

Tumi Moleke

Topic The violence in Natal the 1980's

Purpose To be presented to the GMF seminar on the UDF

The united democratic front (U DF) has since its inception been faced with a lot of opposition towards its ideology and its tactics. In various parts of the country the UDF had to cope with conservative personalities and organisations which were threatened by popular resistance of the 80's for which the UDF was largely responsible. Among an array of organisations that the UDF had to cope with, one organisation and personality towered above the rest and this is Gatsha-Buthlezi and his Inkatha Freedom Party in Kwazulu Natal. This paper examines the causes of the conflict between the two parties which has been responsible for the death of many people in the Natal province. The paper makes the assertion that the conflict was a result of a struggle by the two parties to have total political control over the region with one party relying on state machinery while the other party relying on mass appeal and popular forms of struggle. This struggle for territorial control was further exacerbated by socioeconomic factors thereby resulting in a cycle of violence characterised by attacks and counter - attacks. The validity of such an assertion can be established if we look at the political context within which the two parties came to co-exist, this would require of us to look at the origins of the two parties, their objectives and their means towards achieving this goals. It is hoped that by using this approach we might be able to discern a pattern of the violence that would enable us to draw conclusions about the conflict in the 80's.

The paper makes the assertion that the conflict was a result of a struggle by the two parties to have total political control over the region with one party relying on state machinery while the other party relying on mass appeal and popular forms of struggle. This struggle for territorial control was further exacerbated by socioeconomic factors thereby resulting in a cycle of violence characterised by attacks and counter - attacks. The validity of such an assertion can be established if we look at the political context within which the two parties came to co-exist, this would require of us to look at the origins of the two parties, their objectives and their means towards achieving this goals. It is hoped that by using this approach we might be able to discern a pattern of the violence that would enable us to draw conclusions about the conflict in the 80's.

Gatsha Buthelezi and the Inkatha Freedom Party

Inkatha was formed in 1928 by King Solomon Dinuzulu as a cultural movement with the aim of arousing public enthusiasm for the Zulu monarchy. (1) The organisation disappeared in the 30's and was resurrected in 1975. Since 1975 Inkatha has been synonymous with its leader and KwaZulu prime minister chief Gatsha Buthelezi a man who has won acclaim as the most controversial black politician in South Africa. Gatsha Buthelezi is the leader of a party that is responsible for violence in the country and yet

Linked to the introduction of Inkatha as a subject at all Kwazulu schools was the 1976 students uprisings during which stage Buthelezi sent mixed signals. On the one hand he condemned the violence used by the police while on the other hand he associated with the police by making statements intent on creating divisions within the black community calling on "responsible elements to set up vigilante groups to protect property against militants" (7).

When migrant workers rampaged through Soweto in an attempt to break a stay away called by students allegations went wild accusing Buthelezi for acting in cahoots with the police and inciting the hostel dwellers to act in a manner they did. This led to increasing bitterness

between Inkatha and the Black Consciousness movement.

When the Black Consciousness movement was banned in 1977, Inkatha sought to fill the political gap that remained as a result of the banning. However one issue that has always been

a source of controversy in Buthelezi's career was how he could portray himself as a leader of

the people and yet serving in an institution that is meant to further the oppression of his

people. As he battled during this stage to present himself as an authentic leader of the people

Buthelezi found that his attempts at stretching his influence beyond the borders of his bantustan being made difficult by rejection he received from the black consciousness movement and other local structures such as the the Committee of Ten. Things became more

humiliating for Buthelezi when he was chased away by youths at the funeral of PAC leader Robert Sobukwe in 1978. Facing a credibility crisis in the country particularly amongst large

sectors of the black population Buthelezi in what might have been an attempt at regaining some

credibility overstepped himself when he made public, discussions that he had with the ANC leadership in London which were suppose to be kept confidential and this led to a souring of relations between the two parties. At this stage Buthelezi found himself isolated from the liberation movement in South Africa and started his leanings towards the government. This created internal problems within Inkatha as some of its members condemned Buthelezi's cooperation with governments plan to "slightly increase the power of black local authorities as a complement to Bantustan strategy." (8) This culminated in a number of senior members resigning from Inkatha.

In mid 1980 Buthelezi had to cope with a wave of protest in the territory as students in the Natal KwaZulu area joined their counterparts in the rest of the country and embarked on class boycotts in protest against inferior education. The students were now challenging the authority of Buthelezi in his own backyard and he responded with force and repression., unleashing a reign of terror against the students and using vigilantes to break the school boycotts (9).

Elsewhere in the region conflict was also on the increase. Plans were announced to incorporate some townships into KwaZulu and this led to resistance by the inhabitants of this townships. Residents of Lamontville, Chesterville, Shakaville and Hambanathi came together to form the Joint Rent Action Committee to oppose incorporation into KwaZulu. Again Inkatha found themselves being the target for protest action by JORAC. In the wake of this protest against reincorporation, Inkatha again responded by using force in Lamontville and one of the organisers Harrison Dube was assassinated. There was a perceptible increase in

violence in these areas resulting in a lot of residents fleeing the township. The UDF was formed in 1983 and was made up of an amalgam of structures ranging from political organisations, such as the Natal Indian Congress, the Civics as in the Joint Rent Action Committee, the students organisations as well as the church organisations. One notable political actor in the region absent during the launch of the UDF was Gatsha Buthelezi and he lamented the fact that he was not invited. In their response the UDF leadership said that Buthelezi had proved himself to be an enemy of democracy and as a result not worthy of a place in the UDF. "My view is that the idea of telling Buthelezi that look you have been a political disappointment made him very angry." (10)

The mobilising strategy of the UDF was based around issues that affected people directly and people started challenging apartheid structures and their authority. In this regard Buthelezi and KwaZulu were no exception. Faced with the protest by people on the ground Buthelezi resorted to racist accusations directed largely at non-African leadership of the UDF. He resorted to the National Party discourse blaming external agitators and undermining the capability of the people to express their grievances against issues that affect their daily lives.

Not only was the UDF challenging Buthelezi's authority but it went further to recruit his supporters and undermining his position not only as a Bantustan leader but as an individual

who claim to represent the interest of the people and wanting to liberate them. One UDF spokesman made it clear that "the task of the Unions and other local mass organisations is to draw Inkatha members into struggles around issues which directly affect them. we know Inkatha is not interested in taking up issues through democratic mass struggle but nevertheless we must challenge it to demonstrate it's bankruptcy." (11).

The UDF being composed of a lot of structures meant that it had an increased capacity to challenge the might of Buthelezi. Unlike in earlier periods when protest was limited to a small sections such as students and Buthelezi's ability to crush the protests was made easier.

During the era of the UDF his resources were stretched as he struggled to undermine the United Democratic Front. One thing that is noticeable is that as the wave of protest increased so does the level of violence as the struggle for control was intensified. When the first state of emergency was declared Natal was not affected by the emergency partly because "Inkatha was seen to be in control." (12)

As Inkatha lost more support in the region Buthelezi started to resort to strengthening his base among Bantustan middle class. During the early 1980's a lot of young people from the Black Consciousness Movement joined the KwaZulu civil service and brought along with them the anti-Buthelezi sentiment of their period into the civil service as teachers and clerks slowly undermined the ideological monopoly that he had over the civil service. The

y

soon became a target of his threats as he pointed out the Kwazulu state cannot have in its employ "people who worked in cahoots with an organization that was went on discreting him and destroyed his property".(13)

An examination of the violence suggests that at a quantitative level the violence in Natal was different to the violence that occurred at other areas in the country. But at a qualitative level it was different in that certain specific phenomenon apply to the region which under investigation.

The struggle for liberation has during the era of the UDF spread to all areas of the country and in almost all parts of the country violence has been used to crush this opposition. In Natal KwaZulu however, the individual/personality linked to the internicine violence is a man who throughout his career has been intolerant of any opposition and having shown a reliance on vigilantism and other coercive forms to enforce support and compliance to his rule.

Throughout his career Buthelezi has sought to create an image of himself as a political saviour of the people. This he has tried to do it at two levels i.e the micro and macro levels.

At a micro level he had portrayed himself as a leader of the Zulu people and this reached high proportions when he became prime minister of Kwazulu. At a macro level he wanted to portray himself as a leader of the black masses in their struggle against apartheid. Buthelezi has always sought to link this two levels of his political involvement claiming that his status



as king of the Zulus provide him with access to political activity at this two levels."Both by hereditary right and by voluntary association, I was steeped into the struggle for liberation".

(14)

Certain events occurred at both levels that had a profound impact on Buthelezi's career. After

the establishment of the black consciousness movement in the 70's his ambivalent status in

the struggle for national liberation was put to question and this culminated in him being finally repudiated by the ANC in 1980. This events dealt his image at the macro level a severe blow and Buthelezi was left with the micro level of his political activity to survive and

firmly entrenching his position as a collaborator within the system.

When the UDF was formed the challenge was brought to his only area of political control and

very soon he found himself in the same position as other bantustan leaders

as he faced a wave of protest from the masses that became a feature of the politics of the

country after the UDF was formed. As in earlier instances when his authority was challenged

he resorted to force unleashing his vigilantes against the forces on the left which he claimed

had launched a total onslaught against Inkatha and his government. As the situation became

worse and he was loosing political ground he appealed for more support from the central government and received it when police stations falling under

Kwazulu were transferred to its jurisdiction. This would enable him to have increased capabilities to cope with the threat that the UDF had brought to the region and he felt that no

else would be capable enough to conduct the operation and declared himself minister of

police in Kwazulu. The activities of the Kwazulu police have always been source of controversy as evidenced in recent revelations by some of its former members who alleged that they have received training externally with the purpose of strengthening the Kwazulu police in their fight against the groups on the left an allegation that has been continuously denied by Buthelezi and the central government. In a speech he made in 1975 Buthelezi pointed out that:

" the whole system under which we are ruled as blacks is structured on violence. It is a form of violence that I cannot enter the post office at Nongoma through a door reserved for whites. The influx control regulations and pass laws are a form of violence. The whole colour bar system is based on violence and violence is used every day to enforce it". (15)

If the whole of the apartheid system under which black people are ruled is regulated and sustains itself through violent means, how could he exonerate himself from being the major perpetrator of violence against those who oppose the system which he serves to maintain and defend:

a system which he has acknowledged as a violent system both in its manifestations and its attempt at survival and reproduction.

This paper does not attempt to exonerate the UDF but based on the evidence that has been gathered the major cause of the violence in the region has to be located in its early

manifestations because as it progresses it is difficult to identify the causes as one party

blames the other and accusations and counter accusations become the order of the day.

Men

In the final analysis a society based on a political system that is intolerant of Opposition and

uses force and coercion to maintain and reproduce itself does not inculcate among its members the ethos

of tolerance. Such a society instead teaches its members that political Opposition is dealt with

through force and obliteration of those on the other side of political ideology. As for the

violence in Natal it was in no way different to the carnage that we saw throughout the country when the system was under attack from the mass movement and had to resort to

force and harassment to survive. The violence in Natal represented at a regional level what

was happening in the country however due to the fact that Buthelezi had managed to create an impression of himself as an anti apartheid activist this has enabled the violence to be seen

as something different hence views such as "black on black violence" as some opinion makers have tended to believe and blaming lack of political tolerance as the cause.

## References

- 1 Lodge T & Nasson B South Africa Time Running Out 1991
- 2 Mzala Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a double agenda
- 3 South African Institute Of Race Relations Survey 1975
- 4 Ibid
- 5 Ibid 1976
- 6 Davies & O Meara The struggle for South Africa Vol. 2
- 7 Ibid
- 8 Minnaar A Kwazulu/ Natal
- 9 Interview with Linda Zamh
- 10 Work In Progress 45 Nov/Dec 1986
- 11 Interview with Archie Gumede
- 12 Statement cited in Lodge & Nasson
- 13 Statement cited in Mzala