity. They also fed fire-power into the community and sabotaged peace and cease-fire attempts, assisting in shaping the form the violence took. The township quickly divided up into territories under the control of one or other political group. The spatial nature of political conflict was a crucial element in the formation of political identities, with individual residents, households and entire neighbourhoods firmly identifying 'the other' whom they did not simply oppose politically but hated. The intensity of emotion against 'the other' persisted well after a peace had been brokered and this (along with Operation Marion) contributed significantly to the intensity of sustained levels of violence in the area.

What then of the threats of a return to political violence? My analysis of the processes that gave rise to violent conflict in Mpumalanga Township suggests that political violence was the outcome of a number of articulations – regional political dynamics, state and covert military support as well as local dynamics. While none of these are determining, I would suggest that

covert military activities were crucial to increasing the intensity and longevity of the violence. Without such interventions it is unlikely that a civil war of such proportions (21,000 people, mostly Africans, killed in the course of the war with even more becoming internal refugees (Independent Projects Trust, cited in Krämer 2002:1) could engulf the province again.

Other legacies from the time have the potential to be more devastating. Mpumalanga has been hard-hit by the HIV/AIDS epidemic (see Mosoetsa 2003). The spiralling of this epidemic as well as the brutal gender relations of the post-1994 period need to be located within a modality of political violence that was sexualised. The incidence of rape of 'enemy' women, as well as the demands for sexual availability by 'boys' on the same side, created the conditions for a rampant spread of the virus. Furthermore, in the post-1994 period the economic devastation wrought on local communities by political violence has created fertile conditions for transactional sex, a trend not helped by the economic challenges of the post-apartheid era. Mpumalanga township is one of many KwaZulu-Natal townships where economic liberalisation post-1994 has had ruinous consequences. The majority of industries in the nearby Hammarsdale industrial area are in the clothing and textile sectors; two sectors that have been hard hit by trade liberalisation and World Trade Organisation agreements. The desperate economic situation faced by many Mpumalanga households is in part the result of associated trade liberalisation. However, it is linked to the legacy of political violence as well. Residents emerged into the post-1994 period economically depleted and with their human assets in shreds. As a result of political violence residents had lost jobs and schooling had been severely disrupted, ensuring youngsters had little hope of entering the labour market. Informal economic activities had collapsed and household resources were minimal. When the impact of trade liberalisation is overlaid on such an already grim social and economic situation, the effects are necessarily all the more devastating.

Notes

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2. The Methodist Church had bought the farms Woody Glen and Georgedale in the Shongweni/Hammarsdale area in 1862. The intention was to acquire land for African Christians (the *amakholwa*) from the Verulam area in order to establish a mission (see Laredo 1968). The Mission Society purchased the land with the intention that the *amakholwa* who settled there should, in return, purchase their land from the Missionary Society and thus acquire freehold rights along with the title deeds of the land.
3. Ulundi, the capital of the KwaZulu Homeland, was associated with Zulu ethnic rule.
4. Letter from Township Consulting Engineers Horne & Glasson to Secretary, Department of Bantu Administration and Development, March 25, 1970. National Archives of South Africa (hereafter SAB), Department of Bantu Administration and Development (hereafter BAD), Box 5051:166.
5. Letter from Township Consulting Engineers Horne & Glasson to Secretary, Department of Bantu Administration and Development, March 25, 1970. SAB, BAD, Box 5051:167.
6. The informal settlement was named Woody Glen or Inkandla in recognition of the old farm that once occupied the same ground.
7. *Kholwa* means 'believers'. Most Christian converts lived in communities on mission reserve land known as *kholwa* areas. In many of these areas residents formed themselves into tribes, *amakholwa*, and elected chiefs to govern them. Even if Georgedale women were not *kholwa* themselves, they were able to enter into contractual agreements in their own right.
8. The Natal Code of Bantu Law was a remnant of the colonial governor Shepstone's rules. It made most African women in Natal legal minors. Women falling under the code (all African women except the *amakholwa*) could not own or inherit property in their own right, control their earnings, enter into legal agreements or act as guardians of their children (Hassim 1990).
9. From the late 1970s *qonda*'s appeared in many townships in KwaZulu-Natal, composed of older men. The direct translation of the word *Qonda* is: 'be on the line' which can be understood to mean: 'stick to the rules' or 'people who want to ensure everything remains the same'. They played a role between that of cultural enforcer of tradition and *hloniphia* (respect), and vigilante, cleaning up the areas of petty criminals. Their almost simultaneous appearance in many townships throughout the province, and their links to township councillors led many to speculate that they had been organised by Inkatha. They were key in breaking the school boycotts of 1980 by forcing the children back to school. In 1986 members of the Durban Workers' Cultural Local developed and performed a play called *Qonda* about the problems associated with *qondas* (see Von Kotze 1988).

10. Azapo was a national political organisation, falling within the black consciousness tradition. It was founded in April 1978, the first organisation formed since the bannings of 'Black October' the previous year. They proclaimed their intention to focus on the black working class and saw trade unions as an instrument to 'redistribute power'. They recognised that some blacks would find it within their class interests to collaborate with the authorities (Lodge 1983:244-5).
11. The ten-point Freedom Charter was adopted by the ANC and its allies at the Congress of the People, affirming the right of the people to govern, to share in the country's wealth, to enjoy human rights and equality before the law and to enjoy equal access to education, housing and medical care.
12. The UDF was constituted as a broad front. It was loosely constituted thus allowing a range of organisations, including those that were non-political (for example church organisations) to affiliate. Its affiliates were diverse with no common policy although Charterist organisations were in the vanguard. They were bound simply by adherence to the struggle for a non-racial, unitary state and tactics of non-collaborationism (see Seeking 2000:49-51).
13. This has been marked as a significant event in the politics of KwaZulu-Natal. It is seen as a turning point in the periodisation of violent conflict in the province (see Minnaar 1992) and in the relationship between the UDF and Inkatha.
14. Against this background of rising tension, Mpumalanga residents working in the Hammarsdale textile factories challenged their union, the NUTW, to respond. At provincial level, accusations of being anti-Cosatu were levelled at the NUTW leadership. A split resulted (see Baskin 1991:113) and the splinter union, the Textile and Allied Workers Union (TAWU), had a strong support base in the Hammarsdale and Pinetown factories.
15. The South African Defence Force code name given to the covert military operation whereby Inkatha supporters were trained in counter-revolutionary warfare tactics.
16. Dulaxolo Luthuli, often known by his clan name Madlanduna, was born in the mission area of Georgedale, Mpumalanga. His family, related to the late Chief Albert Luthuli, was well-known for its ANC sympathies. His father, Reverend Jafta a travelling preacher, owned land in Georgedale and was a respected figure in the community. Luthuli was a member of the ANC and later its military wing Umkonto weSizwe (MK). He was trained in the Soviet Union, fought as part of MK and was later captured and sent to Robben Island. On his release from prison in the late 1970s he returned home, found his father had become a member of Inkatha and joined as well. In the early 1980s he considered himself to be both a member of the ANC and Inkatha. He claimed that discussions on Robben Island had not identified Inkatha as an enemy organisation to the ANC. (This view is in contradiction to that of Harry Gwala, who in the early

1970s was apparently warning workers to be suspicious of Inkatha and Zulu nationalist politics). Luthuli travelled, with his father, to Lesotho to make contact with the late Chris Hani, a leader of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and discuss the recruitment of members for MK. In 1985 he became an active member of Inkatha when he was approached to become political commissar of the para-military wing of Inkatha. He accompanied the two hundred recruits to Caprivi where they underwent six months' military training (including unconventional warfare). On their return he was asked to take on the position of commander as well as that of political commissar (TRC 1998).

17. These figures are arrived at through perusing newspaper reports at the time.
18. The direct translation of *thelweni* is 'throw down the cliff'.
19. *Hlonipha*, which means 'respect', is a cultural practice central to Zulu identity/ies. *Ukuhlonipha* refers to the practice of granting respect either linguistically or performatively on the basis of age or status. Children are brought up with a strong emphasis on *ukuhlonipha abadala* (respect for adults), and on non-confrontational ways of disagreeing with adults. It should be noted that in *isiZulu* there is no distinction between the concept of 'elderliness' and that of 'adulthood', thus even somebody one year older requires 'respect'. Furthermore, status does not only apply to social position but also to gender, all women were required to *hlonipha* all men (see Dlamini 1989:473-97).
20. In many cases names are not given in order to protect the identities of those participating. This is a selected list of interviews. Focus group interviews have been done with ten groups of older women from different sections of Mpumalanga Township; twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with young women living in various sections of Mpumalanga Township; and a number of key informant interviews have been conducted.

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Oral Interviews²⁰

- DM, young woman, Mpumalanga Township Geordedale, April 6, 1999, tape one.
- MM, young woman, Mpumalanga Township unit six, April 11, 1999, tape one.
- MN, young woman, Mpumalanga Township, unit one north, April 9, 1999, tape one.
- Mqadi (formerly Cele), Azapo chair Mpumalanga 1982-1986, August 1, 2000, tape one, two and three.
- Mthembu's Group, focus group, Mpumalanga Township unit three, second meeting, October 16, 1993, tape one.
- NL1, young woman, Mpumalanga Township unit one south, April 9, 1999, tape one.
- Ngubane, Azapo executive Mpumalanga, July 28, 2000, tapes one and two.
- Reverend X, former tenant in Geordedale and current Mpumalanga resident, Mpumalanga Township unit one north, April 25, 1999.
- Sishi, former Mayor Mpumalanga Township, Durban, April 26, 1999, tapes one and two.
- TN1, young woman, Mpumalanga Township unit four/Geordedale, March 27, 1999, tape one.
- TN2, young woman, Mpumalanga Township unit one north, March 18, 1999, tape one.
- Zondo, Organiser for the Natal Organisation of Women, March 25, 1999, tape one.