

BOIPATONG AND
AFTER: REFLECTIONS ON THE POLITICS OF
VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Mervyn E. Bennun
Department of Law
University of Exeter
Running head:

Abstract

An attempt is made to analyse the use of massacres and assassinations in South Africa, and to suggest how they are used together for political purposes despite being, apparently, characterised by the random choice of victims. By distinguishing between them for the purposes of political analysis, it is possible to understand that what appear to be random and motiveless acts of violence are in fact executed with a clear objective in mind.

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BOIPATONG AND AFTER: REFLECTIONS ON THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

The nature of the violence currently rampant in South African society needs to be examined in a political context if it is to be understood. An attempt will be made in this paper to make such an examination, using an elementary categorisation of the violence, and to point to some of its implications. The categories overlap, the categorisation as a whole may be thought to be somewhat rough and ready, and the conclusions broad; but it is suggested that the broad picture is defensible because it explains otherwise puzzling behaviour.

No apology is offered for the relative absence of officially published statistical material. Until the allegations of misconduct and responsibility against the police and army have been resolved, it is difficult to trust any statistical information they are responsible for. Some figures, however, are worth noting.

According to one account, there was a total of 11,764 murders committed between January and August 1991 according to officially-released statistics; of these, 4.62% were solved by the police and an offender faced a less than 10% chance of prosecution.¹ There is no WEEKLY MAIL, 22 - 28 November 1992.

agreement on how many of these deaths are politically related: during the period referred to, the police claimed that 806 were related to unrest or political violence, while the Human Rights Commission put the figure at 1,161.² 81 deaths are attributed to the police - presumably, these are deaths which the police acknowledge that they were responsible for, and not cases where they are alleged to have been responsible; it appears also that these were all politically-related cases.

Various independent unofficial agencies in South Africa have made an effort to compile information. The Human Rights Commission in particular publishes a 'Weekly Repression Report' and monthly Area Repression Reports:

These reports are drawn up by HRC researchers located in Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, from information culled from the Press, electronic media, police unrest reports, community organisations, church groups, trade unions, political organisations, monitoring groups, and others. In each incident reported the source references are quoted.³

²The figures are derived from tables prepared by the Human Rights Commission, *Statistical Summary: An Overview of Two Years of Destabilisation - July 1990 to June 1992*, Appendix 1, Figure 1.

³Coleman, M. (1992) *Political Violence #1 South Africa: an Overview of Two Years of Destabilisation July 1990 to June 1992*. Human Rights Commission: Johannesburg.

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One term the HRC uses, in particular, should be noted; it states that its figures "are compiled on the arbitrary premise that any incident in which ten or more people died should be classified as a massacre". In view of the prevailing conditions it seems highly unlikely that any more reliable basis for such figures will ever emerge. Any distortion in the data compiled from these sources certainly cannot be attributed to a want of objectivity on the part of the HRC; one should, however, bear in mind in view of what follows below that the editorial policy of the daily Press is not generally characterised by sympathy for the African National Congress and the organisations associated with it.

If one depicts the violence in terms which treat all that is happening as part of an undifferentiated whole, it is possible to attribute the killings to racial characteristics and ethnic disputes, so justifying the continued existence of apartheid. Thus, for example, addressing the United Nations Security Council in July 1962⁴ the South African Minister of Foreign Affairs said:

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⁴South Africa Communications Seches Press

Release, Statement by the South African Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. R.F. Botha, in the UN Security Council, 16 July 1962..

In the days of apartheid, a variety of differing political groups were united in their opposition to the policies of the day. Now that apartheid has gone, they are no longer united. Their historical, natural differences have come to the fore; differences which among other things, include both ideological and ethnic differences.

This, he explained, was where the causes of the violence lay. He made it clear that it would delay the "transformation process" involved in abolishing apartheid. The State President, Mr. De Klerk, has himself claimed on numerous occasions that ethnic rivalry underlies the conflict between the African National Congress and Inkatha.

If we accept such analyses then we must inevitably conclude that the majority of South Africans are incapable of participating in the processes of a democratic society, for only apartheid can preserve the peace.

Any examination of the violence currently disfiguring South Africa must relate it to the current political situation, and this essay is an attempt to do this. The account is in no way complete - the intention is to raise aspects for discussion and research and to draw attention to some of the issues which have emerged. Two topics in particular are mentioned but briefly: the incidence of attacks on rail commuters,

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and the importance of the numerous hostels as focal points of tension. The topics are of such importance that they merit far more detailed discussion than can be offered here.

Press images of political violence

In the first instance, this covers the highly specific and targeted violence against those political activists who either oppose the apartheid system or the present South African government; or against those who, as political activists, support the government or political organisations which align themselves with it. The first group consists principally of the rank and file of the membership, the leaders, and the structures of the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party, the Congress of South African Trades Unions (COSATU) and various other organisations including local civic organisations. The second group of victims is principally members of the Inkatha Freedom Party (hereafter, called Inkatha) led by Gatsha Buthe, which maintains close links with the ruling National Party.

The statistics derived as described above by the Human Rights Commission consistently suggest that both
5 See especially Segal, L. (1991) The Human Face of Violence: Hostel Dwellers Speak, Journal of Southern African Studies 18 190-231 for an important interview-based study; and the report (1992) Fortresses of Fear. Independent Board of Enquiry: Johannesburg.

the responsibility for and the burdens of the violence are unevenly borne as between Inkatha on the one hand and the African National Congress and other organisations associated with it on the other. The HRC figures suggest that between July 1990 and June 1992 Inkatha members, supporters, or elements were responsible for 34 (69%) massacres, and township residents and African National Congress supporters had a responsibility in 6 (12%). A further 3 (6%) were carried out by "vigilantes" which the HRC describes as being "certainly aligned with Inkatha."

Considering the massacres from an analysis of the victims, they were township residents in 36 (73%) of the cases; residents specifically identified as ANC supporters were additionally victims in 10 (20%). Inkatha members and supporters were victims in 9 (18%). The damage caused to the ANC, its members and supporters, and the organisations allied with it becomes even more striking when these killings which do not amount to a massacre are included. Bringing political assassinations into the accounting, between January 1990 and April 1992 the HRC recorded a total of 119. It observes that "Over 100 of these victims are clearly identifiable as belonging to the anti-apartheid camp,

either as officials or members of organisations or as family members, friends and associates caught in the firing line."6 The effects in some parts of the country have been devastating. The African National Congress has disclosed that in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging triangle (broadly, the densely-populated and industrialised area consisting of Johannesburg and the surrounding urban areas) the movement has been almost crippled through the destruction of the middle tier of the leadership and the creation of a reign of terror which prevents people from organising, attending meetings, and even walking in the streets at night.7 More recently, John Carlin8 describes the violence as having "wreaked havoc" on the African National Congress's organising ability. According to the HRC's figures, between July 1990 and June 1992 in the "PWV Triangle" alone there have been 40 massacres in which at least 1,200 people have died, and just under 60% of all politically-related deaths occurred there.

At first sight, much of the violence appears to be motiveless and irrational - typically, occurring within the townships and squatter camps. This is hinted at in 6Human Rights Commission, Press Statement No. 92/9, 21 May 1992.

7CAPE TIMES, 25 November, 1991.

8INDEPENDENT, 24 June, 1992.

the HRC's distinction between township residents and ANC supporters in the figures given above: one might understand why ANC members are targeted, but why people of no affiliation? The Press reports describe what appear to be organised and pre-planned attacks, often by groups who seem to have a degree of training, on what appear to be randomly-selected victims who are murdered in their homes or in the streets. In many cases the Press reports state that no clear links are claimed or can be established between the victims and any political organisations.

There is no regular one-to-one relationship between the reported affiliations of victims and attackers: there is no certainty that a report will enable one to conclude that it was an attack by people of an allegedly identifiable political or other affiliation, on others with a rival affiliation. This is not necessarily due to poor journalism; the news reports typically comment both on the frequently astonishing degree and scale of the violence, and the apparently "motiveless" or "irrational" or "pointless" or "meaningless" nature of the incident - a judgement based on the apparent lack of any coherent political pattern however indefensible.

For example, a weekly paper⁹ carried a report of an attack by gunmen on a house in Soweto in which nine people were shot dead by a group who burst into the house and opened fire at random. They were thought by one of the two survivors (the other was her one year old child) to be Inkatha supporters from a local hostel. The woman said that she could think of no reason why her home was singled out. It appears from the report that there was no trace of any political links involving those in the house. An African National Congress official blamed Inkatha and the police for the attack; the former denied responsibility, and the latter were reported to be investigating.¹⁰ The same news item reports also that in the same week in Soweto at least 17 people were killed in random attacks which commenced after an IFP rally on the Sunday.

Incidents often show a degree of planning and preparation - for example, in an attack on a train near Johannesburg it was reported that the attackers had boarded the train with their weapons hidden in umbrellas, which automatically triggered the metal detectors on the stations.¹¹ Attacks on train pas-

⁹SOUTH, 12-18 December, 1991.

¹⁰It is noticeable that there is an almost complete absence of published reports of the outcomes of such investigations, which must by now be many hundred in number.

¹¹CAPE TIMES, 19 November, 1991.

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sengers are in fact one of the most important manifestations of the violence being considered. According to one study, between July 1990 and April 1992 approximately 200 people were murdered and over 750 injured by groups of attackers using "traditional weapons" and firearms.¹² In January 1992 a special commission under the auspices of the Gonstone Commission was set up to probe train killings.

In train attacks and others, witnesses and survivors describe the assailants as appearing in groups - ten, twenty, and more are not uncommon; the use of vehicles - often, it is said, police or army vehicles; and the use of a variety of firearms and other weapons including grenades. The attackers are often said to have been wearing similar garb or similar disguises; and the onslaughts, judging by the Press reports, seem to have the precision of an attack by trained and disciplined men.

The massacre at Boipatong is an example of such an event. It must, however, be emphasised that - especially abroad - it has merely been particularly well-publicised. The Boipatong reports generally leave in some doubt the affiliations of the victims, while

¹²Memorandum Violence on Rail Commuters, prepared by Chedde Thompson and Haysom, Attorneys, Johannesburg; see, for a fuller account, (1992) Blood on the Tracks: a Special Report on Train Attacks. Independent Board of Inquiry: Johannesburg.

the attackers are reported to have been linked with a hostel characterised by its support for Inkatha.

Typically, when the Press analyses these events it sometimes has difficulty in coping with their political implications and content. For example, the GUARDIAN featured two analyses of 'the Boipatong massacre. The first, by Rian Malan and Denis Beckett¹³, explained the event as revenge for an atrocity by the African National Congress, which sought out and killed Inkatha members in Boipatong on the night of Saturday 13 June - four days before the Boipatong massacre itself. They attribute the "massacre of innocents" thereafter to an act of revenge by the residents of the kwaMadala hostel nearby where Zulu members of Inkatha live.

The second, by David Beresford¹⁴, suggests that the event was vengeance triggered instead by the killing of a white police commander in the area, and he points to the evidence that the massacre was facilitated by the use of security force vehicles and that white gunmen were said by witnesses to be amongst the killers.

It is, however, the thesis of this analysis that these two explanations, whether taken separately or together - for they are not mutually inconsistent - are

¹³GUARDIAN, 30 June, 1992.

¹⁴GUARDIAN, 3 July, 1992.

inadequate. For one thing, they both import an element of rationality which accounts of other similiar incidents cannot offer: if the prior incidents are true, then while what occurred subsequently cannot possibly be justified at least we would have an explanation why passions were aroused. This would make the Boipatong massacre unusuai, for generally the Press reports offer no such prior provocations to explain other massacres. Further, assuming that either or both of the two provocative incidents took place - and there is no reason to doubt that they did - the only link between them and the massacre which we are asked to accept followed as a result is that the victims lived in Boipatong. The attackers appear, from the Press reports seen, to have made no effort to target those actualiy responsible - mereiy being a township resident justified being the victim of a revenge attack by Zulu-speaking, Inkatha-supporting hostel dwellers. Note that Malan and Beckett describe the victims as "innocents".

If these explanations based on provocation are correct then they put in doubt the entire process of change in South Africa for they seem to assume the existence of deeplyurooted grounds for conflict based on ethnicity and tensions between Zulus and others.

They are thus consistent with and support the view of the South African Government as expressed by Mr. Botha. Thus an analysis that depends on the reasons given by the Minister, as quoted above, tends to support the preservation rather than the ending of apartheid. It is submitted here that accounts which do not locate the violence firmly in the social structures created by apartheid itself are at best incomplete and inadequate. We should ask whether the superficially inepricable other cases involving apparently random victims and the Boipatong massacre do not in fact have nmre similiarities than differences, and whether the "trigger" incidents in Boipatong merely formed the background, or even camouflage, for what might or would have happened anyway. Certainly, there is much evidence that the residents of the kwaMadala Hostel in Boipatong were involved in great vioience before the massacre of 17 June 1992 and a massacre by its inmates was anticipated.¹⁵ A further, and not inconsistent, analysis is that the prior killings in Boipatong mereiy supplied a pretext for what followed - a grotesque and disproportionate justification which, precisely because it was grotesque and disproportionate, made Boipatong, 15Vaal Council of Churches, Memorandum by Lawyers Representing the Vaal Counci? of Churches: "Efforts to Prevent the Boipatong Massacre"; 23 June, 1992.

in the judgment of those whose interests are served thereby, a suitable venue for yet another massacre. This suggests a degree of rationality and planning behind both the Boipatong massacre and similar events. The alternative is to invoke an image of "back on black" violence - mutually destructive conduct lacking even the thinnest of political motives, and occurring simply because it is part of the culture of black people to engage in it.

The Political Implications

There is evidence that an attempt is being made to use violence in lieu of law directly as a means of simple political control. The problem which this raises is to identify who is responsible.

Until recently, the South African government was able to rely on its massive security legislation, and in particular the Internal Security Act and Emergency Regulations, as its principal weapons against its political opponents. The ANC, the South African Communist Party, the Pan-African Congress, and other organisations were illegal, membership and support for their activities were serious crimes, and the very frequent use of prolonged detention and other severe administrative measures against individuals made virtually every form of resistance to the government dangerous indeed. However, in February 1990 it released

the leadership, including Nelson Mandela, and many activists and members of illegal organisations. It thus became necessary immediately to remove the prohibitions on the organisations and the administrative weapons if there was to be any prospect of constitutional negotiations proceeding. In addition, the Government was forced to respond to pressure to end the state of emergency. The effect has been to reduce in certain respects the availability of: various types of detention, criminalisation, and other techniques of disabling the opposition.

Some of the political implications of this were noted by the Goldstone Commission of Inquiry Regarding the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation (hereafter, referred to as the Goldstone Commission). In the Second Interim Report, Judge Goldstone drew attention to the role of the police when considering the causes of violence. He noted that the State had legalised the "large and predominantly Black-supported political organisations" and continued:

This must be seen against a background of a lawful and largely Government-supported Inkatha Freedom Party having been at war with a largely underground African National Congress and its front organisations. With rapid change the Government, again suddenly and unexpectedly,

resolved to negotiate in public and in private with organisations that were perceived, for good reason or bad, as the enemy of Inkatha, of White South Africans, and most important, of the police and army.¹⁶

The Interim Report specifically listed, as one of the causes of the violence,

A police force and army which, for many decades, have been the instruments of oppression by successive White governments in maintaining a society predicated on racial discrimination.¹⁷

Evidence to the effect that the South African Defence Force has trained members of Inkatha as far back as 1986 was presented to the Goldstone Commission by the South African organisation Lawyers for Human Rights.¹⁸ The organisation picked out the political objectives behind the formation and fostering of vigilantes and "hit squads":

Fundamental to the thinking underlying (this) strategy was the notion of contra_mobilisation
¹⁶Goldstone Commission of Inquiry Regarding the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation, Second Interim Report, para. 2.3.3.

¹⁷Goldstone Commission of Inquiry Regarding the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation, Second Interim Report, para. 2.3.2.

¹⁸Lawyers for Human Rights, Memorandum to the Goldstone Commission, March 1992.

involving the mobilisation of groups and sections of the population, their support and funding in order that such groups and persons should be in a position to attack targeted forces or. organisations such as SWAPO in Namibia and 'the African National Congress and the United Democratic Front and their allies in the Republic thereby relieving the security forces of much of the burden of containing such organisations.

The Human Rights Commission observed that assassination created an atmosphere of terror, and forced leaders into hiding from where they could not longer operate effectively. Pointing out that in every opinion poll conducted after February 1990 the African National Congress has recorded an average of at least 70% or more of black political support (as against, for example, an average of 1% for Inkatha), in a joint paper prepared for the Human Rights Commission and Community Agency for Social Enquiry the two organisations remark that -

...(T)he violence makes it extremely difficult for the African National Congress to translate its support into an organised membership. Being unable to respond to 03115 for defence, the African National Congress is in danger of appearing weak

and ineffectual in the eyes of township residents.¹⁹

So far as can be determined, the authorities have not denied that "hit-squads" exist. Following the disclosure that funds had been channelled through the South African Defence Force for training para-military "hit-squad" units, the SADF issued a statement that it was -

" not prepared to comment in any way on allegations and speculations about covert actions which were authorised and carried out in the national interest.²⁰

This policy - of refusal to comment - extends to individuals. In similar vein, allegations of complicity in murder have been made against named very senior officers - in some cases, in confessions by others involved with them - but there has been, up to the time of writing, absolute silence from both them and the State, and the officers have remained in post.²¹

¹⁹Everatt, D. and Sadek, S. (1992) The Reef

Violence: Tribal war or Total? Strategy? joint paper for the Community Agency for Social Enquiry and the Human Rights Commission: Johannesburg.

²⁰WEEKLY MAIL December 13-18, 1991.

²¹Perhaps the most extended and detailed is the biographical account and confession of Dirk Coetzee as researched and recounted by Pauw, J. (1991) In the Heart of the Whore. Southern Book Publishers: Halfway House. There have been allegations that during 1992 South African Police agents came to Britain, where Coetzee is in hiding, in a failed attempt to kill him. They were picked up by British police and expelled. Coetzee has said, explicitly, that he was the commander of the South African Police death squad and claims that

Evidence that the violence is being carried out according to some overall strategy is found when the timing of individual incidents is considered. The monthly frequency of incidents as collated by the Human Rights Commission appears to be random until one compares the numbers with the dates of important political developments in South Africa. There is, arguably, a dramatic rise when reports of bloodshed would cause the maximum harm to the opposition, and an equally dramatic drop when the image of the state, or of President De Klerk, or of other symbols or figures, would otherwise be harmed.

The correlation is nothing less than startling. For example, in July 1990 the reported number of politically-related deaths was approximately 50. The historic "Pretoria Minute" was signed the following month following a much-publicised meeting between the Government and the newly-unbanned anti-apartheid organisations and their released leadership including Nelson Mandela. The number of politically-related deaths rose that month to approximately 600. In September, during the start of the campaign by the African National Congress and other organisations for a constituent assembly, the figure fell to 356; but it was he and his men "had to" murder political and security opponents of the police and the government.

56 in October when President FW De Klerk visited Denmark and Ireland - which were at the forefront of the campaign in Europe for sanctions against South Africa.²²

The South African experience of assassination confirms that its sheer ugliness renders it an inadequate and inefficient means of exercising political control. It generates martyrs, and its high visibility causes problems for its perpetrators in international relations and hardens domestic resistance. The process, in fact, is self-defeating and discredits all responsible. However, when combined with the misery of more general violence assassination has proved to be more effective in damaging to the opposition in South Africa. What follows is an attempt to formulate a possible model which at least in part explains this process; but it must be emphasised that this is hypothetical for up to now there is no more than circumstantial evidence that any planning or conspiracy is involved. One may feel that the state in particular has been derelict in confronting the issues, but this is a

²²Graphical displays of the figures are provided in the joint paper prepared for the Community Agency for Social Enquiry and the Human Rights Commission by Everatt and Sadek, above, n. 19. The document remarks that the "peaks and troughs" of the violence "mirror the waxing and waning fortunes of the National Party government, as it seeks 'to negotiate a future South Africa which retains minority control of economic and political power."

different matter from an assertion that there is a coherent policy of replacing the mere criminalisation of political opposition with the physical elimination of it.

A Model for the Violence

The combined effect of assassinations and massacres is, arguably, to partially disguise the political nature of assassinations and to make them seem instead to be unfortunate incidents in what can be represented as some sort of "normal" environment of violence - exemplified by the speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs when he told the Security Council that the violence was caused by ethnic tensions between the ANC and Inkatha. Further, and - despite the apparent contradiction involved - simultaneously, it is sought to alienate the community from whom the assassinated victims are drawn by means of generalised violence. When the cost of associating with a targeted organisation can be measured in terms of becoming a victim of its political enemies, then hostility to that organisation can be engendered. The processes of camouflage, alienation, and provocation arising from the massacres combine with the obvious damage caused by assassinations, and the result is a picture of extensive violence which is sustained because it becomes self-perpetuating. In terms of this model, the

camouflage process operates through the random choice of victims - and the more numerous, the better. Currently with this process, the political context of what is happening can be emphasised by the perpetrators, making the penalty for political involvement high indeed. By attacking individuals at random within a community known to support a particular organisation, a form of collective punishment is imposed and people are terrorised into avoiding any support or contact with that which brings them such misery. It is not necessary for the victims to be members or supporters of the target organisation themselves; and paradoxically, as the South African experience seems to demonstrate, it is immaterial if the victims' conclusion that the attackers come from an organisation known to be hostile to the target organisation is erroneous; all that matters is that they should think that this is the case. It is thus not illogical that police officers, members of political organisations, or criminal gangs might pose as members of each other's structures or organisations if their objectives are to provoke violence and use terror and confusion. Frequently, reported connections between the killers and such organisations are either absent or vague and uncertain, and if made are hotly disputed. It is striking that the police, the African National Congress and

Inkatha all claim to have been impersonated by the perpetrators of the violence. Certainly, so far as 'the police are concerned, the formidable "Koevoet" ("Crowbar") unit, trained in precisely this sort of activity, has been transferred to, and is operational in, South Africa following the independence of Namibia where it was established and where it was engaged in "pseudo-operations" against SWAPO.²³

The processes of camouflage and intimidation described above are not necessarily in conflict with each other at all, and indeed can operate simultaneously even in the same incident. It all depends on what is suspected or known or disclosed to others - eye-witnesses, observers from the immediate community, and, through the Press, the outside world. The report of killings in Soweto quoted earlier illustrates clearly this ambiguous quality and its impact. For example, survivors and others within the community may know very clearly from their own information sources and experience what the true basis of the attack is - the terrorism motive is clear to them. But the Press does not always report such incidents fully.²³ For an outline of this and other recent policing issues and problems, see Cawthra, G., (1992) *South Africa's Police: From Police State to Democratic Policing?* Catholic Institute for International Relations: London.

or in such a way that this detail, if it happens, makes any sense at all. The killing then seems to be just another apparently "incomprehensible" incident in the overall pattern, and the camouflage effect operates all the time.

It is clear that it is intended from the outset that those who feel themselves to be exposed to such attacks will retaliate or act preemptively. Where there are hostels, for example, from which the killers are thought to have come then these, and their inmates, become targets. A self-sustaining cycle of terror develops. The International Commission of Jurists drew attention to this process in its analysis of the massacre at Trust Feeds in 1988 (one of the very few massacres that came to trial). The judge had concluded that the police officer in command had intended that everyone in the house where the killings took place should be killed. The ICJ report continues:

Either by mistake - as the judge suggested - or by design - part of a strategy to stir up revenge killings, as the prosecution suggested - all 11 victims were Inkatha supporters.

The incident was then covered up and the residents's association blamed for the attack. Members and supporters of the association could never set

foot in Trust Feed again and Inkatha took over the township 24

Allegations against the police and army have now reached such a pitch that it is inevitable that a proper investigation will eventually be mounted. Some of the claims are highly specific - the names of particular officers have been publicly linked with specific murders, for example - and there have been repeated disclosures of funding and organisation by the police of so-called "hit-squads" and other activities. Describing the allegations as amounting to a "maelstrom", a recent account²⁵ describes funds being given to Buthelezi to fund the training and deployment of a group which was used to assassinate ANC supporters. At the time of writing, there does not appear to have been the slightest effort to deny and refute many of the allegations.

Cawthra claims:

Far from being removed from politics, the police have been central to the storm of political violence that has accompanied South Africa's transition to democracy.... (Sections of the police have acted as a "third force", facilitating assassinations and massacres by anti-ANC forces

²⁴International Commission of Jurists, (1992) An Independent Survey of the Violence in South Africa.

²⁵GUARDIAN, 6 February, 1992.

that are designed to trigger cycles of violent retribution in black townships. They have aimed to weaken the ANC's organisational base, to raise the spectre of "black-oneblack" violence and to block progress towards a negotiated end to apartheid....26

The Goldstone Commission and the United Nations have together called for an investigation which would probe these matters. A partial enquiry, the Harms Commission, confirmed some fears but has been widely rejected as a whitewash owing to its very restricted terms. By contrast, the Goldstone Commission has no such limitations imposed by the Peace Accord, which set it up. The Accord states that the Commission's objectives include inquiring "into the phenomenon of public violence and intimidation in the Republic, the nature and causes thereof and what persons are involved therein".

Criminal Gangs

A worrying development is the involvement, if the allegations are well-founded, of what appear to be criminal gangs which initially appear to lack political objectives, but which are invoked for these purposes in a type of mercenarism. For example, there have been 26 Cawthra, G.

extensive reports and self-confessed criminal activity concerning a group known as the BTrack Cats,²⁷ including claims that the group was funded and protected by the police. In the town of Kroonstad, the Three Million Gang was described by a member as having been helped by police, local councillors, and white businessmen with transport, weapons, and food. In this person's affidavit details are given of an assassination in which he participated in the presence of the police who were called to the scene by the leader of the gang using a two-way radio.²⁸ Two leaders of a gang named "Saddam 5" in a township near Btoemfontein claimed at a mass meeting that the gang was formed and registered at the local police station. The station commander said he had no comment to make about the gang's allegations. The meeting appears to have been called by angry residents because of the gang's alleged involvement in violence, murder, and hooliganism.

Whites as Victims

The violence described above is a picture in which the victims are, for the purposes of this discussion, black. In fact, all parts of the community experience the violence and its related effects. If what is

²⁷GUARDIAN, 24 January, 1992.

²⁸NEW NATION, 27 September - 3 October, 1991.

described above reflects efforts to prevent change, it is interesting to note that it is possible also to use the white experience for the same purpose. Indeed, it is in the interests of any who oppose constitutional change that 317 parts of the community should feel threatened.

It is not difficult to find, in the white-directed Press, illustrations of how one can play on white fears. For example, the main story on the front page of a randomly-selected edition of the Afrikaans-language daily published in the Transvaal,²⁹ strongly pro-apartheid, carried an article which reads (translated from the Afrikaans):

Farmers in the (Orange) Free State are planning the "biggest emergency meeting yet" in the province to put an end to the plundering, robbery, and theft on farms and in the rural areas. The police and army are also going to be drawn into the discussions, which will take place in Bloemfontein

Dr. Pieter Gouws, the new president of the Free State Agricultural Union, says that a "low-level" ²⁹TRANSVALER, 13 December 1991; the edition was published on the date that I had chosen, just under a year earlier, to fly from Johannesburg to London by South African Airways, and was read because it was available on the jet.

war" is being waged against farmers, particularly those near squatter-camps, black towns, and Lesotho.

Many Free State (residents) now live in fear after numerous cases of murder, robbery and assault.

They say they are being threatened and everything they possess is being stolen (Note: the original uses the lurid idiom "rot en kaa7 gesteel").

The market value of farms has also declined sharply. In some districts farmers who have left their land cannot rent their farms

"There will have to be immediate talks with Lesotho", said Dr. Gouws. "The progressive conquest ('verowering') of white farms through theft is a fact."

Clocolan's District Farmers' Union has already this week consulted the disaster and emergency aid committee of the Free State Agricultural Union about the stealing, robbery, and attacks.

A memorandum has also been sent to the security forces.

Clearly, the message is that white safety can be assured only by apartheid.

Once we accept that the apparently irrational and motiveless violence discussed earlier might, in fact, be politically driven then it is not fanciful to ask whether "ordinary" crime and violence cannot be used for similar purposes. Certainly, if the allegations are correct, then corrupt police links with criminal gangs is established. The picture is deeply worrying.

Conclusions

One obvious question which must be considered is whether we are not looking at a pattern of senseless violence but dealing instead with deliberate policy prepared and executed out by those with power and resources. The answer is not easy. It is tempting to point to a state conspiracy for which the evidence seems to be abundant and mounting, but one political analysis casts doubt on the idea that the present government is content to follow a policy of violence which it may well have inherited from its predecessor. There has, for example, been a claim that the previous President, Mr. P.W. Botha, admitted that he had sanctioned the assassination of more than 1000 black activists,³⁰ and the government has duly ordered an investigation into this; but it is difficult to see how the South African government today can sustain its ³⁰Statement made by Mr. Jan van Eck, Member of the House of Assembly; INDEPENDENT, 28 May 1992.

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involvement in such policies if it hopes to participate in processes of change which it has been forced into by the sheer weight of the opposition, national and international, with which it has to contend. On the other hand, it is even harder to see how the government can sustain its denial of responsibility if it fails to respond to that evidence. It is worth noting the careful words of Judge Goidstone in a statement made at the preliminary hearing into the Boipatong massacre:

No evidence has been submitted to the commission which in any way justifies allegations of any direct complicity in or planning of current violence by the State President, any member of the Cabinet or any highly placed officer in the South African Police or Defence Force. But if such evidence is submitted to the Commission it will be thoroughly investigated.

This must create profound problems for the police in the light of the evidence already available. It must be extraordinarily difficult for the South African Police to maintain morale and discipline when there are conflicts created by such uncertainties. Cawthra,³¹ tracing 'the evolution of: policing ideology in recent years in South Africa, draws attention to the total and instantaneous reversal in its role and self-perceptions
³¹Cawthra, G., p. 3.

required from the beginning of 1990, when the reTease of NeTson MandeTa and the other Teaders, and the removaT of the bans on the ANC and other organisations, took pTace. President De KTerK, teTTing them that where one task they had was "a control function connected to a specific poTiticaT party", matters were now different:

You wiTT no Tonger be required to prevent peopTe from gathering to canvass support for their views. This is the poTiticaT arena and we want to take the poTice out of it. We don't want to use you any more to reach certain politicaT goaTs...

This must be a bewdeering, even a shocking, deveTopment to many serving police officers. The faiT-ure to deny cTaims that very senior, named, officers have ordered the murder of poTiticaT figures, and the voTume and detail of cTaims that the poTice continue to pTay a key roTe in the fomentation of vioTence, raise the question of whether Mr. De KTerK's instructions have been repudiated rather than heeded. The sociaT and poTiticaT conditions exist under which fearful corruption and criminaTity in the poTice might fl0urish.

There is no reason 'to think that ithe South African PoTice are immune from processes that have characterised other societies in a state of transition.

It woqu take TittTe effort to make the vicious circTe spin faster: to make "ordinary" assauTt and

killing, robbery, rape, burglary and theft - whether for gain or self-gratification - seem to be more "normal" than ever. Cawthra³² has drawn attention to the process whereby policing of what he calls "normal" crime was displaced during the States of Emergency between 1985 and 1990 by a preoccupation with "ideological criminals". He continues,

As a result, crime prevention, especially in black areas, has been neglected and it has risen dramatically in the 1990's. For example, murders in 1990 increased by over 30 per cent to 15,109, only some of which could be attributed to the political violence.

The violence is truly frightening, but it is not beyond our understanding and our ability to respond to it.

There are many implications arising from the above examination. Not the least is for urgent steps to be taken to secure proper policing. This paper is not the proper context for a discussion on whether the existing police can be reformed or whether it should be replaced by something wholly new. Either way, it hardly seems to be unreasonable to say that on this point alone action is urgent. In view of the cost in lives and suffering,

³²Cawthra, G.

one wonders how to express the matter emphatically enough.

The Peace Accord, drawn up in September 1991 and signed by the government, the National Party, the ANC and many other organisations, sets out a complex and far-reaching set of structures to address the violence. Its importance and potential cannot be overstated, and it deserves and must be given extended study and analysis. One of its most remarkable features is that it is a treaty between political and other organisations, the ruling party, and the State in which the latter binds itself to take important steps. The question of the extent to which the Accord is justiciable seems to have been sidestepped by 'the appointment, in his official capacity, of a senior judge to carry out functions defined by it. The Goldstone Commission is thus but one of its manifestations. It is a hopeful development that the United Nations has been drawn in to assist in its implementation.

For the South African people, the Accord is a most important matter. Properly applied by 'them, it must affect drastically not merely what they do but their accountability within the country as a whole.

The overall picture is thus, potentially, one that gives reason for hope for increasingly peaceful management of South Africa's problems.