

Moderate Witness:
The English language press and liberal discourse
in militarized South Africa, 1976-1988
A case study of the *Natal Witness*

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Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	P 4
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	P 5
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	P 7
<i>Introduction</i>	P 9
<i>Chapter 1. Centrism defined? The Natal Witness's ambivalent approach to the Soweto uprisings</i>	P 41
<i>Chapter 2. Cold War Anxiety on both sides of the Border: Operation Reindeer, Operation Protea and conflicts closer to home</i>	P 74
<i>Chapter 3. 1987: Die Rooi Gevaar, Total Onslaught and Cuito Cuanavale</i>	P 112
<i>Chapter 4. Militarisation on the Doorstep: Conscription and the UDF-Inkatha war</i>	P 132
<i>Conclusion</i>	P 166

Abstract

This thesis investigates the English language press and its coverage of protest struggles and backlash, border wars and related militarisation of society in the critical years of South African political change between 1976 and 1988. The widespread reputation of Natal liberalism has led researchers to debate the extent to which the independent *Natal Witness* was a politically oppositional paper and raises interesting questions about the construction of liberalism itself as a political doctrine. I examine the *Natal Witness* as a case study - an English language newspaper based in the province that was then called Natal. In this study, I focus on key events related to violent political conflict to determine how this newspaper reported on the apartheid state's police response to protest, its military campaigns, perceived security threats to the nation, the issue of military conscription, and the increasingly violent provincial politics fought between the followers of the United Democratic front (UDF) and Inkatha. I describe the coverage of the *Witness* at length and show how various mediums (news articles, letters, and opinion pieces) and various sources conveyed events to its readership. I assess the content and its ambiguities to paint a complex and detailed picture of how discourses shifted with events and over time.

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List of Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
ANGOP	Angolan Press
ATASA	African Teachers Association of South Africa
AZAPO	Azania Peoples Organisation
CI	Christian Institute
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COSATU	Confederation of South African Trade Unions
ECC	End Conscription Campaign
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions.
FNLA	National Front for the Liberation of Angola
MPLA	Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NP	National Party
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
PAC	Pan African Congress
PFP	Progressive Federal Party
PLAN	Peoples Liberation Army of Namibia
RAF	Royal Air Force
SAAF	South African Air Force

SAAN	South African Associated Newspapers
SAAC	South African Council of Churches
SACBC	South African Bishops Conference
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAP	South African Police
SAPA	South African Press Association
SWAPO	South West Africa People's organisation
SWATF	South West African Territorial Force
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF	United Democratic Front
UN	United Nations
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
UP	United Party
US	United States

Introduction

This thesis investigates the English language press and its coverage of protest struggles and backlash, border wars and related militarization of society in the critical years of South African political change, between 1976 and 1988. It employs a case study of the *Natal Witness* to consider how contexts of political violence in this period were represented in news and opinion, and how these informed the discourses of political liberalism that were advanced in opposition to key governmental policies. The widespread reputation of Natal liberalism as an oppositional discourse has led researchers to debate the extent to which the independent *Natal Witness* was a politically oppositional paper and raises interesting questions about the construction of liberalism itself as a political doctrine. This thesis seeks to answer the question: How did contexts of political violence shape the public discourses of liberal political opinion in the medium of this Anglophone newspaper?

In this study, I focus on key events related to violent political conflict to determine how this newspaper reported on the apartheid state's police response to protest, its military campaigns, perceived security threats to the nation, the issue of military conscription, and the increasingly violent provincial politics between the followers of the United Democratic front (UDF) and the Zulu-identified movement, Inkatha.¹ Anglophone newspaper coverage of the South African border wars and other conflicts has been under-researched in South African historical studies. Research on media responses to political conflict and violence has largely focused on either the Afrikaans language nationalist press, or the alternative press in South Africa. Michael Graaf, for example, in his book *The Pro and Anti-conscription Press in South Africa* comments briefly on the English 'mainstream' response to the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) but his primary concern is with alternative and Afrikaner nationalist

¹ Inkatha was founded in 1975 by Mangosutho Buthelezi, a former member of the African National Congress (ANC) and chief of the homeland Kwa-Zulu, north of Natal. The Inkatha organisation was founded on the original aims of cultural Zulu Nationalism where it aimed to socially uplift Zulu speakers within South Africa as well as oppose the apartheid policies of the South African government. It took a moderate approach in its opposition towards apartheid choosing to oppose apartheid from within the system itself as well as negotiate reforms with the government. Inkatha was initially allies with the ANC until a breakaway resulted over various disagreements concerning the nature of opposition towards apartheid as well personality clashes between senior leaders of both organisations. The former partnership turned into a massive rivalry, which resulted in a full scale war between Inkatha and an ANC key ally, the UDF.

press coverage.² Another work, *Censorship of the press in South Africa during the Angolan war: a case study of news manipulation and suppression* by Graeme Addison addresses the censorship laws and embedded journalism of the South African Defence Force (SADF).³ Addison also briefly describes the response of the English language press to this situation. Keyan Tomaselli and Eric Louw focus on the militarization of the media in South Africa: they suggest that from 1976, the media adopted the hegemony of militarization, owing to the shift in the hegemony of the Nationalist Party government to a more militaristic mindset.⁴ Furthermore, they theorize that the media were used to prepare the national consciousness for conflict. Yet, none of these studies set out specifically to explore mainstream English language press coverage of South Africa's militarization during the period in question.

I will, to some extent, be engaging the much-debated question of whether (and to what sense) the English language press placed itself in an oppositional role towards the National Party government in this period. Media historians such as Ruth Tomaselli, Les Switzer and Eric Louw have associated liberalism with the English language press in South Africa. Science historian Saul Dubow connected liberalism with the English dominated institutions when he spoke about the success of liberalism's survival. "The remarkable resilience of many of these [liberal] institutions has perhaps less to do with individual moral heroism (though there were many instances of this) than with the fact of their deep imbedded ness in an Anglophone public culture that was itself never directly threatened by Afrikaner Nationalism."⁵ The construction and dissemination of Anglophone public culture was, in part, an effect of its print media. Newspapers, as the primary transmitter of news, opinion and debate surrounding current national and global events are, as theorized originally by Benedict Anderson⁶, the means through which political life is articulated and imagined.

² Michael Graaf. *The pro- and anti-conscription press in South Africa* (Durban: University of Natal, 1988)

³ Graeme Norris Addison. *Censorship of the press in South Africa during the Angolan war: a case study of news Manipulation and Suppression*. (MA. Thesis, Rhodes University, Grahamstown: 1988)

⁴ Tomaselli, Keyan and Eric Louw. *Militarization, Hegemony and the South African Media 1976-1986*. (Presented at the ASSA Conference, Durban: 1988)

⁵ Saul Dubow. *A commonwealth of knowledge: science, sensibility, and white South Africa, 1820-2000*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) pp 9-10.

⁶ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. (London: Verso, 1990)

While this is not a line of discussion I pursue in this research, it is worth mentioning that the nature of what constitutes an opposition or alternative press is currently a matter of public debate in South Africa, with the tabling of the Protection of Information Bill and the proposal for a media tribunal creating controversy this year (2010). Other national contexts produce some interesting bases for comparison that I wish to briefly note. One example is opposition and the promotion of democratic ideals by the press in Zimbabwe. Several writers point to the relevance of this comparative case study to my own research, given the country's recent history of authoritarianism and extreme government suppression of dissent under the Mugabe regime. In the same way as the apartheid South African government tried to suppress the press, the Mugabe regime does today.

Dumisani Moyo analyses the oppositional role of the *Daily News*, detailing its opposition to the authoritarianism of the Mugabe government as well as the complex nature of imagined identities.⁷ This work raises issues over the nature of liberalism and its various controversies, one that has similarities to my own research into the *Natal Witness*. The first issue I can note is the way liberals have seen their own identity as being a bulwark against authoritarianism. This is illustrated in a description of the *Daily News*, which “became a stringent critic of the Mugabe government, exposing corruption and holding the government accountable to its actions”⁸. The other issue raised was that of social class and a Western connection being associated with racialised liberalism. In particular, the issue of foreign shareholders, she points out, was a controversial issue in the country. This led the *Daily News* to become rhetorically identified with colonialism and the suppression under British Rhodesia. Stanford D. Mukasa in the *African Quarterly* also touches on this case, and the issue of foreign ownership, noting that 60 percent of the shares belonged to foreign companies.⁹ As I will note in my analysis, Natal liberalism unabashedly looked to Western social values as hegemonic confirmation of its position in relation to governmental and anti-colonial strategies, and has (more recently) similarly been accused of promoting foreign ideas in an African context. The assumed readership of the *Natal Witness*, evidenced in the content I examine, is an Anglophone (white) middle class in Natal.

⁷ Dumisani Moyo. ‘The ‘independent’ press and the fight for democracy in Zimbabwe: A critical analysis of the banned Daily news’ (*Westminster Papers in education Vol 7*. London, 2002)

⁸ Dumisani Moyo. ‘The ‘independent’ press and the fight for democracy in Zimbabwe: A critical analysis of the banned Daily news’

⁹ Stanford D. Mukasa. ‘Politics and press in Zimbabwe’ (*African Studies Quarterly*, 2007) URL <http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v7/v7i2a9.html> accessed on 8 November 2010.

Mukasa raises another issue: that of the social class interests of the Zimbabwean Independent press. He asserts that independent newspapers, because of their linkages to big businesses, do not give adequate coverage to workers' rights. "Their orientation towards the business community means that while these papers sometimes have a no-holds-barred attitude in the way they criticize government, they tend to be more restrained in advocating workers' rights at the expense of business."¹⁰ He also views the independent press, along with the government press, as out of touch with people in rural areas. Similar criticisms have been levelled at the South African English language newspapers during the militarized periods of the apartheid era, particularly in the 1980s. This is also interesting when you compare it to the *Natal Witness* whose ownership, though comparative small, was still linked to a capitalist social class.

An aim in this study is to consider the public articulation of Natal liberal imagination in relation to key historical events in South Africa. What vision of political change was envisioned through reports and editorials in the newspaper, the *Natal Witness*? What themes emerged in the vocabulary of reporting on violence of various kinds? How were these related to regional issues, for example, conscription? There are some good reasons to explore these questions in relation to the province that was in this period called Natal. Natal was the province where the unofficial war between Inkatha and the UDF was most deadly — the only province that experienced regular and devastating violence during South Africa's 'peaceful revolution'. It was also the site of the KwaZulu-Natal Indaba, which looked towards an alliance between white capital and black politics. Natal was the only province in which the National Party (NP) lost elections. Its regional identity has at times been a source of separatism. Saul Dubow emphasized that "in Natal the possibility of secession was to be seriously, albeit unrealistically, entertained in the first half of the twentieth century."¹¹ Natal claims an important role in white liberal history, and Paul Rich has described how the region became a power base for the development of the politics of social welfare in the 1920s.¹² In addition, D.A Moffatt, in her MA thesis, asserts that the Natal section of the

¹⁰ Stanford D. Mukasa. 'Politics and press in Zimbabwe'

¹¹ Saul Dubow. *A commonwealth of knowledge: science, sensibility, and white South Africa, 1820-2000*, p 193.

¹² Paul Rich. *White power and the liberal conscience: racial segregation and South African liberalism* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1984)

Liberal Party of South Africa played a principal role in the party, having a major influence in the direction of its policies.¹³

Yet, there has been only scant research on the Natal press as a cultural or political organ or a vector of liberal political views. A confirmation of this point can be seen in the work of a prominent analyst of the South African press, Les Switzer. In his several studies on the South African press, Switzer's focus on the middle-to-late 20th century press in Natal, especially the English language press has been minimal.¹⁴ This is not to say that the press in Natal has been neglected as a subject of research. Many biographies have been written, including some specifically pertaining to the *Witness*.¹⁵ For example, in 1996, Simon Haw published an overview of the *Natal Witness* commissioned for its 150th anniversary, from its beginnings in 1846. He documented the newspaper's early growth under Dennis Buchanan and argued that it maintained an uneasy relationship with the Natal colonial government in the 1850s. He briefly describes the *Natal Witness*'s support for the British forces in both the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 as well as the South African War from 1899 to 1902, as well as for South African participation in both World Wars. That the *Natal Witness* was consistent in its support of the British cause through key national and international conflicts is relevant to my study. A communalist or English ethnic element in the newspaper appears to remain relevant in the period I will be focussing on, though the picture is far

¹³ Debra Moffatt. *From 'conscience politics' to the battlefields of political activism: The Liberal Party in Natal, 1953 to 1968*. (MA Thesis, Durban, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal: 1999)

¹⁴ Les Switzer. *Media studies and the critique of development* (Durban: University of Natal, 1987); *Media and dependency in South Africa a case study of the Press and the Ciskei homeland*. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University, 1985); *Politics and communication in the Ciskei, an African Homeland in South Africa: a case study of the Press and the Ciskei "Homeland"*. (Grahamstown: Rhodes University, 1979), *South Africa's resistance press: alternative voices in the last generation under apartheid*. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University, 1997); *South Africa's alternative press: voices of protest and resistance, 1880s-1960*. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University, 1997); *The Black press in South Africa and Lesotho: a descriptive bibliographic guide to African, Colored, and Indian newspapers, newsletters, and magazines, 1836-1976*. (Boston: Hall, 1979)

¹⁵ Maria Arcache. *An assessment of the role played by the English Press (especially the Natal Mercury) in Natal during 1948*. (Honours Thesis, University of Natal, Durban: 1992); Duncan Du Bois. *The 'Mercury' and the Indian question in Natal, 1860-1897*. (MA Thesis, University of Natal, Durban: 1989); Simon Haw. *Bearing Witness*; K.M Kilfoil. *The Natal Witness and the confederation issue in the period 1874- 1881*. (Honours Thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg: 1972); Mary Lawhon. *Environmental issues in the South African media: a case study of the Natal Witness*. (Masters Thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg: 2004); Balasundram Naidoo. *David Dale Buchanan as editor of The Natal Witness 1846 to 1856*. (Masters Thesis: Durban-Westville University: 1972.) Terry Wilks. *For the love of Natal: the life and times of The Natal Mercury, 1852- 1977*. (Pinetown: Robinson, 1977) Christopher Coldrey. *Open testimony: an introduction to the Natal Witness, South Africa's oldest newspaper*. (Pietermaritzburg: Natal Witness, 1972)

from simple particularly in the early half of the 20th century. For example, reflecting on the views of George Harold Caplin, an editor during the Second World War, Haw writes, “He [Caplin] remained a staunch supporter of Afrikaner aspirations, the realisation of what he saw as an essential factor in the creation of that Broad South Africanism, which was in his view at the heart of the United Party.”¹⁶ In this quote, Caplin is identified as a key supporter of South Africanism, which advocated ethnic harmony between English and Afrikaners. Haw infers that this was part of what predisposed the *Natal Witness* to be in opposition towards the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and its apartheid platform.

During the period of 1948 to 1988, Haw saw the *Natal Witness* as oppositional to apartheid. In the period that is researched in my study, the 1970s and 1980s, the *Natal Witness* is demonstrated by Haw to have held various positions. With regard to the Rhodesian civil war close to the South African border, Haw asserted that, “the *Witness* tended to follow popular opinion in South Africa by supporting Smith’s beleaguered regime.”¹⁷ Whose ‘popular opinion’ is referred to here is unclear but the statement shows a context of anxiety about the South African border situation among English-speaking *Witness* readers. Smith’s regime, with its large population of people of English ancestry, was seen by many as a buffer against insurgent movements closer to home. Haw dedicates only a page of analysis to the *Natal Witness*’s coverage of the Soweto uprisings. According to Haw, the response of the *Witness* to the conflict “showed scant sympathy for the government’s position on the violence.”¹⁸ The *Natal Witness* rejected the government line that the cause of the violence was “agitators” and argued that government policy was the real cause of the violence. Overall, in his analysis, Haw portrays a *Natal Witness* strongly opposed to government policies. However, he does not scrutinize the nature of the opposition and fails to analyze the contradictions in the *Witness* as a producer of public culture. I would argue that a fuller understanding of white racial hegemony during the apartheid era demands that Natal’s liberalism be scrutinized through the crucible of militarization and racialised violence of the 1970s and 1980s. My study examines a key part of this issue, by documenting how the militarization of South African society was portrayed and related through the public discourses of the English language news media in the ‘liberal’ province of Natal.

¹⁶ Simon Haw. *Bearing witness: the Natal Witness 1846-1996*. (Pietermaritzburg: Natal Witness, 1996) p 226.

¹⁷ Simon Haw. *Bearing witness: the Natal Witness 1846-1996*, p 259.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p 301.

The *Natal Witness* had a significant and growing readership in the period in which my study is situated, centred as it was in the provincial capital of Pietermaritzburg. In 1976, it claimed an estimated circulation of 33,000 copies; by 1988, this had risen to a distribution of 55,000.¹⁹ Another interesting factor concerning the *Natal Witness* was the nature of its ownership. The *Natal Witness* was an independent paper and not linked to large industrialist or mining companies in contrast to many other English language newspapers in South Africa at the time. The Craib family established the *Natal Witness* paper under their private enterprise the Natal Witness Publishing Company. Stuart Craib was a third generation owner of the *Natal Witness* when he took over from his father in 1979.

As will be shown later in this chapter, some media theorists have speculated that media companies are primarily profit driven, with market interests taking precedence over ethical journalism that could threaten its economic base. Mazzoleni and Schulz, for example, argue that, "The media are organisations with their own aims and rules that do not necessarily coincide with, and indeed often clash with, those of political communicators. Because of the power of the media, political communicators are forced to respond to the media's rules, aims, production logics and constraints".²⁰ Based on their theory, editorials and columns by political columnists in the *Natal Witness* could well have been compromised if it conflicted with its advertising sponsors and interests as a business. However many social media theorists have stated that it is particularly large media companies with industrial and economic interests who have been the main culprits in suppressing media. Andrew Ó Baoill, in his journal article, 'The effect of ownership structure on the media agenda' writes about how large media companies have indirect control over issues focused upon in the editorial content, especially in terms of what issues are in the media agenda. He states that commercial advertising interests influence these. O Baoill in his case study of the US media cites Bagdikian, that "33 percent of American newspaper editors said they would not feel free to print an item damaging to the parent firm".²¹ But, in the case of the *Natal Witness*, the Craib family maintained all the shares during this period, and (unlike other Anglophone South African newspapers) was not linked to large industrial and mining interests, like Anglo-American. This

¹⁹ Figures supplied by the Circulations Department of the *Natal Witness*.

²⁰ Mazzoleni Gianpieto and Winfried Schulz, 1999. "*Mediatization of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy?*" (Political Communication, Volume 16) p 247.

²¹ Andrew O Baoill. 'The effect of ownership structure on the media agenda' (Funferal Publications, 2009)

makes it an interesting case for consideration of its content during the embattled periods of apartheid. While Ruth and Keyan Tomaselli²² write about how large industrial interests have often had an effect on the nature of the media content, it is important to consider the specific case of the *Natal Witness* to determine how class and cultural values emerge in its pages.

What was the nature of English newspaper opposition to the apartheid regime?

Many have assumed the English language press, to have an oppositional stance in relation to the Nationalist government during the apartheid years. There has, however been significant contestation over the nature and degree of the English press's opposition towards the National Party in South Africa. Participants in this debate have been influenced by wider theories of Marxism and liberal orthodoxy. Those with liberal or social democratic leanings have shown optimism over newspapers' potential role in creating and maintaining democratic systems, in keeping with theorists such as Jurgen Habermas. Habermas put forth the claim that the formation of a public sphere has played a vital role in promoting democracy and accountability of government. He defines the public sphere as an arena in which people may discuss issues that affect them and their society. Newspapers have served an important function in allowing citizens to operate with a shared knowledge base for debate. While his ideal model of a public sphere was the Greek system of public debate, he does acknowledge its weaknesses such as prohibited female participation.²³ Similarly, Alex de Tocqueville has noted that newspapers assist in democratic practices, having the ability to unite and mobilize people towards a common goal. In *Democracy in America*, he explains that newspapers can unite people who are geographically distant as well as provide a means of participation for those who are willing but need guidance to do so.

The principal citizens who inhabit an aristocratic country discern each other from afar; and if they wish to unite their forces, they move towards each other, drawing a multitude of men after them. In democratic countries, on the contrary, it frequently happens that a great number of men who wish or who want to combine cannot accomplish it because as they are very insignificant and lost amid the crowd, they cannot see and do not know where to find one another. A newspaper then takes up the notion or the feeling that had occurred simultaneously, but singly, to each of them. All are then immediately guided towards this beacon; and these wandering minds, which had long sought

²²Muller, Johan, Ruth Tomaselli and Keyan Tomaselli. *Narrating the crisis: hegemony and the South African press*. (Johannesburg: Lyon, 1987)

²³ Jurgen Habermas. *Structural transformation of the public sphere: an enquiry into the nature of bourgeois society*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989)

each other in darkness, at length meet and unite. The newspaper brought them together, and the newspaper is still necessary to keep them united.²⁴

Tocqueville states that the newspaper can enable people to communicate with each other, defeating the hindrance of geographical distances. From these factors, he concludes that the newspaper is vital for both producing and maintaining a democracy.

Karl Marx put forth quite a different idea about information and knowledge, with his views about links to the ruling classes creating a new school of thought. Marx states that in a capitalist society the principal group dominates the formation of discourses and mentalities. He explains that their wealth and political connections to the state allow them exclusive access to the means of ideological production in society.

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class, which has the means of material production, also has the means of mental production, so that thereby generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.²⁵

In Marx's view, the material dominance of the ruling class allows them to produce, distribute, and shape ideas, which determine the ideology in a society. "It is self evident that they do so in its whole range, hence among other things rule as thinkers, as producers of ideas and regulate the production and distribution of those ideas".²⁶ Noam Chomsky is an influential scholar whose views about media and politics Marx has shaped. He states that the media are aligned heavily to commercialized interests and largely run with profit making at heart. Consequently, large corporations dominate the content of the media through various mechanisms.

In short the major media – particularly, the elite media that set the agenda that others follow – are corporations selling privileged audiences to other businesses. It would hardly come as a surprise if the picture of the world they present were to reflect the perspectives and interests of the sellers, the buyers, and the product.²⁷

²⁴ Alex Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. (Chicago: Vintage Books, 1990) p 134.

²⁵ Engels, Friedrich and Karl Marx: *The German Ideology*. (New York International Publishers, 1988) p 64.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Noam Chomsky. *Necessary illusions: thought control in democratic societies*. (London: Pluto Press, 1989) p 8.

Robert McChesney, also a Marxist, holds a similar perspective on the media. He argues that private owned media are less about public knowledge and democratic practice than about financial, profit-making interests. In a capitalist society, the media rely on advertising revenue from corporations for its main source of income and, consequently, are compelled to serve their interests for financial prosperity. Furthermore, content that undermines the interests of advertisers is frequently filtered out. He concludes that the private media therefore hurt the public interest. For example, the American media – for a long time – would not air discussions on the unhealthiness of smoking for fear of alienating tobacco-producing sponsors. Newspapers and other media that hold a critical view of the system, which favour the wealthy elite, would be reduced to the alternative media, which operate on a much smaller scale.²⁸

These broad discussions on the political role of newspapers are relevant in the debates about the nature and extent of the opposition provided to the apartheid government by the English language press. The dominance from 1948 of the National Party into all spheres of South African community in conjunction with the decline of the United Party, led to the English press becoming the primary opposition of the South African ruling party. This is certainly the view of Elaine Potter who viewed the Afrikaans press as a supporter of the South African government, debating issues with the government but ultimately aligning itself to National Party principles.²⁹ These principles included apartheid policies such as separate living spaces and public facilities for designated races, exclusion from political power and other civic rights for black people, as well as job reservation for white men. According to this view, the English language newspapers became the opposition when Afrikaner nationalists ascended to political power and furthered the marginalisation of the majority.

The English press..., through an opposition organized independently of government became the official opposition by default, for in the final analysis the real opposition was the African. It was the total exclusion of the African from constitutional politics, which cast the English press into the role of the opposition.³⁰

²⁸ Robert McChesney. *Rich Media, Poor democracy: communication politics in dubious times*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999)

²⁹ Elaine Potter. *The Press as opposition: the political role of South African newspapers*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975)

³⁰ Elaine Potter. *The Press as opposition: the political role of South African newspaper*, p 27.

The English language press was, in Potter's view, predisposed to supporting the opposition's perspective because of their willingness to air criticism.³¹ Potter holds a sympathetic and stereotypical perception of the English newspapers – this being that they advocated tolerance and were open-minded. She argued that the English press increasingly tried to give a 'voice' to the African people. "As an institution within the white domain, the English press was able, by articulating what it saw as the interests of the African, to extend the boundaries of the political system".³² Potter's sense is that English language newspapers 'spoke for' those without a formal voice.

Potter claims that the English press opposed the government by being a critic of government. "The basis of the English language press and the government had variable levels of antagonism, varying in intensity according to the policy of newspapers and their editors".³³ A measure of the strength of its opposition was that, to counteract the power of these newspapers, the government tried to clamp down with censorship laws. For example, descriptions of prisoner abuse were prohibited and political criminals recognized as 'banned' by the government were not allowed to be quoted. Despite these limitations, English dailies like the *Star*, and the *Sunday Times* constantly searched for ways to expose what they saw as gross injustices. Other English papers like the *Rand Daily Mail*, and the *Daily Dispatch* often ignored the law in publishing stories of prisoner abuse.

When Potter published her book in 1975, the National Party was in power and had implemented much of its apartheid policy. All serious opposition, both black and white, was being suppressed, often violently. The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of stagnation for extra-parliamentary groups in South Africa, as the oppositional struggles of the 1960s and the government had clamped down on the mass protest action. The detention of important leaders in the African National Congress (ANC) and Communist Party, such as Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, as well as a law banning the anti-government movements, were vital to suppressing dissent. The official opposition, the UP, was diminishing in strength because of its failure to provide an alternative system to apartheid while the

³¹ Ibid, p 28.

³² Ibid, pp 28-29.

³³ Ibid, p 153.

Liberal Party, another main parliamentary opposition, was banned because of its multi-racial membership. These factors certainly influenced Potter's belief that English newspapers represented a strong opposition to apartheid, since the press was at least operational and effective at disseminating needed alternative views and knowledge. In her view too, the black press was too weak to represent strong opposition – her analysis coming before the Soweto uprising in June 1976 in which youth sparked the revival of mass black action against the National Party government, culminating in the form of widespread mass consumer, rental, and school boycotts organized by various anti apartheid organisations across the country. It is possible that Potter's viewpoints on the English press as the main hope for opposition politics would have been changed by these events.

Potter believed that the Anglophone press was the only realistic opposition in South Africa. Writing six years later, Richard Pollak held a very similar view but one that was more sceptical of the English press, taking a somewhat Marxist critique of it. He viewed apartheid South Africa as a totalitarian society. The English press singularly tempered this reality: "More than any other powerful force in the country these newspapers stand almost alone between the Afrikaner government and totalitarian darkness."³⁴ He described the role of the press in providing information to the public: "Inside South Africa, newspapers serve as the lone megaphone of dissent. Without the moderately free press to promulgate news and unpopular ideas, the country's political lopsidedness would be complete."³⁵ A few examples include calling for public facilities, like baths, to be open to all races and for an end to the curfews for black people in the main city centres. Pollak is also interested in the oppositional position of the English language press in relation to the apartheid state that he described as an emotionally charged a relationship: "In South Africa a fury that borders on mutual hatred characterizes the nationalists and the English language press."³⁶

Pollak, however, had a strong critique to offer. He saw the English press as two-sided. He argues that despite the support for an end to apartheid English newspapers only functioned as a limited opposition to the government because of their invaluable ties and relationships with the large industrial interests

³⁴ Richard Pollak. *Up Against Apartheid: The role and plight of the press in South Africa*. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Louis University Press: 1981, p 3.

³⁵ Richard Pollak. *Up Against Apartheid: The role and plight of the press in South Africa*, p 2.

³⁶ Ibid, pp 1-2.

who possessed them. “Consequently the newspapers are disinclined to offer political programmes that might jeopardize their patron’s financial hegemony. Since an end to apartheid would mean granting full political rights to the overwhelming non-white majority, editorials in the English press tend to beat round the thorny bush.”³⁷ In this argument, he takes the Marxist line of capital ultimately constructing the political hegemony of society as a whole. He therefore sees the English language press as only supporting changes in the social order that would not hurt the major financial and industrial interests, for example the removal of ‘petty apartheid’. Such calls to actions would not have challenged the capitalist system, which caused the exploitation and poverty of millions in South Africa.

An interesting element to Pollak’s argument is the information scandal of 1978. This scandal involved politicians in government circles such as Connie Mulder, then Minister of Information, and Eschel Rhoodie, then Ministry of Information secretary, who used millions of public funds to finance clandestine activities, such as buying out media outlets and newspapers to create propaganda. These were set to counter negative press coverage about the government both locally and internationally. Funds were extracted from the Department of Defence because defending the country was seen as a holistic measure, which would involve spreading propaganda for the government. Rhoodie attempted a coup d’état of the news agency South African Associated Newspapers (SAAN), but was thwarted by shareholders in the company. He then combined his funds with those of Louis Luyt (a wealthy South African executive and founder of both the Triomf Fertilizer company and Louis Luyt Breweries) to form an English language paper called the *Citizen*. The *Citizen* operated under the façade of being an independent newspaper but was really government owned. The *Rand Daily Mail* was the first paper that leaked information of this scandal. Other English language papers followed in their speculation about the *Citizen*. This led to an investigation into Rhoodie’s activities and the English language press were eventually vindicated in their allegations.

Pollak’s book was published during the period of crucial militarization in South Africa, i.e., between 1976 and 1990. However, it was published before the States of Emergency in 1984 and 1986. It was written in a period when the state had full monopoly over broadcasting such as radio and television,

³⁷ Ibid, p 9.

which was a powerful medium of communication. These circumstances help contextualize his viewpoint that the English language press was the only major anti-government player. The English language press had access to large amounts of money via ties with large financial and industrial interests that gave them power but also limited their democratic nature. Despite his critique of the impact of capitalist interest, Pollak saw the English language press as invaluable in its opposition to government because of its airing of needed information, also internationally: "...the role of the English-language press is critical because it provides a highly visible forum for information and ideas inside South Africa and because its reporting has been relayed around the world by a corps of sympathetic foreign correspondents".³⁸

Johan Muller, Ruth Tomaselli and Keyan Tomaselli, co-editors of the book *Narrating the crisis: hegemony and the South African press*, take a similar line of argument to Pollak in their Marxist angled criticism of the English press's ties to big financial interests.³⁹ The Tomasellis and Johan Muller cite the Steyn Commission's concession "that the English language press had done a good job in articulating black aspirations in the absence of truly independent black press."⁴⁰ The authors concur with this point of view but also argue that the opposition to the government was meagre and that its ties with large industrial and mining interests outweighed a commitment to change and genuine representation of black workers and the poor. "Considering the composition of the holding companies and the directors who serve them it is not surprising that the English language press is closely associated with the aims, objectives and interests of the hegemonic bloc as a whole."⁴¹ The authors evidence this limitation when they describe the press's treatment of poverty in black residential and commercial areas. They contend that, overall, the English language press took a weak interest in black poverty and offered limited solutions. The authors add that this press did not look at the fundamental causes of the problem like the exploitative nature of the capitalist system, and they tended to treat the problem from a paternalistic approach. Their analysis of coverage showed that

³⁸ Ibid, p 9.

³⁹ Muller, Johan, Ruth Tomaselli and Keyan Tomaselli. *Narrating the crisis: hegemony and the South African press*. (Johannesburg: Lyon, 1987)

⁴⁰ Tomaselli, Ruth and Keyan Tomaselli. 'The Political Economy of the South African press', in Muller, Johan Ruth Tomaselli and Keyan Tomaselli (eds). *Narrating the crisis: hegemony and the South African press*. (Johannesburg: Lyon, 1987) p 61.

⁴¹ Tomaselli, Ruth and Keyan Tomaselli. 'The Political Economy of the South African Press', p 57.

The structural causes of the conditions of poverty are seldom probed, and the plight of destitute urban blacks has been treated in a humanist and piecemeal fashion, although this does not necessarily indicate that all reporters are unaware of structural processes behind black poverty. In addition to this, commonsense of newsworthiness, which dictates that events are of greater importance than processes, there are 'human interest' stories. These are seen to operate outside ideology.⁴²

Simon Burton's chapter in this same edited collection, 'Ideology on the Beat: Labour and the English Language Press' discusses the limited and misguided support of the English language press towards labour issues and trade unions. According to Burton, the English press did not investigate labour conditions and took to dismissing the trade unions as agitators. Burton writes: "It has not provided the background to worker demands, seeing them largely as attacks on a stable society, disruption of the economy and threats to the basically contented majority of blacks."⁴³ He also contends that the press failed to research the organisation of labour as a process and a build up, consequently citing strikes as spontaneous and irrational.

The press has not provided a view of trade union as a process, nor is it in a position to do so as long as it accepts the dominant ideas about worker organisation and reflects workers problems in an 'event' orientated way. It cannot explain 'events' and contributes to the general view of worker action as 'irrational'. In many cases the history and process of worker organisation is concealed within the structure of the news.⁴⁴

Keyan and Ruth Tomaselli also cite the English language press's use of 'Extras' to further illustrate the English press's ambivalent opposition to apartheid. These Extras were weekly supplements to the main body of the newspapers. They were set out to cater for the black, Indian and coloured readership, because of their perception that they had different (that is, racialised) interests and needs. For them, this is a form of racial segregation, which they suggest stands in contrast to their professed stance against segregation. Here, the *Rand Daily Mail* illustrated their point:

The contradictions that were outlined earlier in the analysis of the English language press were manifested here in the *Rand Daily Mail*: on the one hand, it was a liberal and integrationist paper; on the other hand, it represented segregationist news. This was clear in its publication of a separate issue as well as Pogrand's rationale explanation for its existence: Total integration is obviously desirable but is our readerships ready for it?⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid, p 63.

⁴³ Simon Burton. 'Ideology on the Beat: Labour and the English Language Press', in Ruth Tomaselli, Keyan Tomaselli and Andrew Muller (eds). *Narrating the crisis: hegemony and the South African press* (Johannesburg: Lyon 1987) p 180.

⁴⁴ Simon Burton. 'Ideology on the Beat: Labour and the English Language Press', p 180.

⁴⁵ Tomaselli, Ruth and Keyan Tomaselli. 'The Political Economy of the South African press', p 74.

The authors note that although the government probably disliked the extras it never clamped down on them as a politically challenging alternative press. “While the Extras may contribute to the overall government dislike of the more liberal newspapers, they have not been singled out for the same authoritarian treatment as has been dispensed to newspapers wholly aimed at black readership.”⁴⁶

The Tomasellis and Muller published their collection at a time of many political developments in South Africa. At this stage, there was a growing black middle class explicitly encouraged by government and large corporations in South Africa. In conjunction with the rise of the black middle class was the rise of a strong black press in the 1980s. The UDF⁴⁷ was central in organising and creating various anti-apartheid newspapers. The organisation produced many of its own journals and newsletters, which it used to spread its message of liberation from apartheid. In tandem were community presses, created in black townships across the country. According to Keyan and Ruth Tomaselli, they were called community presses because of their discourse, which allowed people to identify themselves with a certain community. It was also at the height of reform where certain oppressive laws were being disbanded. However, critics who wanted more than window dressing changes and were hoping for a more egalitarian society continued to be sceptical of these reforms and of the deliberate policy of government to create an African middle class. Many saw the South African mainstream press as supporters of the large industrialists, whose desire to avoid a socialist or economically uncertain future overrode their willingness to join forces with radical opposition movements. Tomaselli, Tomaselli and Muller’s critique of liberalism and of the English language press is shaped by concerns of this nature.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p 75.

⁴⁷ Created in August 1983 at Mitchell’s Plain, the UDF was an anti-apartheid coalition of various resistance groups such as workers, community activists, women and student groups who joined forces. Prominent members of the organisation included Desmond Tutu, Alan Boesak and Helen Joseph. The UDF aim was to create a broad multi-racial front against the apartheid regime and it adopted the policy of the Freedom Charter. It expanded quickly and by 1987 had many affiliate organisations across the country. The UDF activities included rent boycotts, mass protests and worker stay-aways. Prominent organisations aligned to the UDF included the End Conscription Campaign (ECC). It also formed a partnership with the ANC, which activated its war with Inkatha in Natal.

However, Elspeth Mackenzie disputes the theories that the English language content was ultimately decided on by the big industrial and commercial companies in South Africa.⁴⁸ She concludes that editors are free to make their own decisions regarding their newspaper content, saying that the viewpoints were too diverse between the English language papers on an issue, to conclude that they were dictated by commercial directors. Citing the example of the English newspapers' stance towards the 1983 referendum on the new constitution, she writes that: "The different opinions expressed in the newspapers showed that there was neither regional conformity nor unanimity within either of the publishing houses."⁴⁹ Based on interviews with former editors of the *Cape Times*, Ken Owen and Harvey Tyson, and on their stories, she concludes that they had control over the newspaper content. Eric Louw has seen a racialised interest at work in the mainstream press. He argues that despite the differences between the Afrikaner and English language presses, they both serve the same racial aim.

Both are owned by and largely staffed by elements of the same (White) ruling elite. Both clearly paint a picture of the world that reflects the interests of the various white ruling class elite "class factions." Hence, both justify the status quos (though in marginally different terms in the English and Afrikaans newspapers) to the White readership, and both serve to exclude alternative perspectives (that is to say perspectives fundamentally at odds with the ruling class). The latter point is important in serving to keep the subordinate classes disorganized.⁵⁰

Writing in the same decade, Gerald Shaw does not concede that English language press opposition was illusory. His assertion is that despite leftist charges that the English presses were part of the white dominated hegemonic system, the fact that Afrikaner nationalism and the government were hostile to them is sufficient confirmation of their opposition role. He asks:

But why the intense hostility by Afrikaner nationalists toward the English language newspapers and why the corrosive suspicion and distrust that have led to the appointment of two commissions of inquiry into the press since 1948 and a sustained barrage of anti press rhetoric, characterizing these newspapers as biased, slanderous, pro-communist and unpatriotic?⁵¹

⁴⁸ Elspeth Mackenzie. 'The English-language press and the Anglo-American Corporation: an assessment'. In *Klieo*. (26, 1994).

⁴⁹ Elspeth Mackenzie. 'The English-language press and the Anglo-American Corporation: an assessment', p 103.

⁵⁰ Eric Louw. 'The English and Afrikaans Press in South Africa', in *Communicatio*. (10, 1984) pp 31-55. in Gordon S Jackson (ed). *Breaking Story: The South African Press*. (Boulder, Colo: Westview, 1993) p 38.

⁵¹ Gerald Shaw. 'The English-Language Press', in Welsh, David, David Jeffery Butler and Richard Elpick (eds). *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa its history and prospect*. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press 1987) p 293.

The English newspapers, he claims, were “liberal minded” and played an important role in South African society because of their ability to connect with all racial groups: “South Africa needs liberal minded newspapers which are in touch with readers in all communities”.⁵² Shaw also argues against accusations that the large industrial and financial companies controlled the editorial content of the English press. This press had its own institutional principles and organisational culture: editorial freedom was part of the liberal tradition that existed in the English language newspapers. He pointed out that once an editor was appointed it was very difficult to remove them especially if they were well respected.⁵³ In addition, if there had been editorial control, it would be harmful to the newspaper’s credibility and lead to lower morale including a lowering of standards, thus making it imprudent for proprietors to interfere in the newspapers.⁵⁴ The notion of editorial freedom was closely associated with editorial excellence.⁵⁵ Shaw defined an alternative press to be one where the editors formed their own opinions, working in conjunction with their readership. “A newspaper operating in the liberal tradition, competing in the marketplace of ideas is much of the time reflecting the views of the readers as forming them, although it may, in times of crisis, move ahead of them.”⁵⁶ Thus, Shaw puts a strong argument for the moral legitimacy of the English press, specifically as a liberal press, in the role as an opposition to the apartheid government. Shaw wrote in 1987, apparently motivated by the increasing criticism of the English language press by the left – particularly the accusation that it was dictated to by its holding companies.

The National Party also accused the English language press of being the handmaiden of mining interests. However, there undoubtedly was a value system of independence deeply ingrained in the English press. This was also the view of Potter, who wrote that: “Newspapers in the mould of the English language press acquired an existence independent of their promoters, especially when the concept of editorial independence was so highly valued.”⁵⁷ Potter argues further that English newspapers’ first priority was to serve the public interest on which they relied financially, and if the newspapers had been merely a mouthpiece for the large industrial companies, strong public interest

⁵² Gerald Shaw. ‘The English-Language Press’, 300.

⁵³ Ibid, p 290.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p 291.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p 291.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p 291.

⁵⁷ Potter, *The Press as Opposition*, p 78.

would have been lost. Critics of the English press's domination by mining interests have tended to ignore the internal culture of newspapers as a factor operating in favour of public service journalism and against the exclusive representation of mining interests.⁵⁸

Writing retrospectively, Jill Wentzel sees the English language press as assuming an unambiguously oppositional role to the apartheid government. She has a more radical position on this question, relative to the works of Shaw, Potter and Pollak, who all saw the English press as qualified in their oppositional power and subject to conditions. Wentzel argues, for example, that "[m]any of the reporters for the English language press were also supportive of the UDF and the ANC, so it was hardly surprising that the differences between mainstream and the commercial press were not profound."⁵⁹ Moreover, she declares that the English language press was often biased in its support of the anti-apartheid organisations, and illustrates her point through an analysis of the coverage regarding township violence.⁶⁰ Wentzel describes a substantial number of photographs of victims who suffered through police brutality being published along with comprehensive interviews of police victims. This she compared to the few pictures and interviews of victims of violence by political activists. She maintains that attacks on the black councillors [collaborative with the government] by anti-government activists were often given scant coverage in the English language, liberal press. Wentzel highlights similarities between the English language press and the alternative press. She depicts the English press as lending full support to the UDF, using the example of the *Star*. "Though the *Star* was commonly accused of conservatism, it often read like the newsletter of the UDF".⁶¹ She argues that the paper gave the UDF full coverage, which included coverage of its campaigns, articles written by its members and the promotion of UDF leaders. The *Star* also highlighted attacks on UDF members whilst, in contrast, giving rival organisations like AZAPO negative coverage. Wentzel concludes that the English language press was hardly a pawn of the industrial capitalists as proposed by its leftist critics. "I am merely pointing out that the English language press did not behave as critics of the capitalist monopoly said it did."⁶²

⁵⁸ Ibid, p 78.

⁵⁹ Jill Wentzel. *The liberal slideaway*. (South Africa: South African Institute of Race Relations, 2001) p139.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, p 140.

⁶² Ibid, p 140.

Finally, and pertinent to my study, in an argument that supports the view that the English press played only a limited opposition role, Keyan Tomaselli and Eric Louw discuss how the militarization in South Africa affected the South African media in the 1980s. In a conference paper, these authors demonstrate how military hardliners had taken over the country's internal and external affairs since the 1976 Soweto riots. They identify a shift that occurred when P.W. Botha, the former Minister of Defence, became president and appointed fellow military hardliners to his cabinet, such as Magnus Malan. Tomaselli and Louw list the following trends as especially crucial to this period: the sidelining of the extreme right wing; the class conflict between different factions within the ruling class being played down; attempts to undermine support for both the ANC and the UDF; overt racism being avoided; and growing infiltration of the military strategists which involved the formation of a siege mentality. Tomaselli and Louw also describe the media's use of what they labelled 'boo' words (meaning those with negative connotations) and 'hooray' words (those with positive connotations). The 'boo' words included 'communism', 'UDF', 'terrorist' and 'total onslaught' whilst the 'hooray' words included 'private enterprise', 'boys on the border', 'reform' and 'privatization'.⁶³ Their paper was presented at the ASSA conference in Durban in 1988, the same year as the Natal Indaba, as well as the ongoing violence in the province between Inkatha and the UDF, South Africa's incursions into Angola, and uncontrollable civil unrest in South African townships. It was written during the State of Emergency where the police and army had extra-judicial control over the country, and were able to detain for six months without trial merely based on suspicion. Their paper is therefore a response to these developments and an assessment of news coverage in that context.

What this literature demonstrates is that there has been a scholarly debate about the nature and extent of the opposition to the apartheid government levelled by the English-speaking press in South Africa. They differ in their views regarding the nature and meaning of the news content, on the influence of its alliances to capital, and on the paternalism meted out to black readerships; however, all position the English press as a liberal institution. It is notable that both 'sides' of this debate clearly position English language newspapers as motivated by a fixed conception of liberalism or 'liberal tradition', claiming

⁶³ Tomaselli and Louw. *Militarization, Hegemony and the South African press*, p 5.

that tradition either as virtue or as a limitation. Liberalism, in the South African historiography is considered an endemic quality of English newspaper culture, to some extent emerging from its reputation a set characteristic of English South African-ness itself in the face of Afrikaner nationalist politics.

What is the nature of Liberalism?

In direct relation to the oppositional role of the English language press in South Africa, then, and for the purposes of my study particularly related to the period of militarization, is an understanding of the nature of liberalism. The role and nature of liberalism in South Africa has been another point of debate by academics and activists. South African liberalism is described by proponents, such as Helen Suzman and Ken Owen, as a humanist and nonconformist tradition, which was in steady opposition to the apartheid system. However, many critics, from Steve Biko in the 1970s to Kader Asmal in the early 1990s, have attacked liberalism as counterproductive to the struggle against apartheid and even an oppressive tool used by privileged white people. In response to such critiques, David Welsh and others defend liberalism as playing a watchdog role in the apartheid years as well as contributing to the values of the new constitution. In the collection *Ironic Victory: liberalism in post-liberation South Africa* edited by R.W. Johnson and David Welsh, the authors attempt to refute the accusation that liberals were a hindrance to the struggle against apartheid and racial inequality in South Africa. Welsh lists the virtues of one interpretation of liberalism, including tolerance for all viewpoints, compassion, the end of social and economic inequality, a belief in the rights of the individual, as well as basic human rights and a rule of law that would ensure the above protection.⁶⁴ He contends that liberalism's flexible approach enabled it to be both relevant and realistic for any society – a universal, both adaptable and dynamic. "Liberalism's very flexibility and its open-endedness within the broad parameters of its core values have enabled it to be dynamic, adaptable and pragmatic."⁶⁵ Welsh also claims that when liberals aimed to reform a system that was unfair and exploitative such as the apartheid system, for example, they argued that racial conflict coupled with violence and bloodshed would occur if progressive changes in the law

⁶⁴ David Welsh 'The liberal inheritance', in *Ironic victory: liberalism in post-liberation South Africa*, in Johnson, R.W. and David Welsh, eds. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998) p 1-2.

⁶⁵ David Welsh 'The liberal inheritance', p 3.

were not forthcoming. “For most liberals, this has been an important argument for the progressive extension of political rights. Continued exclusion, coupled with pervasive exploitation and discrimination, was the recipe for a dangerous backlash among the excluded.”⁶⁶ Welsh names as ‘liberals’ during apartheid South Africa anyone who believed in giving equal rights to people of all races and were therefore opposed to any form of racial discrimination.⁶⁷ He cites liberalism’s origins in South Africa as dating from Union in 1910, when white liberals fought for black people’s equality and enfranchisement in the voting system. He contends that that they fought against government’s segregation of races, such as the 1913 Natives Land Act, which mapped out racialised territories and land ownership. Liberals also fought against the apartheid laws since 1948, which evolved from earlier segregation laws. In their continuing battle for equality, South African liberals were particularly against state centralization, preferring “a federal system for South Africa as a defence against an overweening central government.”⁶⁸ The book *Ironic Victory: liberalism in post-liberation South Africa* was published in 1998 – four years after the ANC had taken control over the country. This book is a response to the repeated attacks on liberalism in the second half of the 1990s by Marxist and Africanist writers.

Liberals are said by some to have a commitment to the rule of law, defined as a set of principles based on a wide and fundamental humanist assumption of civil liberties such as freedom of speech.⁶⁹ This view is asserted by John Dugard who also describes the rule of law as the belief that all people have the right to a fair trial and equal treatment under the law. He also proclaimed that many liberals in South Africa had embraced this concept. The rule of law and the advancement of civil liberties (or human rights in modern parlance) have always been among the main practices of liberals in South Africa.”⁷⁰

Debates about the politics of liberalism are also evident in the book *Watchdogs or Hypocrites*, which features both criticisms and justifications for liberalism. Published in 1997, it contains a collection of

⁶⁶ Ibid, p 4.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p 4.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p 6.

⁶⁹ John Dugard. ‘Human rights and the rule of law I’ in Welsh, David Jeffery Butler and Richard Elpick (eds). *Democratic liberalism in South Africa Its history and prospect*. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press 1987) p 274.

⁷⁰ John Dugard. ‘Human rights and the rule of law I’, p 271.

newspaper articles and papers from 1990 to 1996 representing arguments over liberalism's role in the struggle of liberation. Many of these were written at the time of the transition to democracy and the period just before that, and therefore constituted a debate about liberalism's role in liberation politics and the transition. In many of these debates, liberalism is constructed as a racialised, white, political philosophy. For example, Bennie Bunsie argued liberals were patronizing in their support for black people's rights. "They entered the black struggle to teach us the superiority of their culture, into which they wished to assimilate us, without attempting to understand the culture, history and civilization of the African people."⁷¹ He elaborated that many black people had been alienated from liberalism. "It is this patronism [sic] that blacks condemn and regard as dangerous. It was this attitude that induced Steve Biko and others to launch the Black Consciousness Movement."⁷²

Reprinted in the same volume is Kader Asmal and Keith Roberts's argument from 1991 that liberals were not fully committed to the fight for racial equality in South Africa and were weak in their support for progressive organisations such as the ECC.⁷³ The AZAPO chair, Itumeleng Mosala, went further in attacking liberals by describing liberalism as a tool of oppression. "It is a powerful tool by means of which black people can be paralyzed into perpetual slavery and dependence."⁷⁴ He asserted that, liberalism is a powerful weapon used by whites against anyone who attacked their ideology.⁷⁵ Despite white liberals being in opposition to apartheid they failed to support the necessary alternatives and rather displayed lethargy. Alistair Sparks uses a quote from Williams to drive his point.

Our South African brand of progressive liberalism failed largely because most times we were long on principle and short on practice. We stood for the rights of man but did not do enough for the women and children who were deprived of those rights, except to talk about them in the cosy confines of our homes, our meetings and in the cosiness of the Nationalist controlled political institutions.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Bennie Bunsie. 'Liberalism still taboo', *Sowetan*, 19 June 1997. Extracted from F.N Stiftung (ed). *Watchdogs or Hypocrites: The amazing debate on South African liberals and liberalism*. (Johannesburg: Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, 1997) p 288.

⁷² Bennie Bunsie. 'Liberalism still taboo'

⁷³ Asmal, Kader and Keith Roberts. 'Liberalisms hollow core', *Sunday Times* 1 October 1995. Extracted from F.N Stiftung (ed). *Watchdogs or Hypocrites: The amazing debate on South African liberals and liberalism*. (Johannesburg: Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, 1997) p 92.

⁷⁴ Itumeleng Mosala. 'Focus on AZAPO', *The Sowetan*, 18 August 1993. Extracted from F.N Stiftung (ed). *Watchdogs or Hypocrites: The amazing debate on South African liberals and liberalism*. (Johannesburg: Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, 1997) p 14.

⁷⁵ Itumeleng Mosala. 'Focus on AZAPO', p 14.

⁷⁶ Sparks 'Yes it means the whole hog', p 3.

Helen Suzman and others have come to the defence of liberals and the ideology of liberalism during the apartheid years. In response to accusations that liberalism was an obstacle in the struggle, Welsh describes the liberal's 'watchdog role' in South Africa during the apartheid era. He is adamant that liberals exposed the atrocities of apartheid system thus effectively being a thorn in the flesh of the ruling party. "Their incessant nagging, their ability to expose the human costs of apartheid and their unceasing championing of an alternative vision of society based on respect for human rights must have been like water torture for the Nationalists."⁷⁷ He further states that liberals were responsible for bringing the Nationalist party to accept the principles of equality and justice for all in South Africa, which led to an aversion of violent conflict. "Liberals can take credit for removing the blinkers that blinded so many Nationalists for so long. For a minority to have yielded power to the majority without the devastation of a civil war was a process with few historical precedents."⁷⁸

Welsh also defends liberals against accusations that they were secretly, or in effect, supporting the basic status quo of white superiority whilst in opposition to apartheid, by asserting that liberals were 'realists' who were against the revolutionary violence because of its futility to cause meaningful social change. Liberals, he said, took advantages of opportunities to work for reform.

The accusation that they were covert defenders of the status quo is not only absurd but is insulting. True they were not revolutionaries, but realists who recognized that the state could not be overthrown by the efforts of the armed struggle. South African liberals have always been reformist, seeking incremental change of a cumulative nature and, where possible, seizing opportunities that created additional political space.⁷⁹

John Dugard also defends the role of liberalism in South African society stating that it had a role to play in moving Afrikaner nationalism to a more flexible mindset. Notably silent on the role of black and racial opposition as a revolutionary force, he describes the liberal pressure exerted publicly among other factors in bringing about change.

The liberal belief in the rule of law and the recognition of human rights as necessary pillars of a decent society have at least penetrated Afrikaner nationalist thought and begun to influence the legal process and the constitutional debate. International opinion is partly responsible for this new approach. But liberals must take some of the credit.

⁷⁷ David Welsh 'Introduction', in Johnson, R.W. and David Welsh (eds). *Ironic victory: liberalism in post-liberation South Africa*, Johnson, R.W. and David Welsh, eds. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998) p 20.

⁷⁸ David Welsh 'Introduction', p 5.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p 17.

Their perseverance and commitment to liberal values have to some degree triumphed over an ideology that exalted the state over the principle of equality and individual liberty.⁸⁰

Dugard claims that since 1910 liberals had been actors in pressurizing the governments of the day to accept the principles of human rights and the rule of law. One later example is liberal efforts to protest the 1956 Separate Voter's Bill where coloureds were removed from the voting roll. Despite conceding that this action from liberals did not have much impact on the laws, Dugard states that the liberal propagation of the rule of law did have an impact on Afrikaner nationalists' mindsets regarding justice and human rights and moved these to ones that are more progressive. "Although most of the laws that run counter to the principles inherent in the rule of law remain unchanged, Afrikaner nationalist's attitudes towards notions of justice of human rights have certainly altered".⁸¹ Paul Pereira also entered the fray, responding to accusations by Alistair Sparks for criticizing certain aspects of the ANC. In his defence of liberals, he states that the ANC shared similarities to the apartheid government in their methods of liberation.

Mr. Sparks describes these liberals as conservatives. Yet conservatives would by their very nature, tend to defend the present style of governing and would fail to see the similarities between the government's censor boards and the ANC's cultural desks, between government officials shouting "communist" and ANC supporters shouting "sell out", between a government whose agents kill people and a liberation movement whose agents kill people in detention, between a government who relies on centralized power and the ANC who profess to do likewise, between the totalitarian concept of *volk*, and the concept of the people's will.⁸²

Finally, in defence of liberals, high profile liberal Afrikaner Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert wrote that, "liberals have not only proclaimed and sermonized. They were active in civil society, business and politics and some of the more pragmatic good sense obviously prevailed until today."⁸³

Jill Wentzel, in a South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) publication, took a radically different stance from the above critics of liberalism. She has insisted that, since 1984, liberals in South Africa were too biased in favour of black liberation movements like the UDF and the ANC and thus not

⁸⁰ John Dugard. 'Human rights and the rule of law 1', p 271.

⁸¹ Ibid, p 271.

⁸² Paul Pereira. 'Response to Alistair Sparks', *The Star* 26 November 1991. Extracted from F.N Stiftung (ed). *Watchdogs or Hypocrites: The amazing debate on South African liberals and liberalism*. (Johannesburg: Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, 1997) p 7.

⁸³ Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert. 'Fashioning a new role for fashionable liberalism', *Sunday Times* 6 June 1993. Extracted from F.N Stiftung (ed). *Watchdogs or Hypocrites: The amazing debate on South African liberals and liberalism*. (Johannesburg: Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, 1997) p 10.

adhering to principles of objectivity. She partially blames the liberals for their failure to expose and address the atrocities and disruptions committed by the UDF and school students in their campaign against Bantu Education. She also states in her introduction that the ‘miraculous’ peace deal between the government and the ANC was not a result of liberal action. In this account, she avows that liberals lost their most important values, which had previously made them important and reliable sources of information during the 1960s and 1970s. A disturbingly large number of liberals – in fact most of the liberal constituency – lost their pragmatism, their critical facilities and their willingness to court unpopularity in the pursuit of truth and succumbed instead to the kind of romanticism they had always despised.⁸⁴

Wentzel argues that despite obvious changes in the social and political climate, the liberals were still in the mindset from the ‘Verwoerdian era’ of black victimization and the extreme advance of white privilege. With government reforms and the rise of a powerful liberation movement, liberals should not have continued to position blacks as helpless victims without voice. She partially attributes this attitude to timidity in the face of attacks on liberals by Africanist movements such as Black Consciousness, who viewed liberals as part of the white dominated system. It was a pattern of guilt and a desire to attain their anti-apartheid credentials that led liberals to an unbalanced bias towards the black liberation movements. The UDF caught the imagination and support of liberals. However, the dichotomous nature of the 1980s and liberals desire to boost their anti-apartheid credentials had liberals not wanting to question the UDF’s often controversial policies and actions in its goal to overthrow the apartheid regime. They also, in Wentzel’s account, ignored the controversial revolutionary rhetoric and its attacks on officials, blindly believing the UDF’s intentions as being purely noble ones.

Liberals were reluctant to admit that the UDF’s campaign was to render the country ungovernable rather than to organise a nationwide campaign of peaceful protest. Largely they dealt with their misgivings by simply ignoring the revolutionary rhetoric and targeted attacks on black constables, policemen and political rivals that began early in the unrest.⁸⁵

Most liberals refused to attribute the violence in the townships to UDF activists; instead choosing to blame the security forces exclusively even when, according to Wentzel, activists started the violence. This was done, repeats Wentzel, to maintain political credibility.

⁸⁴ Jill Wentzel, *The Liberal Slideaway*, p1.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p 34.

Rather than criticize or question the wisdom of some of the tactics of the UDF, churchmen and the liberals preferred to blame the bulk of the violence on people and organisations they could attack without damaging their anti-apartheid credentials.⁸⁶

Many liberals saw the organisation of consumer boycotts and worker strikes by the UDF as being conducted in a democratic fashion and blamed government and institutional violence for clashes that occurred. In Wentzel's view

Even the very brutal methods of coercion were blamed on the effects of violence, and for this reason neither the Black Sash nor the English mainstream press, neither the PFP nor the churches, ever mounted a serious challenge to liberatory strategies that resulted in assault and murder.⁸⁷

As a member of the Black Sash in the 1980s, Wentzel recalls certain silences in their meetings and accounts, for example, of people having their hands burnt and being forced to drink cooking oil for not participating in certain consumer boycotts. In ignoring the atrocities allegedly committed by activists, liberals were ignoring the hostile conditions, which township people had to face daily. She also accused them of having been out of touch with the sufferings of black people.

The violence in the townships – the central issue of the times – was pushed off the centre stage. For liberals, living in their separate and more comfortable suburbs it was not the centre issue. For township residents it was the stuff of their daily lives. Though the victims of apartheid were also the victims of liberatory violence, it became impossible to say so without being accused of insensitivity to the suffering of black people. In this way, the rhetoric of the slideaway turned the truth upside down for liberals' silence in the face of coercion and intimidation was the ultimate insensitivity to the suffering of black people.⁸⁸

Wentzel's *The Liberal Slideaway* was published in 1995 after the 1994 elections, when the ANC had taken power. She writes in the context of what was seen by many to be a miraculous agreement between the NP and the ANC, thus avoiding mention of the violent civil war waging in the province of Natal. Additionally, this book was also published before the documentations of victims' stories by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), so it illustrates the frustration that she felt about liberal ignorance of atrocities committed within the liberation movement and its civilian casualties. She is also writing in the context where township schools were still suffering from unrest and ill discipline – a result of the 1980s unrest and boycott disruptions in these schools. Wentzel concludes that liberals fell into the dichotic mindset of the 1980s, and lost their principled basis for an independent response.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p 49.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p 52.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p 121.

New questions for old answers

Wentzel's analysis represents a relatively unique critique of the failures of liberalism on its own stated terms. Otherwise, the debate is a roundly dichotomous one waged between critics and proponents of liberalism as a political strategy. Debates about the role of the English language press under apartheid, are paralleled with debates about the role of doctrines of liberalism and those who espouse their principles. These have been cast largely as *moral* arguments. Did the English language press constitute an opposition to apartheid? If so, how strong or weak was that opposition? If not, can it be described as a tool in the hands of white supremacist power? As paternalistic? As an expression of capital interests? These questions, to some extent, reflect a political impasse. They reflect certain assumptions about the way that liberalism is understood in South Africa as a racial, cultural, and class-based phenomenon. In the case of the *Natal Witness*, there has been the assumption that a liberal press naturally reflects the provincial character of 'white' Natal as a liberal, 'English' province. Yet, the English press has not really been explored for its role in generating the vocabulary of liberalism that acts as a referent for activists and civilians in relation to political change. Political discourses informing South African politics have surely not emerged apart from their relation to specific historical events. Abstract principles must be applied and utilized in prescribed actions and ongoing analysis in order to be realized as a political doctrine. The 'liberal public' cited in the above debates existed in relation to the organs of knowledge transmission and analysis, as readers of newspapers, as much as holders of principles.

The formation of a 'liberal public' through cultures of 'print capitalism' represented in Natal by the 'liberal' English language newspapers such as the *Natal Witness*, illustrates various culturalist theories on the news media. Benedict Anderson in his work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*⁸⁹, speaks about the development of nationalist identities amongst peoples who come to imagine themselves to be a unified body. Print media enable different and diverse people to share a common sense of community. Shehla Burney in her journal article *Manufacturing*

⁸⁹ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* London: Verso, 1991.

*Nationalism: Post September 11 Discourse in United States Media*⁹⁰ also writes about the power of the press and media, in this case creating an emotive nationalism in the United States. Burnley states that the, “US (A) vs. THEM discourse has been a mainstay of much representation in the media.”⁹¹ She also asserts that cultural nationalism had become very much linked to what she sees as an imperial policy by the US towards the Middle East.

Language is key in this formula, but so is the transmission of ideas about what constitutes newsworthiness and how news is analysed. Emerging in a colonial context like Natal with a strong sense of diasporic identification engaged over time, newspapers contribute to an ethno-linguistic sense of culture in dialogue with that of the - in Natal’s case - British metropole. From this perspective, liberalism can be seen not merely as a political doctrine but also as a culture, that references itself in relation to the wider world of Western or British political values. English language newspapers, in this line of thought, serve as a vector of liberal cultural values in the face of local political events. This view illustrated points from Andrew Heywood in his work *Political Theory: an Introduction*, where he writes about Nationalism having a cultural entity.⁹²

This study documents, in detail, the construction of a political vocabulary of liberalism in relation to key events of militarization and political violence. It was in relation to such events, and to the methods of reporting and sourcing utilized, that this English language newspaper created (as Paul Rich has described liberalism) an adaptable and shifting discourse of moderation and ‘responsible’ social change that informed expressions of liberal political culture. Opposition to the government is most certainly apparent in the news coverage, opinion and letters that fill the pages of the *Witness* in the period I am focusing on. But the very polarisation of politics at this time helps show how the nature of this opposition was positioned within a regional ‘imagined community’ with concerns for class, family and Anglophone culture that reflect the socio-economic divisions within South Africa itself.

⁹⁰ Shehla Burnley. ‘Manufacturing Nationalism: Post – September 11 Discourse in the United States Media’ (University of Toronto Press, 2002).

⁹¹ Shehla Burnley. ‘Manufacturing Nationalism: Post – September 11 Discourse in the United States Media’, p2.

⁹² Andrew Heywood, *Political Theory: An Introduction* (Second ed). London: Macmillan Press, 1999.

Research methodology

I have used a qualitative method in my research, which in contrast with quantitative research does not rely on numerical figures to determine significance. My adaptation of this approach included the formulation of sampling. I was required to consider how to select what I saw as key important events and to consider how to identify key issues within these events. It seemed advantageous to look to larger definitions of political violence, border war violence, and civil war brought directly into the *Witness's* back yard, and into the families of its readership - to gain a sense of the press's response. Quantitative research has its various advantages. With quantitative analysis, I would have entered key words using a search engine on scanned documents in a wider selection of years. This would have enabled me to get a sense of how much interest there was in the paper about the topics and would have provided me with a direct path to these topics. It would also have allowed me to cluster different key terms and drawn my attention to particular publications. However, for my Masters thesis, I strongly felt that a richer reading would come from selecting key periods and then examining clusters of papers in their context. I would have used a quantitative method only as an *additional* source of information, not as a primary method, and doing this would have required a different technical expertise, one too ambitious to consider for this particular project. R.C. Mishra's description of qualitative research as providing for situational and contextual understanding of the research fits what I have done in this thesis.⁹³ W.H. Weiss also states that qualitative research allows for a more holistic approach to research, which makes this method conducive to both my research, and historical research more generally.⁹⁴ MQ Patton states the following about qualitative research. "Qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues, cases, or events in depth and detail. Data collection is not constrained by predetermined categories of analysis, allowing for a level of depth and detail that quantitative strategies can't provide."⁹⁵ Approaching my material, this way enabled me to consider aspects that I would not have noticed through a quantitative content analysis of a larger sample of issues. Thus, the use of qualitative analysis to investigate the *Natal Witness* between 1976 and 1989 allowed me to establish a concentrated

⁹³ R.C. Mishra. *Exploring education research*. (New York City APH Pub, 2005.) p 46.

⁹⁴ Carol Weiss. *Evaluation methods for studying programs and policies* (2nd ed.) (Upper Saddle River, 1998) p 102.

⁹⁵ Michael Patton. *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2000.) p 56.

understanding of the nature of liberal discourse and supposed governmental opposition of the *Natal Witness* concerning South Africa's militarization within this period.

This research has involved an analysis of microfilm and hardcopies of the *Natal Witness*, with my data drawn from the Don Africana Library at the Liberty Life Towers and the Pietermaritzburg Resource Centre, as well as archives from the *Witness* office in Pietermaritzburg. A period of thirteen years of daily news requires a sample of newspaper coverage taken around events that, I argue, can reveal broader trends in discourse and coverage, though I am aware of the inevitable limitations and dangers of exclusion. I have chosen five events, or clusters of events, that I considered key, and my analysis was based on all issues of the newspaper published five to six weeks following, or surrounding, each of these event clusters. For each newspaper in the period selected, I describe the content in detail and provide some analysis, with particular attention to the first four pages where newspapers generally place what they consider the most important. In addition, I examine all opinions pages, editorials and letters.

The first events I examine, written as Chapter One are the Soweto uprisings from 16 June 1976. This is considered by many South African historians to be a watershed moment in the country's history, regarding resistance to apartheid. The second set of turning points, represented in Chapter Two, is the South African Defence Force (SADF) operations in Angola, namely Operation Reindeer and Operation Protea, which took place in 1978 and 1981 respectively. Operation Reindeer was the first major military operation by the SADF in Angola. According to Tony Weaver, the Cassinga Raid (part of Operation Reindeer) stands out between 1975 and 1978 as a landmark event in the South African border wars as an example of South African aggression.⁹⁶ She details the strong evidence behind claims by the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) that the attack by the SADF was on a refugee camp full of women and children. This controversy could have discredited the South African war effort and brought into question the conscription of white South African youth. Operation Protea, three years later was the biggest SADF military operation since World War II, where the SADF invaded Angola to attack SWAPO bases. This operation was highly successful for Nationalist government propaganda, with SADF troops turning up documents and Soviet weapons thereby proving a Soviet link to SWAPO. This

⁹⁶ Tony Weaver. 'The South African Defence Force in Namibia', in Jaclyn Cock and Laurie Nathan. *War and Society: The militarisation of South Africa*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 1989) p 93.

operation might have pulled the debate on conscription the other way, as it underscored the State's continual Cold War claim that the SADF were fighting communists.

Chapter Three traces ideologies of *Die Rooi Gevaar*, 'total onslaught' and the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in Angola. The SADF entered Angola in September 1987 to take Cuito Cuanavale, which they considered a key base for SWAPO insurgents and eventually pulled out of the battle in June 1988. The period I am researching in this battle is between November 2 and December 14 1987. This was one of the periods characterised by the heaviest fighting. In the same period, key political moments in Natal regional, and also national, life occurred: the Natal Indaba, which was set to negotiate an alliance between capital and black protest, and the release of Govan Mbeki, a key ANC political prisoner who served time on Robben Island for his conviction of treason by the state.

Finally, Chapter Four explores conflict and militarization in the province of Natal, home of the *Natal Witness*, and documents the debate over conscription and the UDF-Inkatha conflicts that fall within the period of 25 July and 5 September 1988.

Chapter 1

Centrism defined?

The *Natal Witness's* ambivalent approach to the Soweto youth uprisings

On 16 June 1976, schoolchildren in the Johannesburg township of Soweto boycotted classes and marched on the streets bearing slogans as well as chanting anti-government choruses. What made this turn in historical events was their confrontation with the South African police force, who met the strikers at Orlando West Junior Secondary school where 50 police were situated. Police threw teargas at the crowd who responded by throwing stones. The police then opened fire killing some of the protestors – the dead included children. A highly publicized death was that of Hector Pieterse aged thirteen. A wave of international condemnation followed as pictures of his body, carried by a grieving classmate, were transmitted internationally. This day also set off a storm of violence in Soweto for the next year, ending only in late 1977, when the police finally put down the unrest. Acts of violence in Soweto between June 1976 and the end of 1977 included the setting alight of buildings, the looting of shops, the blowing up of vehicles and people representing oppression being attacked. The rebellion spread through different parts of the country from the Transvaal, to coloured and black schools in the Western Cape.⁹⁷

The government responded with a strong speech by Jimmy Kruger on 18 June. In addressing the world and South Africa, he stated that the government would not be intimidated by internal unrest and international pressure. Two days later this culminated in the extension of the Riotous Assembly's Act which imposed a national ban on all political meetings. In the same week, the violence continued against a backdrop of B. J. Vorster's appointment with Henry Kissinger. From 24 June to 31 June, the conflict extended from areas around Soweto to the Rand. Many arrests were made. Between 1 July and 7 July, the violence extended to places around Pretoria. During the period, the government debated the language issue. From 14 July to 28 July, the national ban on political meetings was extended to the end of the year and black children gradually returned to school.

⁹⁷ Brooks, Alan and Jeremy Brickhill. *Whirlwind before the storm: the origins and development of the uprising in Soweto and the rest of South Africa from June to December 1976*. (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980)

In this chapter, I explore how the *Natal Witness* covered the Soweto uprisings of 1976 and how that coverage bears on the construction of liberal discourse regarding political violence and the prospects of political change in South Africa. I will also be analyzing its stance towards the NP government and its policies as well as considering the nature of the paper's opposition.

There are three key themes coming out of my research. The first one I will be addressing is how black protest was represented in the *Natal Witness*. The newspaper constructed a distinction between what it deemed 'responsible' black protestors, who believed in mediation and non-violent action, and 'radical' black protestors who were involved in violent struggle. The second theme is the use and representation of official sources and the official viewpoints, which included statements from high-ranking officials of government as well as the South African Police (SAP) and the South African Defence Force (SADF), regarding the uprisings and the protests. Here I will also examine the responses in the editorials, and columns including letters written by members of the public. The third theme I will cover is how the *Natal Witness* used non-official sources such as liberal individuals, non-governmental organisations and international sources. These themes show the newspaper's role not only in producing an idea of objectivity and balance in its reporting, but also in presenting an overall picture of viable change that gave meaning to emerging liberal political ideals.

In examining my key themes, I analyze all daily issues of the *Natal Witness* that ran from 17 June to 28 July 1976. Within this sample, I found eighty-three articles related to the unrest in Soweto, including the violence on June 16 and the aftermath. Among these were nineteen articles dealing with black demonstrators in Soweto and the Rand area and fourteen articles featuring official government statements on the violence. Seven articles covered statements from non-governmental groups and eight focused on statements from prominent members of South African society not connected to government. There were four articles on civil defence, which reflected concern over national security. In the opinion section, fourteen commentaries focused on the Soweto uprisings, eight of these being editorials whilst six were columns. I also found six letters, which represented public responses to coverage by the *Natal Witness*.

Various security laws made it illegal to report statistics on the uprisings from unofficial sources. The first was the Official Secrets Act of 1956 – a law that curbed discussion on matters related to national security. This act was amended in 1965, (in a way which) criminalized the publication of information regarding police activities without permission from the Minister of Defence. In generating copy, the *Natal Witness* relied on several sources. One source of information was official newssheets released by the South African government. The paper also relied on the SAP to provide statistics. However, it was able to report the unrest without using police sources. For example, its reports of the violence in Soweto were taken from eyewitness journalists from their own paper, as well as other journalists. *The World* was also a prominent source of reporting from other newspaper's accounts. As a further source, the *Natal Witness* used the media agency, the South African Press Association (SAPA) for information and selected articles.

War of words: *Natal Witness* reports on the Soweto uprising

In their editorial and opinion pages, the *Natal Witness* took a strong stand against the South African authorities' actions concerning the Soweto youth protests. The first article concerning the violence in Soweto was two days following the main events of 16 June.⁹⁸ In condemnation of the government's role in the Soweto violence and the death of schoolchildren at the hands of its police, the *Natal Witness* published a number of editorials and columns, which collectively offered up a theory about the causes of violence and set up an oppositional discourse in relation to the official government line. On 18 June 1976, an editorial condemned the government for its unfair racial laws and asserted that these were the cause for the violence. Entitled 'The government was warned' the editorial presented the view that, "[w]hile there are no doubt several contributory reasons for the Soweto riots, their proximate cause has been the authorities' intransigent attitude, over a long period towards the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in Soweto schools."⁹⁹ The editorial pointed out that protests could not have come as a surprise since "...the government had been warned between 1974 and 1976 by progressive organisations

⁹⁸ Significantly there were no reports from 16 June 1976. It is unclear why, but presumably the *Natal Witness* had already published its daily before news came through.

⁹⁹ 'The govt was warned', *Natal Witness*, 18 June 1976, p 12.

such as the homeland leaders in March 1974, and the South African Teachers Association (ATASA), in January 1975.”¹⁰⁰ The editorial concluded that for violence to end and racial tension to improve, ‘whites’ needed to know that they could no longer impose whatever they wanted on black people. “[U]nless the whites realize that blacks are people who need to be consulted about how they want to live; the prospects for peaceful coexistence between the races in South Africa are bleak.”¹⁰¹ The editorial displays some key ideas that were to be themes in later reporting in this period: the idea that violence was the inevitable institutional outcome of National Party race policy, which in turn precluded ‘peaceful co-existence’, a notion that appears to affirm the idea of distinctive ‘race groups’ even as it denounces apartheid policies.

The *Natal Witness* also published the government’s own analysis of the causes of the Soweto uprisings and the conduct of the police force in the unrest. The government set out to deny that the uprising was the spontaneous action of children. Instead, they blamed the violence in Soweto on adult ‘agitators’ spreading misinformation and stirring up crowds into violence. Drawing upon Cold War rhetoric, which held purchase on the continent that had flashpoints of armed struggle in nationalist bids for independence, it portrayed the protestors as pawns of the Soviet Union, which clandestinely wanted to control South Africa because of its strategic position in the battle between communism and capitalism. The government also defended the conduct of the police force. On 19 June, the *Natal Witness* covered President BJ Vorster’s claim that the unrest was a planned attempt to create disorder and division in the country. “Mr. Vorster said that it was clear that the unrest was not of a spontaneous nature but a determined effort to cause panic and a polarization between white and black”.¹⁰² Spreading rumours, he continued, was also a tactic of the subversive forces. “The aim was to sow large-scale panic by spreading false rumours. The public should be wary of rumours of this nature which were very likely to be spread and which were circulated to spread panic.”¹⁰³

In the same issue, the *Natal Witness* published two opinion articles blaming the government and authorities for the unrest. One of these identified the proposed use of Afrikaans as the medium for

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² South African Press Association SAPA. ‘Unrest was planned’, *Natal Witness*, 19 June 1976, p 3.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

teaching in schools as the activator of the unrest in Soweto. “The immediate cause is clear – the forcing of African secondary school pupils to study subjects difficult enough in themselves, through a language with which they and their teachers are most inadequately acquainted and for which they see little need in their lives.”¹⁰⁴ Twentieth century conflicts between Afrikaans and English speakers, as well as undoubtedly deeply rooted ethnic prejudices, were clearly seen in overt and covert references by some of the voices that were to emerge in these weeks. The second opinion article was by Bob Thompson (a full-time weekly columnist employed by the *Natal Witness* who wrote on political life and linked it to Christian ethics based on his interpretation of the Christian bible), entitled ‘Underneath the black iceberg’. He deemed the Soweto unrest an urgent message for a change in direction of South African society. “This week’s events in Soweto are both a tragedy and a painful lesson for all who wish to hear. Unless we heed the alarm that has been sounded here, and change direction, we are in danger of running on to the rocks of serious social distress.”¹⁰⁵ This writer used the phrase ‘running on to the rocks’ as a nautical metaphor for violence just under the surface –similar to the ‘black iceberg’ in the title of his piece. He also stated that government violence would not solve the conflict, and rather a change in attitude from government was needed.

The issues are far deeper than the question of Afrikaans medium teaching in black schools, and the response required is therefore more far-reaching than review of African education. The tragedy in the demonstration shown by the police, and even by the army, and the only answer South Africa has to the aspirations of the majority of her people is the loaded gun. But no man can shoot an ideal, and every bullet shot will multiply the frustrations of those who are left behind. Soweto has exposed the underneath of the iceberg of black passion. This has been costly but what can you expect when a people have nothing to lose but life and are prepared to pay the costs”.¹⁰⁶

This is a comment on the militarization of South African society and it demonstrated a strong antagonism to it. It also contains a sense of threat, the anger of a majority that has little to lose. There is a sense that these words addressed a fear rife within the community of readership of the radicalisation of the masses, who through frustration and violence were being shaped into a destructive body.

Meanwhile, two days later, in an official statement summarized by the *Natal Witness*, the Minister of Justice and Police Mr. Jimmy Kruger praised the police, comparing them to the Royal Air force (RAF) fighter pilots in World War II. “The police action reminded him of Winston Churchill’s praise for the

¹⁰⁴ ‘The one man commission’, *Natal Witness*, 19 June 1976, p 8.

¹⁰⁵ Bob Thompson. ‘Underneath the black iceberg’, *Natal Witness*. 19 June 1976: p 8.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, pg 8.

Battle of Britain pilots – never had so much been owed to so few.”¹⁰⁷ Kruger defended his department’s decision to use live ammunition, highlighting the official conception of the need for drastic political discipline:

Mr. Kruger however discounted the use of rubber bullets, which he said would not work in South Africa. “The moment people in a riotous situation know you have rubber bullets it means in effect you have rubber guns. They must realize that if things get out of hand the police have no option but to keep law and order.”¹⁰⁸

What is clear is that the sense of threat was agreed upon by both ‘sides’ in this debate over the nature of political violence. While Thomson laments the provocation of black anger into a threat that could sink society, Kruger is arguing on how that threat must be dealt with in order to ‘keep law and order’.

Denouncement of government provocation is a theme that emerges in a number of forms. In this same issue, the *Natal Witness* published a letter by an anonymous writer who called her or himself ‘South African but not as proud as should be’, which addressed the question of provocation as an ‘ethnic’ issue of Afrikaner Nationalism and the government use of Afrikaans. “The Afrikaans people are as proud of their language as any other nation, but a little restraint in trying to enforce it in this way will help avoid further bitterness and ill feeling.”¹⁰⁹ The writer further urged those in government to empathize with the black population over the language issue. “How would the average Afrikaner like the idea of being taught geography in Zulu or Xhosa? I have some very fine Afrikaans friends and am proud to number them as such, but they are not radicals and extremists.”¹¹⁰ This letter is a plea for the values of empathy and moderation, significantly defined and appealed to within a discourse emphasizing ethnic differences.

Other letters published in the *Witness* were sympathetic to police conduct. On 21 June 1976, a letter by D.L. Scannell which proclaimed with bitterness that the ‘Police can never be right’ was printed in the *Natal Witness*. The writer criticized Mr. Mosala’s viewpoints (which I discuss in the following pages) printed in the *Natal Witness* on 17 June. He stated that, “Mr. Mosala takes the police to task for having become involved, in that they confronted the students. If on the other hand the police – in response to

¹⁰⁷ SAPA ‘Police action gets praised by Kruger’, *Natal Witness*, 21 June 1976, p 11.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ ‘South African but not as proud as should be’, *Natal Witness*, 21 June 1976, p 10.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

previous analogous situations – decided to stay away from Soweto and leave the Soweto students to run amok they would be accused of not raising a finger to control the crowds”.¹¹¹ This contributor perceived a no win situation for the police and defended their actions. In contrast, another letter published the same day by F.J Van Wyk, who was at the time the director of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), complained that the government had been warned by multiple organisations. Van Wyk blamed the government for not reacting to ‘warnings’: “[f]ailure to act wisely in time is the prime cause of the deaths and injuries, of destruction of property and a tragic disturbance of public order and race relations.”¹¹² Views of government failure to respond ‘wisely in time’ to voices of ‘warning’ suggest a broad sense of government as a rational actor, weighing the views of its critics in a reasoned way – a view that takes for granted a particular conception of political power—though in many ways such a view appears more a conceit than a genuine belief.

The government made their own accusations. On 22 June 1976, the *Natal Witness* published an article featuring an attack by NP Member of Parliament, Mr F Herman on the English press and the Progressive Federal Party (PFP). He labelled the English language press in South Africa as “communist” and singled out the *Sunday Times*. “South Africa had the communist press to thank for recent disturbances he said.”¹¹³ In the same article, Mr. Adrian Vlok, the Minister of Security in the South African government, was reported to have alleged that the PFP had links to the Soviet Union. “Mr A.J Vlok said progress “promoted communism” and said their members were “travellers of Moscow.”¹¹⁴

Also on 22 June, Jimmy Kruger stated once again that unrest would need to be suppressed. “We cannot tolerate any extension of unrest; police will have to contain the disturbances”.¹¹⁵ He also stated that not all the deaths in Soweto were due to the police violence and instead emphasized the brutal nature of the rioters. “The rioters in these places followed more or less the same pattern as in burning, looting buildings, throwing stones and other objects, burning vehicles and attacking members of their own

¹¹¹ D.L. Scannell. ‘The Police can never be right’, *Natal Witness*, 21 June 1976, p 10.

¹¹² F.J. Van Wyk. ‘Prime Cause’, *Natal Witness*, 21 June 1976, p 10.

¹¹³ ‘Parliament Reporter’ ‘MP’S in uproar over riots’, *Natal Witness*, 22 June 1976, p 11.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ SAPA. ‘Kruger takes hardline on disturbances’, *Natal Witness*, 22 June 1976, p 1.

race.”¹¹⁶ A day later, the *Natal Witness* reported on Jimmy Kruger’s contribution to the verbal assault accusing the PFP of supporting subversive groups “He joined the concerted attack on the Progressive Reform Party and said Progrefs sympathized with Black Power movements and other pressure movements that wanted to bring down South Africa”.¹¹⁷ The article also gave a summary of his accusations that the PFP were guilty of defamation of the police and racist against Afrikaners.

Questions of race were clearly more explicitly at issue for some readers. While much of the analysis could be construed as implicit in its racial identification, on 23 June 1976, another anonymous letter showed that whiteness was a point of explicit solidarity for some readers. The writer defended the police actions, and contended there were no atrocities committed by police in Soweto. “Not shame at the so called atrocities of the police force but at the fact that certain white skinned, so called citizens still dare to criticize the police for their attempts to prevent further bloodshed”.¹¹⁸ The writer cast shame on ‘whites’ who were ‘selling out’. “No, I feel shame at the fact that I am expected to regard them as fellow South Africans. Shame at the thought that men are dying on the border to save their miserable lives”.¹¹⁹ The author also berated some of the white press for allegedly selling out the white people. “Shame at the fact that some white owned papers that are adding to the white suicide.”¹²⁰

On the same day, the *Natal Witness* published two letters critical of the government and police role in the Soweto uprisings. The first one was by Peter Brown, a liberal stalwart in the 1970s. In previous years, he had helped found the South African Liberal party, a mouthpiece of liberalism in the 1950s. He also assisted political prisoners and was eventually banned for a brief period in 1969 under the Suppression of Communism Act. Brown’s inclusion in the pages of the *Natal Witness* gives further indication of the range of voices the *Natal Witness* was attempting to air. In his letter, Brown asserted that police conduct in the Soweto uprisings was highly irrational in its response to the demonstrations, which allowed the situation to break into violence. “A sound psychological approach and the right equipment are both needed if a blood-bath is to be averted. Equally jumpy and probably racially

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ SAPA ‘All work together, pleads Jimmy Kruger’, *Natal Witness*, 23 June 1976, p 11.

¹¹⁸ ‘A mixture of pride and shame’, *Natal Witness*, 23 June 1976, p 8.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

prejudiced, white policemen with automatic rifles when confronted by an incensed Black mob is sheer madness.”¹²¹ Like other writers, he criticized the South African government’s role in the violence and claimed that it was the biggest danger to the country. “The events of the last week show us that the threat to the security of our country is posed not by SASO but by the National Party Cabinet Ministers.”¹²² Anton Gardner’s letter, which questioned the conduct of the government and police, was also published in this issue of the *Natal Witness*. In his letter, he criticized the police shootings of people who were looting shops in the uprisings: “Why are looters shot dead when no rioting is going on? (Since when has death by firing squad been the penalty for theft?)”¹²³ The government and whites must “learn their lessons”: “If the government and most Whites, are too rigid and insensitive to learn the lesson, and if they are content with sniffing out agitators and blaming the whole thing on someone else – then we are all doomed.”¹²⁴

In another discussion of the security forces, an editorial ‘Law and order’ published on 24 June criticized not the motives but the methods of the riot forces in the Soweto unrest. The writer maintained that the methods used by government to maintain law and order were a signal of its inadequacy. “It is a poor government which sees the maintenance of law and order in terms of ministerial fist and police enforcement”¹²⁵ The writer furthermore criticized the use of real bullets stating the view that rubber bullets would have provided an adequate alternative given that they cause immense pain and injury. It compared South Africa’s methods to other countries, stating

Our methods of riot control involve bloodshed on a scale not acceptable in civilized societies. We should review them. In doing so, we should draw on the experience of many harassed police forces in other countries, which have similar problems and have had to find new ways of dealing with them.¹²⁶

The editorial was an indication of the *Natal Witness*’s capacity to assemble a range of opinions on the causes of protests and use of police force on and following from the 16 June events. Yet, if the aim was to provide a ‘balanced’ and ‘objective’ form of reporting, it is clear that opposing sides often agreed on key points: it was government’s role to discipline unrest, either through avoiding unrest through more

¹²¹ Peter Brown. ‘The Soweto Riots’, *Natal Witness*, 23 June 1976, p 10.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Anton Gardner. ‘The Soweto Riots’, *Natal Witness*, 23 June 1976, p 10.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ ‘Law and order’, *Natal Witness*, 24 June 1976, p 14.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

rational policies or through direct action; and South Africa was a time-bomb with a ‘black iceberg’ which posed the threat of a ‘blood bath’.

On 26 June 1976, Botha was again reported as blaming the Soviet Union for having instigated unrest in Soweto. “Mr. Botha said that Soviet expansionism was however the background against which South Africa’s problems had to be seen.”¹²⁷ He contended that the Soviet Union had strong incentives to control South Africa. “For Soviet influence to grow it had to control the Southern Hemisphere, and it was here that the world strategic influence was gradually moving – to countries like Brazil, Argentina, Australia and South Africa with growing industrial capacity and prosperity”.¹²⁸ Botha also accused the PFP of being traitorous.

Their party has become the mouthpiece of everything that is disloyal and un-South African. Black majority, as understood by the PFP, will bring the peace of the churchyard.” Mr. Botha said he was sorry that the United Party was struggling because he did not want to see it lose its position as the official opposition.¹²⁹

In response to government reports published on the 22nd and 26th of June, the *Natal Witness* published several opinion columns proposing other causes of the violence. On 26 June 1976 weekly columnist for the *Natal Witness* Donald Woods in his piece ‘Soweto signals’, pointed out that Afrikaans was not the main issue behind the riots.

To say that the Soweto Riots were over Afrikaans language instruction in Black schools is like saying that the American Revolution was over George III’s Stamp tax. In each case, these were merely the trigger-issues in a boiling-up of wider general resentment. And in each case, official arrogance was to blame.¹³⁰

He further declared that

It was ironical that [left wing figures] Beyers Naudé and Selma Browde were officially warned in effect not to say anything that would aggravate the situation. That warning should have gone to [right wing] Andries Treurnicht whose initial pronouncement on the language issue was provocative almost to the point of irresponsibility.¹³¹

Woods also addressed Jimmy Kruger’s stated concern over the growth of Black Consciousness and the potential danger to South African society. “But who started all the colour consciousness? Wasn’t it those people who painted signs on park benches? Wasn’t it those people who started laws emphasizing

¹²⁷ SAPA. ‘Revolution in SA impossible – Botha’, *Natal Witness*, 26 June 1976: p 6.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Donald Woods. ‘Soweto and its signals’, *Natal Witness*, 26 June 1976, p 12.

¹³¹ Ibid.

race? Wasn't it those people who encouraged Black Nationalism?"¹³² Woods took Kruger to task on his claims about agitators encouraging violence in the Soweto township. He stated that the apartheid laws and the neglectfulness of the government were the real agitators behind the revolts.¹³³ Thus, Woods provided alternative reasons for the Soweto violence, which were in direct contrast to the South African government line. Woods, a close friend of Steve Biko; had a series of confrontations with the South African government and was reported as scathing in his attacks on government policy. He was eventually banned for his columns in 1977 and in the same year got a toxic package sent to him allegedly by covert South African agents.

On 26 June 1976, an editorial titled 'Who are to blame?' responded to government slurs about the English language press. The writer refuted the idea that it could be blamed for violent protest. Indeed the press served as a 'safety valve' on an explosive situation. Rather it was the legitimate social grievances themselves, which allowed communism to become popular.

It is true that the South African press, in its day-by-day recording of the social and political scene has exposed the injustices and discrepancies of our racial laws; in doing so it has created a safety valve rather than contributed to the explosion. Communistic propaganda can thrive on only real grievances, and there are all too many of these.¹³⁴

The writer blamed the government policies as the main instigator behind the Soweto unrest.

The root cause lies in 28 years of bigoted doctrinaire legislation, 28 years in which less than one-tenth of our population has systematically imposed its will upon the rest of us, in matters ranging from what books we may read and when we may see films (or part of them) to the bulldozing of homes and uprooting of settled communities.¹³⁵

Such prose coming from editors of the *Natal Witness* indicated a strong anti-government discourse, which also attacked white complacency—the "SA" (the 'we') is clearly not a universal 'we' but a middle class white establishment 'we'. This is seen in an article by Ben Thompson, who criticized South African society for failing to see the coming violence.

SA has blindness to the racial problems, 'Alles sal regte kom' is our laissez-faire philosophy when problems surface and so we do nothing about it. Or else we don't see the problems at all. Our myopic stubbornness seems to know no limits, so that when the explosion comes we have to confess that we didn't expect it.¹³⁶

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ 26 June 1976 'Who are to blame', *Natal Witness*, 26 June 1976, p 5.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Bob Thompson. 'O South Africa, South Africa', *Natal Witness* 1976, p 6.

Also on 26 June, a writer of the public responded to the earlier item entitled 'Underneath the Black Iceberg'. The author called the piece "irresponsible" and stated that it would only perpetuate the already precarious situation in South Africa. The author claimed that the government did not suppress blacks and blacks in SA had no reason to be dissatisfied. "To imply that blacks of South Africa are frustrated and oppressed on the whole is not true. The blacks of South Africa are better off than the blacks in most other countries of the world."¹³⁷ The writer claimed that the government had done much for race relations. "Certainly after all the government has done, and is trying to do in the way of race relations, it is wrong to imply that the only answer SA has is through the barrel of a gun."¹³⁸ While this viewpoint is clearly more sympathetic to explicit racial white politics than Thompson's, it is clear that both authors similarly address themselves as if to white, middle class readerships, indicated the degree to which it is perceived that the public of the *Witness* is viewed as a particular cultural community.

On 28 June 1976, the paper printed a letter from 'A Scholar' who wrote that there should not be protests against Afrikaans as a compulsory medium for black schools. He pointed out that Afrikaans and English were vital to learn as "blacks could not vote or participate in the economy if they could not speak any of these two languages and therefore these protestors were unjust."¹³⁹ On 1 July 1976, a letter was printed in reply to the 'Scholar'. The contributor informed the scholar that black people were forced to take Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. The author stated that this legislation was grossly unfair and that it would make passing matric highly unlikely. The writer also asked, rhetorically, if the scholar would want to write his exams in Zulu, making the assumption, in a province where Zulu speakers are a majority, that the writer was not a Zulu speaker.¹⁴⁰

On 2 July 1976, Donald Woods devoted another article to criticizing the government for its narrow-minded attitude. "The Soweto Riots started once Afrikaans was used as a compulsory medium of instruction in Black schools. Then agitators successfully exploited the situation inciting the mobs to turn the whole thing into an anti-white campaign of destruction."¹⁴¹ He added that, he had "never worked

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ "A Scholar". 'Soweto a scholar's opinion', *Natal Witness*, 28 June 1976, p 5.

¹⁴⁰ 'Getting the facts right', *Natal Witness*, 1 July 1976, p 5.

¹⁴¹ Donald Woods 'All commissions gratefully accepted', *Natal Witness*, 2 July 1976, p 10.

out why Mr. Vorster and Mr Kruger appear to think that if riots are planned or successfully exploited by agitators this somehow makes the situation less ominous. To me it is even more ominous, not less. Surely agitators cannot successfully agitate unless there is some mob predisposition regarding the points they can agitate.”¹⁴²

On 7 July 1976, the *Natal Witness* published a letter by Pat Stillwell¹⁴³ stating that social upliftment of blacks was needed to prevent future violence. “Who were the blacks who protected the whites, who assisted the authorities or, who assisted the police in clearing the streets? They were the taxi drivers, the middle class. Those who had something to lose if the riots continued.”¹⁴⁴ This was an idea introduced by government in the 1980s to build an African middle class as a buffer against revolution. It is noteworthy that the *Natal Witness* included this letter, as the idea drawn was compatible with protection of its own social class. A response came on 8 July, in a letter from an Afrikaans writer, who drew attention to the Anglophone class hegemony that appeared to be at work concealing from liberal writers the implications of their critique of the educational policy. H. Vermaak hit out at English criticism of the Afrikaners and more specifically the Afrikaner government. He stated that there was hypocrisy in English people’s outcries over compulsory Afrikaans in black schools. “They [The English] seem very worried about blacks being forced to learn Afrikaans and yet their forefathers were the first to force (when after the Boer war children weren’t allowed to even speak Dutch in schools).”¹⁴⁵

Some days later, the *Natal Witness* publicised Jimmy Kruger’s justification of his decision to keep black schools closed. “Measures were taken because of continued agitation and intimidation in Soweto and other areas, aimed at starting more rioting when schools reopened despite the fact that the language issue had been resolved.”¹⁴⁶ On 17 June 1976, an editorial responded to government statements citing that government’s closure of black schools was the wrong approach and that it failed to address the main causes of violence in Soweto.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Pat Stillwell was part of the Liberal Party of South Africa, was also known as a liberal Christian

¹⁴⁴ Pat Stillwell. ‘Words of warning’, *Natal Witness*, 7 July 1976, p 6.

¹⁴⁵ H. Vermaak. ‘Challenge to ‘these Englishmen’, *Natal Witness*, 7 July 1976, p 12.

¹⁴⁶ SAPA ‘Kruger clamps down’, *Natal Witness*, 16 July 1976, p 1.

The black people of South Africa and particularly those of our great urban centres have a mass of legitimate grievances against Nationalist legislation and Nationalist administration. The whole structure of Nationalist policy should be forthwith examined and reformed or South Africa will be condemned to a further series of explosions on the Soweto pattern.¹⁴⁷

In its opinion section, the *Natal Witness* presented a range of views but editors took a strongly anti-government line in relation to the response to political unrest. Where the government blamed agitators and the Soviet Union, the *Natal Witness* in its opinion section blamed the government and the social conditions for the uprisings. Another aspect of the reporting was the anti-police element in which the *Natal Witness* took a hostile line to the actions of the police during the Soweto riots. Its readers who conveyed a critical stand on government policy had a notably similar analysis of the situation. South African society was a clock ticking and what was needed was for government to 'learn lessons', apply 'sound psychology' and 'the right equipment'; it must 'act wisely, in time' in order to ensure a 'peaceful coexistence between races'. Expressions of anxiety about the future and faith in a rational approach to national institutions were levelled in relation to both the protests in Soweto and government policies.

The *Natal Witness* opinion pieces reflect a liberal antagonism towards the South African police force. They observed the treatment of protestors by police as inhumane, in particular voicing opposition to police shootings. Given that the SAPS were decidedly Afrikaner dominated at the time this reaction can be surmised as a display of an English liberal national identity in which its contributors saw the *Natal Witness* as an agent for civilised practices and a humane society, this in contrast to the believed inhumane methods of the Afrikaner Nationalist state. The issue illustrates a viewpoint from Anderson concerning how a community imagines itself. He states that, "Communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness (sic) but the way in which they are imagined."¹⁴⁸ The ethnic element is further amplified by the *Natal Witness*'s strong criticism of Afrikaner Nationalism to the extent that it was perceived by some as an attack on Afrikaners as addressed in a letter by a member of the public who criticized the English for their constant attacks on Afrikaners. Thus, the strong criticism of Afrikaner nationalism illustrated an imagined English liberal community in Natal alienated by perceived Afrikaner Nationalist dominance. This once again plays into Anderson's theory of how a

¹⁴⁷ 'Negative approach', *Natal Witness*, 17 July 1976, p 8.

¹⁴⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Pg 20

community would see itself as a separate entity. This also plays into what Paul Rich theorizes about Natal being a strong base for English liberalism, thereby the *Natal Witness* could have been a part of the solid base around an English liberalism at the time.

Coverage of arguments from opposition parties

Two characteristics of the opposition parties' statements reported in the *Natal Witness* were, criticism of the NP for causing the violence and recommendations to prevent further unrest. An emotive article appeared by the 'Parliament reporter' for the paper. The journalist reported Progressive Federal Party MP Dr Alex Boriane's accusations of nonchalance from the government.

Warnings of the situation in urban African townships had been sounded with monotonous regularity. Not only the opposition parties but also many other sources had told the government that the townships were "seething with unrest".¹⁴⁹

In the same article, Mr. Radcliffe Cadman, a leading member of the UP was quoted. He accused Minister of Defence PW Botha and Deputy Minister of Bantu Education Andries Treurnicht of negligence.

The Natal head committee of the United Party yesterday condemned the government – and in particular Mr. M Botha and Mr. Andreis Treurnicht – "allowing a situation to develop in Soweto which would be exploited to promote demonstrations, riots and bloodshed"¹⁵⁰

Cadman also praised what he termed "responsible" actions by black leaders for condemning violence as a political solution. "Responsible statements by black leaders and the Natal Students Representative Council condemning violence as a solution were welcomed and supported by the opposition."¹⁵¹ Government's alienation of black people by their policies was the main cause of the unrest, he suggested. "Here lie the root causes of the dreadful sense of oppression and frustration in the hearts and minds of blacks. The Afrikaans language was not the main cause of the disturbances, but had been the trigger that had set off the riots".¹⁵² Four days later, the view of the leader of the UP, Sir De Villiers Graaf, was covered in the paper. He blamed the uprisings on the NP's policies of legally recognized

¹⁴⁹ 'Natal U.P slams Treurnicht, Botha', *Natal Witness*, 21 June 1976, p 8.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

racial discrimination. "South Africa would be foolish not to see that the tragedy of Soweto was the consequence of the Nationalist Government's policy of institutionalized racism on the grounds of colour."¹⁵³ Graaf was reported as arguing that it was propaganda from the government, which helped the situation in Soweto explode. Further, he called an end to the homeland policy and a new course. Graaf

...urged the "obstinately dogmatic member" of the government who thought that their homelands policy was the beginning and end to think again before even worse disaster befalls South Africa. "As long as this government persists on its course so long South Africa must stand in dread of new bloody clashes and an escalating chain of violence."¹⁵⁴

According to the *Natal Witness*, the government had been censured by the UP and PFP for its move further right on racial policies. The NP was not representative of its voters, its reports ran, as they tended to listen to small interest groups inside the party. In another report, Graaf asserted a fundamental part of what was needed for the 'white man's future' in South Africa. "The battle for the mind of the black man was the key to the white man's future in South Africa, but it was a key government was shown incapable of using."¹⁵⁵ He stated that the situation of Soweto was hopefully a reality check for the government, a sign that they must take another course because of the greater world struggle between capitalism and communism.

Pointing out that all these things must now be lifted out of the more limited perspectives which were valid until the end of last year and seen in the broader frame of the East-West power-political conflict, Sir De Villiers said. "Whatever immediate disadvantages may have occurred in consequence of Angola, the dominating new fact is that southern Africa has suddenly been involved in the world power struggle."¹⁵⁶

This view coincided with a governmental discourse on the threat of communism in South Africa.

On 3 July 1976, a joint UP and PFP statement on options to prevent further violence in the country was reported by the *Natal Witness*. The parties agreed that the government was inadequate to solve the situation, as any small change to its policy would be interpreted as a signal that violence was the key facilitator to change. The views of Harry Pitman, MP for the PFP, were summarized in the article.

¹⁵³ Parliament Reporter. 'De Graaf blames Govt for Soweto', *Natal Witness*, 25 June 1976, p 8.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Parliament Reporter. 'Black man's mind is key – Graaf', *Natal Witness*, 3 July 1976, p 11.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

The government was totally unable to save the situation, he said. "Any concession the government makes will be looked upon by the blacks as fear. Predicting that the government would have to back down on the language issue that sparked off the recent riots in Soweto, he said the government was telling people the only way to change anything was by violence."¹⁵⁷

On 7 July, the *Natal Witness* printed Mr. Cadman's viewpoints that the Soweto unrest was a consequence of government policies.

"The grievances of the Black people were far deeper than the language issue. In Soweto, in particular, the people must be given a sense of belonging, the right to citizenship and home-ownership. Unless the government shows some adaptability on these issues, I do not think the real lesson has been learnt," he said.¹⁵⁸

Opposition party leaders of the PFP and UP pointed to government failures as the reason behind the riots. Published in the *Natal Witness*, their views echoed the sentiments of its editors and a portion of its publics. It further cemented the *Natal Witness*'s position that South Africa was in for heavy conflict if the laws did not change. The prevailing view based on the opinion pages and coverage from the opposition parties was that South Africa needed change, however what change the *Natal Witness* advocated was unclear. This highlights an ambiguity in liberalism that on the one hand advocated for an end to the system of racial discrimination and oppression but the same time was undecided and fearful of the kind of change that could potentially take place.

Coverage of international condemnation

In addition to its reportage of opposition parties' censure of the South African government policy, the *Natal Witness* also covered world reactions and expressions of outrage at apartheid policies and, more specifically, the South African police conduct in the Soweto uprisings. This included statements by the United Nations (UN), the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) and other world organisations. The first article features anger in Britain towards the violence in Soweto. The article started with the title 'Fierce reactions to killings in London', which emphasized the animosity towards the South African authorities. The article described 300 demonstrators in the city chanting slogans and waving signs showing their opposition to the SA government. It also covered some labour MP's stating that the

¹⁵⁷ SAPA. 'Promote power sharing – PFP', *Natal Witness*, 3 July 1976, p 3.

¹⁵⁸ Staff reporter. 'Thousands learn Soweto lesson', *Natal Witness*, 7 July 1976, p 2.

‘Soweto riots’ were the worst indicator of repression in South Africa since the Sharpeville massacres as well as stating that the British government was deeply concerned at the conduct of the South African government. Importantly, it also covers which of the London based ‘anti-apartheid movements’ stated that this incident was a tragic one caused by the government’s apartheid policies.¹⁵⁹

On 21 June 1976, under the title ‘Massive Violence and Killings Slammed by UN’, it was reported that the Security Council had censured the South African government for, “massive violence against and killings of Africans stemming from last week’s demonstrations”.¹⁶⁰ The Council stated that the apartheid system was “a heinous crime against the conscience and dignity of mankind and seriously disturbs international peace and security”.¹⁶¹ The Council gave formal recognition to black resistance movements and condemned the South African government for shooting its citizens as well as urging it to abandon the apartheid system and end racial discrimination.

It recognized the “legitimacy of the struggle of the South African people” for the elimination of apartheid and racial discrimination. South Africa was called on “urgently to end violence against the African people and take urgent steps to eliminate apartheid and racial discrimination.”¹⁶²

The article also confirmed that the UN “[c]ondemns South Africa for its massive violence and killings of African people including schoolchildren and students and others opposing racial discrimination.”¹⁶³

The OAU also made statements of condemnation that were printed in the *Natal Witness*. “Africans killed rioting in South Africa were the victims of oppression and racism.”¹⁶⁴ In another account, too, the broader context of racial oppression was flagged by the OAU. One senior official stated, “The three wounds of Africa, Namibia (South West Africa), Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and Azania (South Africa), will be given first attention especially in view of the ruthless massacres in South Africa”.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁹ SAPA. ‘Fierce reaction to killings in London’, *Natal Witness*, 18 June 1976, p 1.

¹⁶⁰ SAPA. ‘Massive violence and killings slammed by UN’, *Natal Witness*, 21 June 1976, p 11.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ SAPA. ‘SA attacked as OAU meeting gets underway in Mauritius’, *Natal Witness*, 22 June 1976, p 5.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

In order to evade government laws against citing unofficial sources on unrest statistics, the *Natal Witness* printed figures from internationally accredited organisations such as the UN. For example, “[t]he UN committee against apartheid heard charges that 1000 blacks were killed in the recent violence in South Africa and not the approximately 140 officially reported”¹⁶⁶ It reported on the observations of Mr Nicosia Valderrame who had been appointed to investigate the issues of the Soweto uprisings. The article revealed Mr. Valderrame’s reports on the estimates of black people who died during the violence. “Leaders of the Black people estimate about 1000 Africans killed in the recent massacre.”¹⁶⁷ Other suspicions were reported: “Mr. Valderrame said black leaders reported that bullets of that calibre [.22 calibres used by the SAPS] were used by a white vigilante Citizens Reserve Force which was allowed to go into Soweto to murder the blacks”.¹⁶⁸ Valderrame also stated that the term to use for the unrest would be better described as an ‘uprising’ rather than a ‘riot’. “He said it was incorrect to term what had happened in South Africa a riot, since that implied a lack of clear purpose. It was not even a massacre but an uprising.”¹⁶⁹

The *Natal Witness* skirted censorship by the South African government by reporting on recognized global sources, even as the South African government tried to discredit foreign news agencies. By giving credibility to the UN, the OAU and their investigations, the newspaper was able to present alternative points of view that aligned to the perspectives of opposition parties and liberal public.

This further highlights a view in liberal thought that government activities had to be in the spotlight as part of its accountability towards the public and positioned liberal identity as being the guardian of free speech and expression against a totalitarian society. Thus, liberals positioned themselves against the censorship of government. It relates to what Pollak has stated about the English liberal press being the only defence against a totalitarian society. It further shows the promotion by liberals of the idea of media freedom being a fundamental pillar of freedom in a society as well as a pillar of resistance to authority.

¹⁶⁶ SAPA. ‘UN committee hears of 1000 riot deaths’, *Natal Witness*, 24 June 1976, p 15.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

Statements from civil society

The *Natal Witness* also publicized the views of local civil society actors, notably from the religious sector, including the South African Council of Churches (SACC), the Christian Institute, and the African Teachers' Association of South Africa (ATASA). This signified an alignment to what the *Natal Witness* saw as Christian principles, something that was also seen in columns and editorials, most explicitly in Bob Thompson's weekly columns.

On 18 June 1976, the Nederduits Gereformeerde (NG) Synod, a church that had officially rejected apartheid as morally wrong, was reported as not wanting Afrikaans to be associated with repression and urged it to be dropped from the curriculum.¹⁷⁰ On the same day, the SACC¹⁷¹ stated that the political unrest emphasized the precarious situation South Africa was in.

"The horror of the Soweto riot was the most dreadful evidence yet of the lateness of the hour in South Africa," the South African Council of Churches said yesterday. In a lengthy statement, the SACC expressed its support for the student protest against the offending regulations and deplored "the totally unwarranted actions" against them.¹⁷²

The organisation declared that the demonstration could not be extinguished by violence because it was for a just cause and the nature of the Sowetan violence showed it was not just about the politics but a humanitarian problem. "The fact that this confrontation involved schoolchildren has the frightening implication that Black grievances are not only a matter of politics but have become a matter of intense and widespread agony, felt by even the children, that could escalate into a national catastrophe".¹⁷³

On the same day, the *Natal Witness* aired the views of the Christian Institute, a multi-racial organisation opened in 1963 to oppose the apartheid system. This organisation suffered harassment by the state with a few of its members interrogated by police. The Christian Institute voiced solidarity with Soweto

¹⁷⁰ SAPA. 'Drop Afrikaans says NG Synod', *Natal Witness*, 18 June 1976, p 3.

¹⁷¹ Founded in 1968, the SACC took a prominent stand against apartheid. Furthermore, it also took resolutions against conscription and supported disinvestment campaigns by the UDF. Interestingly enough it was labelled a 'black organization' in 1972, thus illustrating its multi-racial character.

¹⁷² SAPA. 'SACC supports rioters', *Natal Witness*, 18 June 1976, p 3.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

protestors and documented its apology for not doing enough to oppose apartheid in previous years. It warned the government of trouble if it continued with its racial policies. The Christian Institute asserted that these 1976 riots surpassed the catastrophe of Sharpeville. The state response to the protests was described as brutal by the organisation.¹⁷⁴ The *Natal Witness* also reported that the Anglican Church had called for prayer. It declared that the riots “were a consequence of the oppressive policies from the government and a hideous symptom of failure to satisfy the legitimate aspirations of black people for a fuller and freer life.”¹⁷⁵

Also on 22 June, the *Natal Witness* documented the views of Cosmas Desmond, a Catholic priest and prominent anti-apartheid and human rights activist. His viewpoints were taken from a funeral sermon, where he denounced racism in South African society and expressed solidarity with the victims of Soweto violence. [The article does not mention whether or not it was a funeral for victims of the violence.] Desmond proclaimed that although the apartheid laws and the police were the main perpetrators for the ‘Soweto riots’, all were to blame because of public apathy over injustices in the country. He declared that the ‘Soweto riots’ must rouse the public out of its apathy and steady it to fight for political, economic, and social justice. The newspaper further reported that 300 people were present at the funeral.¹⁷⁶

Another anti-apartheid activist whose opinions were carried by the *Natal Witness* was Beyers Naudé who was a cleric and a member of the Christian institute. Naudé was prominent in organising South African churches’ resistance against the apartheid government. He declared there was no thought in implementing Afrikaans as a compulsory medium of education and that the government should have learnt from its failure in the homeland system of government. Naudé gave three recommendations to avert further violence in the country. The first was a comprehensive plan to take care of social needs for

¹⁷⁴ SAPA. ‘Symptomatic of black feelings says Institute’, *Natal Witness*, 18 June 1976, p 3.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Call for prayer’, *Natal Witness*, 22 June 1976, p 3.

¹⁷⁶ SAPA. ‘Riots must wake us up’, *Natal Witness*, 22 June 1976, p 2.

blacks. The other two recommendations were giving permanent residency recognition to blacks in urban areas and a complete abandonment of Bantu education.¹⁷⁷

The next day the *Natal Witness* reported the views of a combined statement by the leaders of the Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Congregational churches. They expressed their view that the reasons for bitterness among the black population needed to be addressed. "While we recognize that in any situation of violence, irresponsible elements will be involved, we earnestly urge our members to take note of the deep ground swell of bitterness and resentment that can be so easily fanned into violence."¹⁷⁸ Also on 23 June, the paper provided comments on the Soweto riots from the Witwatersrand Council of Churches, another regional Christian organisation. This comment on the irresponsible elements once again pointed to the theme of responsible versus violent opposition. They stated that fighting would not solve the situation and that the unrest indicated the deep need for change and social reform to avert further violence.

"The current events are a tragic sign of the urgent need for change in South Africa.", says a statement issued by the council. "The situation of urban Africans cannot be dealt with by the use of force on both sides. The reasons for hatred and despair must be removed. The minister of Bantu education could defuse the situation by immediately withdrawing the regulation, which has given offence to so many black pupils."¹⁷⁹

The *Natal Witness* also covered declarations from the Students Representative Council (SRC) at the University of Natal, Durban. The two representatives of the SRC were Mr. Lees and Mr. McMillan. The paper reported Mr. Lees's assertion that government policies were leading the country into violence and Mr. McMillan's contention that social and political suppression would only lead to more unrest. "We know exactly what we can expect if we continue to suppress the political and social frustrations of the people of South Africa".¹⁸⁰

ATASA was a teachers union, which although opposed to racial discrimination, had been criticized by some for its conservativeness. ATASA's criticism of government was chronicled in the *Natal Witness*.

¹⁷⁷ SAPA. 'Afrikaans and blacks', *Natal Witness*, 22 June 1976, p 2.

¹⁷⁸ SAPA. 'Hard bargaining needed to avert violence', *Natal Witness*, 23 June 1976, p 11.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

ATASA slammed the government for its introduction of Afrikaans as a compulsory medium and called for reinstatement of all school board members who were fired because of their opposition to the policy. The article reported that more than 30 members had met with the Minister of Bantu Education. "It was clear that the blacks at the meeting laid [sic] the line that there could be no return to normal until Afrikaans had been dropped as a medium of instruction".¹⁸¹ The board also emphasized that black leaders had constantly warned the government of unrest unless they dropped Afrikaans as a medium but that "[t]he department adopted an unsympathetic and unbending attitude and that certain circuit inspectors made ill advised comments and provocative remarks on the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction."¹⁸²

The acclaimed author Nadine Gordimer was also outspoken about these events. On 28 June 1976, her views on the Soweto uprisings appeared in the *Witness*. The article reported that she laid the blame fully on the government whom she believed had provoked the riots through its unfair policies. "The Afrikaans language is associated with the police and government officials are indeed a pretext, standing for wrongs as old as white supremacy."¹⁸³ The article also summarized her advice to the government commission investigating the causes of violence, where Gordimer stated that, "it should look no further than the government's divisive racial system. The agitator behind the revolt of the children is apartheid itself."¹⁸⁴

On 1 July 1976, the paper included the views of the moderate right wing voice of Professor W.P Esterhuyse of Stellenbosch University, who addressed the Afrikaanse Studentebond (ASB). The *Natal Witness* reported his views on the problems of white interaction with the other races. "Whites, he said were too accustomed to talking down to Africans, Coloureds and Indians."¹⁸⁵ There was, he said, a need for dialogue between 'races' rather than use of force. "Good will could not be won by guns but by contact. There should be more contact between teachers and ministers of religion of all races."¹⁸⁶ He

¹⁸¹ SAPA. 'Drop Afrikaans demands ATASA', *Natal Witness*, 26 June 1976, p 2.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ SAPA. 'Writer blames violence on apartheid', *Natal Witness*, 28 June 1976, p 4.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ SAPA. 'Professor urges state status for Soweto', *Natal Witness*, 1 July 1976, p 7.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

advocated moderate racial separation. “Soweto and other large urban African cities in South Africa should be given status of states like, Monaco and Lichtenstein.”¹⁸⁷ He also said that ‘total separation’ was not viable. “Total physical separation was not possible and he did not think it was necessary.”¹⁸⁸ This illustrates a willingness by the *Natal Witness* to report voices of the more moderate right wing. In an editorial focusing on his speech, the writer asserted, “there were passages that could have startled an ASB audience ten years ago.”¹⁸⁹ Nonetheless, the author perceived Professor Esterhuyse statements as reactionary and viewed the state’s solution as simply another way to oppress the black population, and segregate them away from white society, as well as deny them citizenship and their rights. “As far as we can see, it is only an alternative procedure for depriving of the South African citizen, those Africans in Soweto who do not opt for Bantustans. As such it will never solve any problems.”¹⁹⁰ Rejection of a moderate right wing view is another indication of the distinctive, liberal stance that the *Natal Witness* was creating at this time.

These sources provide an indication of the anti-government discourse in the *Natal Witness*. They were also, in conjunction with the facet of Christianity, highlighted in the *Natal Witness*. It further underscores a facet of Christian humanistic ideology, which focused on individual freedoms and rights. This did not recognize the economic aspect and power politics in South African society. Furthermore the quoting of well-known liberal voices in its pages indicated the position it was attempting to take.

Black agency, criminal and political

Articles in the *Natal Witness* made a distinction between responsible, rational motives for protest in response to legitimate grievances and irrational, irresponsible lawlessness in reports on violent events in Soweto. The paper demonstrates a civic ideal of law and order of a particular kind.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ ‘New thinking’, *Natal Witness*, 8 July 1976, p 12.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

On 17 June, the news headline of the *Natal Witness* read 'Soweto Slaughter'. The article graphically described the violent situation in Soweto and put a special emphasis on whites, some of them social workers, being attacked.

Cars were overturned and set alight. Whites on the black township's roads were assaulted. At least two white men, officials of the West Rand Bantu Administration, were killed after being dragged from their cars. Four white women, all employees of the department of social welfare, were injured when a mob set upon their car.¹⁹¹

The article in some ways depoliticized some of the protests, reporting that criminal elements had "taken advantage" of the violence. "Reports from inside Soweto indicate thugs were taking advantage of the situation. Four bottle stores have already been looted."¹⁹² Yet, as seen, it did distinguish them from the rest of the protestors. In an article on the same page, the story tells of violence by demonstrators against photographers. The article featured the story of a *Sunday News* photographer's account of the violence against him, emphasizing his racial identity as a 'black photographer'. "Alf Khumalo, a black photographer, was taking pictures of the student march before violence erupted. As the students clashed with police, he was dragged to the floor by students objecting to his taking photographs. "A boy who sat next to me was shot", he said. "Students were crying. They were in a fury."¹⁹³

Another report featured a denouncement of 'lawlessness' by Boputswana homeland leader Lucas Mangope. According to Mangope

Such violence could be counterproductive to Africans. The wanton destruction of property, the killings and other demonstrations are not only deplorable but in the final analysis rebound to Nowoane's [sic] advantage. In a situation of lawlessness and total confusion even dialogue which is in fact and should be the origin of redress, to genuine grievances. The destruction by fire of schools, post offices and clinics, amounts to a destruction of our children's progress. In fact this is the most effective method of retarding our own progress.¹⁹⁴

On 18 June 1976, reports on the uprisings continued, with the article titled 'Riot Death Toll Soars'. The article reported that the chaotic situation in Soweto had spread. "Rioting blacks were also on the rampage last night in the African township of Kagiso, Krugersdorp, 25 km north-west of the Soweto townships".¹⁹⁵ The article also depicted some protestors as criminally violent. "Following the looting

¹⁹¹ SAPA. 'Soweto Slaughter', *Natal Witness*, 17 June 1976, p 1.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ SAPA. 'Rioters attack photographers', *Natal Witness*, 17 June 1976, p 1.

¹⁹⁴ SAPA. 'Boputswana chief condemns violence', *Natal Witness*, 17 June 1976, p 3.

¹⁹⁵ SAPA. 'Riot death toll soars', *Natal Witness*, 18 June 1976, p 1.

of beer halls and liquor stores, drunken youths rampaged through the streets. Armed with pickaxes, iron bars, knives, and sticks they indiscriminately attacked buildings and vehicles, while others manned roadblocks.”¹⁹⁶

Thus, in the days following events in Soweto, a picture emerged in the pages of the *Natal Witness* of black protestors as a danger to the public. The paper also emphasized the threat to white civilians in a story with the dramatic headline titled ‘Berserk axe man fells 5’.

The axeman first appeared in the Harry Hofmeyer Park on the West side of the city where he exhorted Blacks to “Bulala Mhlungu (kill the whites).” According to an Indian flower seller, the Africans left hurriedly and the axe man produced an axe from under his red and white striped shirt. “He didn’t even run he just went along chopping at whites, shouting that he was doing it for the children of Soweto.”¹⁹⁷

Two days later, the *Natal Witness* reported on the protest violence, which had spread from Soweto to other parts of the country such as Pretoria, led often by civil rights student movements such as the South African Students Organisation (SASO)¹⁹⁸. The article reported, “There were several unconfirmed deaths and renewed violence yesterday in the Pretoria township of Mamelodi.”¹⁹⁹ It added that some of these occurred when a bottle store was attacked. “There were unconfirmed reports of six deaths in Mamelodi when the Vuma bottle store was razed and looted.”²⁰⁰ The article described incidents that happened in another township, also linking looting and arson with black protests. “There were isolated incidents of violence in the East Rand townships of KwaThema, near Springs, where a beer hall was burnt down and a primary school was set alight. The burning of the complex was sparked by a decision by the Bantu Administration board to withdraw the liquor supply.”²⁰¹ The article further reported that, “firemen were able to prevent the school from being gutted, in spite of being stoned while fighting the fire.”²⁰² An editorial on 26 June, which commented on the uprisings, acknowledged that there were criminals taking advantage of the ‘riots’ in Soweto; however, it separated them from the protestors. “It

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ SAPA. ‘Berserk axeman fells five’, *Natal Witness*, 22 June 1976, p 1.

¹⁹⁸ SASO was an anti-Apartheid organisation which first formed in 1968. It became influential in black resistance politics especially amongst the youth. The movement was fundamental in organising protests which led to the Soweto uprisings.

¹⁹⁹ SAPA. ‘More arson and deaths near Pretoria’, *Natal Witness*, 24 June 1976, p 10.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

is true that some mob leaders and criminals have been active: bottle stores for example, are not sacked by idealists or for political ends, except very occasionally, by ardent teetotallers [sic]. But burglary and looting obviously played a minor role in the riots”²⁰³

This thread of news presented readers with lawlessness and wanton violence that accompanied black protest and were part of the aftermath of police violence. This was one very prominent representation of black struggle – the ‘time-bomb’ and threat to civil society that opposition party leaders, editors and a number of letter-writers decried in their conviction of the dangers of policy to social order. However, another face of black protest was also represented. Page one of the 17 June issue published statements from Mr. Mosala, who was a councillor of the Soweto Urban Bantu Council. He warned of consequences to come if no change was forthcoming.

Mr. Mosala warned in the council earlier this week that enforcing Afrikaans in schools might result in another Sharpeville incident. “If the matter is not dealt with immediately.” But the department merely delayed matters instead of dealing with the central problems which are student’s unwillingness to learn both English and Afrikaans and the lack of qualified teachers to teach Afrikaans.”²⁰⁴

The article also reported that Mr. Mosala

said yesterday police should not have confronted the protesting students. “The police should have realized that directly they moved against the students than the students would retaliate”, Mr. Mosala said. He said the police should have consulted with the parents and school officials about how best to handle the situation rather than trying to handle the situation themselves.”²⁰⁵

In the same article the *Natal Witness* also published the frustrations of Anglican Church leader Desmond Tutu, representing the voice of black leadership

The dean of Johannesburg the very Reverend Desmond Tutu said: “We black leaders have been warning government about something like this happening for a long time if they do not stop and listen.” When he heard about the riots, he said, “For goodness sake, somebody listen to us”²⁰⁶

On 22 June 1976, the *Natal Witness* reported the views of another black leader, Mr. Moerane, who was president of the Association for Educational and Cultural Development for Africans – an organisation working for an expansion of urban rights to black people. This report was taken from Parliament in

²⁰³ ‘Who are to blame’, *Natal Witness*, 26 June 1976, p 6.

²⁰⁴ SAPA. ‘Get police out, stop this teaching system – councillor’, *Natal Witness*, 17 June 1976, p 1.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

which Moraone expressed his views to the government. The paper reported his 'warnings' of further violence if government did not change their policies. "Confrontation would be such a dimension that it would make the current unrest look like a Sunday school picnic"²⁰⁷ The article summarized his view that, although violence was not the way to solve the problems, it would inevitably happen if the government continued on its present policies.

The arbitrary and unilateral division [of the 1913 Native Lands Act] left Africans 13% of the land, "And that kind of order cannot last and will bring disaster to the land."²⁰⁸ He warned that some Africans had already considered conquest, as a way of counterassault. He also said that, "In his council fighting was not best way to deal with the situation, dialogue should be used to solve problems, and accordingly we request the government, in consultation with us, seek ways and means of giving effect to this desire."²⁰⁹

As well as covering the views of individual black leaders, the *Natal Witness* published a number of stories that illustrated humane interactions between black and white people during the chaos surrounding the Soweto events. The *Natal Witness* featured two examples of how blacks had helped save whites from harm and potential death. The first article documented a story of how a black family helped shield a white person who was a health official when he escaped from black attackers after they ambushed him in his car. The article explained that the family was able to smuggle Mr. Beehe into Johannesburg the next morning. In a second article, it was reported that 25 black victims of the violence were sent to a clinic in Sandton, with half of them receiving emergency operations. This story was addressed in an editorial titled 'The right way'.²¹⁰ It also noted there was an exception in a midst of tragedy over the riots.

It was one happy aspect of last week's violent confrontation that, to the best of our knowledge, not a single incident occurred of an injured person being denied treatment or compelled to wait from ambulance or hospital because he was not a member of the group which the ambulance or hospital was designed to serve.²¹¹

It also implied that these actions would help racial harmony. "Twenty five African men and women, half of whom had to have immediate operations were given the necessary treatment and, when conditions permitted returned home or passed on to Tembisa. Patients and their families, we imagine,

²⁰⁷ SAPA. 'Proposed plan to expand urban powers', *Natal Witness*, 22 June 1976, p 2.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ 'The right way', *Natal Witness*, 22 June 1976, p 10.

²¹¹ Ibid.

will long and gratefully remember their reception at Sandton.”²¹² These two stories, as well as the editorial, portrayed a civic ideal of humanistic racial harmony.

The views of protest emerging from coverage in the *Natal Witness* make a distinction between valid political protest against an unjust social order and lawlessness and criminal violence that emerged in the chaos. The reports frequently went into graphic descriptions of violent activities from the youth in Soweto using strong words such as ‘thugs’ and ‘mob’ to describe them. The articles tended to depoliticize some of the protestors, portraying them as being without a purpose. Nonetheless, they also portray a rational kind of political actor, with legitimate demands, seeking change.

Issues around the Soweto uprisings

In relation to coverage of the Soweto unrest, the *Natal Witness* also reported skirmishes of the security forces in southern Africa, internal terrorism trials in South Africa and civil defence plans. The South African government saw all these activities as being intrinsically linked with the Soweto uprisings as a Soviet plot to take over southern Africa. These issues contributed to a state of siege mentality. The *Witness*, also, emphasized a potential threat of violence to whites. An explicit example of this was coverage of a South African ‘treason trial’ on 24 June 1976. The article entitled ‘Liberal Whites will also be killed’, documented threats by a state witness, who reported a plan to eliminate all whites without exception. “A state witness, Mr. Wilson Wilberforce Sinxo, also told the court that in spite of the respect some Blacks had for white liberals such as Helen Suzman and white liberals on Robben Island, it had been decided that all whites, rich, poor, verkrampt, and liberal would be massacred.”²¹³ The article described plans for external training in military camps. “They are alleged, among others, to have tried to leave South Africa to get military training in Tanzania. It is alleged that their training was to have lasted for two years, but that they would have been able later to go to Russia or China for specialised training in sabotage.”²¹⁴ Thus, this issue gives an understanding of the *Natal Witness*’s ambivalent stance towards black opposition, which it considered radical and militant. This issue is also

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ SAPA ‘Liberal Whites will also be killed’, *Natal Witness*, 24 June 1976, p 4.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

seen in *Natal Witness*'s coverage of SWAPO, an organisation set up to free Namibia from South African rule and end racial discrimination for black people. It used military tactics to achieve their goals such as sabotage and the killing of soldiers and officials. The *Natal Witness* used words such as 'terrorists' to describe SWAPO militants and reported their using 'Russian made weapons'. An example of this is an article on 2 July in the *Natal Witness*, '3 more terror men die in SWA'. It reported a skirmish between the SADF and SWAPO. "Three more terrorists were killed and one severely wounded in a skirmish on Wednesday afternoon south of Ovambo, a joint statement by the South African defence headquarters and the South African Police headquarters said yesterday."²¹⁵

Another important theme the *Witness* took up from government discourse was the fear of Soviet infiltration. On 2 July 1976, an editorial titled 'Keeping the Russians out', addressed the Western countries drive to keep the Soviet Union out of southern Africa. In the editorial the theme of changing South African internal policy to reduce the threat of communism and avoid international isolation is played out, as seen from the editorial quoted:

It is far more like and fervently to be hoped, that Mr. Vorster promised changes in his racial policies that would allow Western countries to be seen in our company again. Yet the success or failure depends ultimately, not on Western help but on the people of Africa themselves. Unless Black Africans are made to perceive that their interests, as well as the whites have truly been accommodated, Dr Kissinger's ambitious scheme must fail.²¹⁶

This quote shows the link perceived between the Cold War and the Soweto uprisings, where the editorial speculated that South Africa could be isolated in a war against Soviet influence with black people possibly supporting communism if its alienating apartheid policies were not changed. Thus, the coverage of treason trials and SWAPO adds insight into the nature of reporting on the Soweto uprisings, because of the similar themes emphasized. This provides further evidence of the liberal movement attempting to discredit stronger opposition to the apartheid government by portraying groups such as SWAPO as terrorists. There were also a number of common themes and linkages between the Soweto uprisings and these issues. These commonalities included the fear of black unruliness and violence as well as anxiety concerning an indirect Soviet attack on the country.

²¹⁵ SAPA. '3 more terror men die in SWA', *Natal Witness*, 2 July 1976, p 1.

²¹⁶ 'Keeping the Russians out', *Natal Witness*, 2 July 1976, p 10.

Conclusion

Several issues can be raised in relation to the content of the *Natal Witness* in the weeks following the protests by students against Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, the police violence it was met with and the social chaos and clash of political voices that followed. Firstly, is the illustration of the Natal English-speakers as a community that viewed themselves as connected to each other.

Anderson speaks about an imagined community, where the members of a nation have no connection to each other and have had no communication with each other, but nonetheless see themselves as unified with each other.²¹⁷ Thus, part of the hostility towards the police force in South Africa could have been part of an English speaking Natal nationalist reaction against an Afrikaner authority that they saw as dominating. This is especially relevant given the province's reputation as being the so-called last outpost of British hegemony in South Africa, as well as considering popular sentiment over possible secession of Natal from the rest of South Africa in previous years.

Secondly, with blame overwhelmingly placed at the feet of the government, a theme that emerges is of 'warning'. The idea that rational voices from among the government critics had warned that violence would erupt (that a 'time bomb' would explode) if certain conditions were not met comes through loudly in these pages. It is assumed here that the nature of government is a balance of interests, maintaining law and order, and that by these criteria the NP government had failed. It attributes failure to lessons not learned and warnings not heeded 'in time' of the 'black iceberg' that will destroy society.

Thirdly, it offers an ideal vision of society as one with good race relations, black and white people showing humanity to each other – a 'peaceful co-existence'; the idea that 'blacks are people' who should be consulted in the political process. In the 1976 period there is a seemingly strong endorsement of moderate black leaders, who with their non-violent but supposedly critical stance towards the government laws, are portrayed as the alternative to black anger. This fear of a black revolution highlights that the *Natal Witness* was influenced by racial ideologies entrenched in South African

217 Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* London: Verso, 1991, p 8.

society at the time. Despite not being as extreme as the South African government, the *Natal Witness* demonstrated racialised thinking in its anxieties about black violence.

Another of the prominent themes that came out in this period was the ethnic tensions between English and Afrikaner South Africans. Seen as promoting bigotries and attacked for its conservativeness, Afrikaner nationalism was depicted as a major cause of the Soweto uprisings. One possible reason for the explicit attack on Afrikaner nationalism could be an English South African nationalist backlash against the introduction of Afrikaans as a compulsory medium of education. This may have been perceived as a further encroachment of Afrikaans into South African life.

My study also illustrates assertions of Andrew Heywood who defines a nation as a “cultural entity, and not necessarily a political association, nor is it necessarily linked to a particular territorial area - although nationalists argue that the boundaries of a nation and a state should, as far as possible, coincide.”²¹⁸ In some ways, this study further reveals that English liberalism was produced as a culture, in addition to its political personification in political parties such as the Liberal Party and the Progressive Federal Party. The English language press was essentially an agent of this culture, helping both its popularisation and spread. This relates to the view of Paul Rich who stated that Natal liberalism was effectively popularized and remained strong through its institutions such as the press.

It is notable that the paper's sources, that voice opposition, are broadly drawn from international organisations, Christian leaders and social welfare organisations. Its construction of a moderate, measured response is found in the airing of various views, but with special editorial emphasis that showed apartheid policy as dangerous to civic order. The *Natal Witness* also included voices of well-known liberals, some strong oppositional figures to government such as Peter Brown and Donald Woods for example, which gives more indication of the type of discourse that the *Natal Witness* was attempting to include in its discourse. Furthermore, this type of discourse would have likely to be influenced by Richard Steyn who had taken over as editor of the *Natal Witness* in 1976 and continued his reign until 1990. He was a very strong proponent of liberalism as well as being praised by many

218 Andrew Heywood. *Political Theory: An Introduction* (Second ed). London: Macmillan Press, 1999. pp 97–98.

writers such as Haw and Tomaselli as taking a courageous stand against the apartheid system. He is currently one of the founders of the Helen Suzman foundation, which illustrates further his liberal values.

Finally, the *Natal Witness* did not cover more radical viewpoints, such as socialist and communist viewpoints. Its dualistic portrayal of black action illustrated the paper's ambivalent discourse on social and political change in South Africa. Therefore, as Tomaselli, Pollack and Louw surmised about the English language press in South Africa, the paper did conform to a particular positioning in South African society. It also contradicted Welsh's statement that the nature of liberalism included tolerance for all viewpoints.

Chapter 2

Cold War anxiety on both sides of the border:

Operation Reindeer, Operation Protea and conflicts closer to home

This chapter concerns the *Natal Witness*'s construction of a discourse of oppositional liberalism through its coverage of two key events in the so-called border wars. In this analysis, I will discuss the discourses created around terrorism, apartheid and the SADF role in southern Africa. More specifically, I will be discussing issues pertaining to reportage on SADF invasions into Angola in 1978 and 1981, as well as the South African occupation of South West Africa (now Namibia).²¹⁹ In my discussion, I will be interrogating two SADF operations that took place in these periods. The first was known as "Operation Reindeer", and was launched in May 1978. In this operation, the SADF invaded parts of Angola to root out SWAPO camps. They claimed success but both SWAPO and independent observers counterclaimed that the supposed "base" was in fact a refugee camp. The second incursion under review in this chapter occurred three years later, was called "Operation Protea", and took place from 23 August 1981 to 4 September 1981. This action was also claimed a success by the SADF as it cleared out the SWAPO military camp. The first issue I will interrogate is the *Natal Witness*'s dialogue with governmental sources from their opinion pages. This will include responses by the editorials, columns, and letters to both South African government and oppositional statements concerning the subject of the border wars.

In this analysis, it is important to note the international and local context at the time. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Cold War spread to Africa with both the Soviet Union and the United States competing for influence on the continent. The Soviet Union assisted one of the liberation movements, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)²²⁰ in Angola through providing weapons

²¹⁹ In this thesis, I will be using the name South West Africa, as it is the name used at the time.

²²⁰ The MPLA were one of the liberation movements in Angola during Portuguese colonial rule. After the Angolan war of independence, they were involved in a civil war with over liberation movements for control of the country.

and military advisors. This was coupled with Cold War, anti-communist ideology in South Africa, which viewed Soviet expansionism as a significant threat. In relation to this issue, I will demonstrate the textual production of a recurrent ideological theme promoted by the newspaper: that apartheid was ironically perpetuating the threat of communism in South Africa, even as troops crossed national borders under the justification of defending the country from communist infiltration. The argument was that the government was making communism attractive to black populations through its unpopular laws.

To explore these themes, I focus on the two mentioned military interventions that came to represent the fraught nature of war in the theatre of southern African border states. I analyse a six-week period of coverage following each of the events in question. My first sample on Operation Reindeer extends from 13 May to 21 June 1978. The second sample focusing on discourses around Operation Protea covers 26 August to 2 October 1981. The sources that the *Natal Witness* used included both official and non-governmental sources. Official sources consisted of statements from government, and the security forces, which included the SAP and SADF. Non-governmental sources included international newspapers, opposition parties, and prominent individuals in South African society. The main sources of information the *Natal Witness* utilized were official, where a form of “embedded journalism” took place. The Defence Act of 1967 stipulated that any information or rumour regarding the SADF could not be published without consent from the Minister of Defence. This included information about mobilization of SADF troops or allies to a specific area, the production of weapons and any other information considered classified by the government during wartime. The Act also restricted the publication of any information considered hurtful to the integrity of the defence department and the SADF without prior consent of the Minister of Defence. The SADF set up a public relations office in which they provided news and information, which they regarded as suitable. Despite these measures, the *Natal Witness* managed partially to get around some of these restrictions by quoting international sources such as the UN and the president of Angola. They also used data provided by the main news industry, SAPA.

In the sample of news content from 1978, nine articles were taken from official sources and twelve articles focused on non-governmental sources. There were also eight opinion section commentaries

focused on South African involvement with South West Africa and Angola. These consisted of six editorials and two columns. For my 1981 sample, the *Natal Witness* carried thirty-one articles, which consisted of eighteen articles from official sources and thirteen from non-governmental sources. There were also twelve opinion section commentaries concerning the issue: eight editorials and four opinion columns.

Exchanges of discourse between official sources and opinion articles regarding Operation Reindeer

Operation Reindeer took place on 4 May 1978. The SADF attacked a SWAPO military base in Cassinga, a town on the southern border of Angola. Recently, author Dick Lord, who fought in the South African Air Force (SAAF) has declared that Operation Reindeer was a comprehensive victory for the SADF. “Although only 16 SWAPO cadres were accounted for, cross-border follow-up achieved a far greater result. It crushed the insurgency campaign on the Eastern Front; SWAPO never regained a position of strength in the Caprivi.”²²¹ This attack caused controversy as SWAPO claimed the attack was on a refugee camp for those displaced by the war in southern Africa. Despite South African denials, the Red Cross also declared it a refugee camp. As a result, international bodies such as the UN, OAU, and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) heavily condemned South Africa. The condemnation was transmitted throughout the international media, further emphasising South Africa’s reputation for state-sponsored violence, when it was already being criticized for the deaths of schoolchildren in Soweto. Also important were South African negotiations with the UN over Resolution 435, which were in process at the time: the conditions included South Africa pulling out of South West Africa and a democratic election-taking place in the country.

The government set out several themes in its position about the SADF role and about SWAPO. The first of these was a justification for its authorization of incursions into Angola, putting special emphasis on the Russian threat to southern Africa. The government saw these as necessary to protect South Africa and South West Africa from “terrorist activity” by SWAPO. The government also saw itself as having

²²¹ Dick Lord. *From fledgling to eagle: the South African Air Force during the Border War*. (Johannesburg: 30 Degrees South, 2008) p152.

to defend against the greater threat of communism in the region. Finally, the government claimed that a legitimate election could not take place in South West Africa without the suppression of SWAPO's military wing. Another aspect of the official sources was the denial that South Africa was expansionist in its aims. The government line was that South Africa was engaging militarily, purely to protect its borders.

The first government defence for Operation Reindeer published in the *Natal Witness* came from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Pik Botha. On 6 May 1978, he claimed that SWAPO was not holding its side of the agreement in recent negotiations. "It has to be emphasized that SWAPO had not only accepted the proposals of the Western powers, but that it had increased its acts of violence during recent days on a wide front. SWAPO's reply to South Africa's acceptance was to commit more violence."²²² Botha claimed the action was one of defence, stressing the necessity for South Africa to maintain its commitment to "protect" the people against insurgent violence. "South Africa cannot forsake its duty to give the people of the territory the necessary protection. Without that they will be entirely defenceless and become prey of merciless physical violence"²²³

On 8 May 1978, an editorial titled 'The strike into Angola' commented on the SADF raid on a SWAPO camp based there. This editorial conceded it as a resounding military victory for the SADF and affirmed that South Africa had a right to defend its people.

Judged in pure military terms the South African strike last week into SWAPO bases in Angola appears without a doubt to have been successful. In Parliament, the opposition have expressed their support for the action. As Harry Schwarz, had argued, "it would only seem fair that South Africa should be entitled to protect her own troops and the people of SWA/Namibia against ambush, assassination and intimidation so that free and fair elections may be held."²²⁴

Therefore, the writer advances the view that on a military level South Africa was within its rights to attack SWAPO because of a military threat to peace and democracy in the region. In the next paragraph, the writer also criticized past actions of the government towards South West Africa claiming that its attempts to thwart democracy in the region had made the military invasion necessary.

²²² SAPA. 'World reaction', *Natal Witness*, 6 May 1976, p 1.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ 'The strike into Angola', *Natal Witness*, 8 May 1978, p 6.

It is indeed one of the ironies of history that South Africa finds herself the guardian of democratic processes which she has resisted for so long. It is one of the tragedies of history that her resistance to that process has largely contributed to the circumstances, which made military action necessary.²²⁵

The writer therefore expressed a dual and ambivalent position, which, on one hand, saw South Africa as a protector of democracy and SWAPO as a threat to the region and on the other hand, was critical of South Africa's past foreign policy.

On 13 May 1978, further official explanations of the government's actions in Angola were reported in the *Natal Witness*. The article disclosed Mr. Botha's reproach to the United States over its criticism of the incursion into Angola, where he stated that the US paid no heed to the "terrorist" activities of SWAPO. In this view, South Africa had both a right and a responsibility to protect the region from SWAPO militarism and ensure that democracy was established in South West Africa.

He said in an interview, I find it strange that Mr. Holding Carter, the state department spokesman should find South Africa's timing of the raid so unfortunate but that he does not find it unfortunate that SWAPO terrorists are killing innocent civilians in South West Africa. Throughout a year of long discussion, I have personally urged the five Western governments to do their utmost to persuade SWAPO to stop its violence. The five Western nations know very well what SWAPO is up to in the territory. They all have intelligence services.²²⁶

Two days later the *Natal Witness* reported South African President B.J. Vorster's views on the situation, which reiterated the military operation as justified and a "right". He accused SWAPO of increased violence, asserting that, "SWAPO had stepped up their terrorist activities from Angola, demanding military response."²²⁷ Vorster stated that, "[c]onsequently there was nothing else that could be done under the circumstances."²²⁸ Vorster further claimed that South Africa was interested in a peaceful government for Namibia, and that it would "not tolerate" the region being used for facilitation of SWAPO attacks. "South Africa was interested firstly in good government in the territory and secondly, that the territory should not be used as a springboard for terrorist attacks on South Africa. Naturally if that happens, we will hit back which is the right of any country under those circumstances."²²⁹

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ SAPA. 'Botha slams US policy towards SWAPO violence', *Natal Witness*, 13 May 1978, p 1.

²²⁷ SAPA. 'SWAPO gave us no choice, says Vorster', *Natal Witness*, 15 May 1978, p 7.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

On May 20 1978, Tom Copeland (a columnist employed by the *Natal Witness*) conceded that the UN set double standards in its dealings with violence in the Southern African region. “Why, for example should South Africa’s recent military raid be condemned universally, while acts of terrorism in South West Africa/Namibia and elsewhere raise hardly a protest?”²³⁰ On 29 May 1978, an editorial titled ‘Two sides’ attempted to interrogate both the issue of South West Africa and Operation Reindeer. The editorial, which indicated an alternative approach to the government, insisted that there were “two sides” to the issue. “Much as South Africans may believe in the correctness of the government's attitude they should understand that the other side does not. As McHenry [head of a Western delegation helping negotiations over Namibian independence] himself pointed out in his Press conference last week he and the Western contact group were regarded as pro- SWAPO by the South Africans but as pro South Africa by SWAPO”.²³¹ The editorial also charged that South Africa had to bear the consequences for its actions in Angola, given that it was a sensitive time for the SADF to invade. “The Ascension Day strike into Angola by South African forces has not helped the process of bringing about a settlement in SWA/Namibia if for no other reason than it has added to the distrust of the South African government by the other side.”²³² This editorial indicates that the *Natal Witness* was formulating a middle ground discourse, a path between the South African government and SWAPO’s anti-colonial strategies. As is typical of a liberal press, the ‘objective’ path (and truth) is perceived as lying between, or through a balanced consideration of, two positions. In this case, these editorials also give an indication of the ambivalence that the *Natal Witness* maintained in these early campaigns. It was not always homogenous on the subject.

On 1 June 1978, the *Natal Witness* reported that Vorster had praised the West for seeking to strengthen NATO, in reaction to the ‘Marxist threat’. He asserted that this threat was not only against South Africa, but was a menace to the entire Western world. Vorster also called for an end to arms sanctions against South Africa stating that the country was an integral part of the battle between ‘Marxism’ and ‘the West’.

²³⁰ Tom Copeland. ‘Even SA has double standards’, *Natal Witness*, 20 May 1978, p 4.

²³¹ ‘Two sides’, *Natal Witness*, 29 May 1978, p 10.

²³² Ibid.

I think I have the right to put this question to the West: taking into account the threat, which you know, exists and taking into account that the NATO defence has to be improved why do you withhold arms from the one stable country in this part of the world? What do you hope to achieve by befriending those who want to boycott South Africa? What cause do you serve by harming South Africa?²³³

On the same day, an article appeared which featured a speech by F.W De Klerk, the Minister of Post and Communications, at the Republic Day in Pretoria on the threat to South Africa. De Klerk contended that, “South Africa needs a strong and motivated defence force on a continent where Marxist expansionism and Western escapism is evident and there is a build up of weapons on an unbelievable scale.”²³⁴ In another Republic Day celebrations speech, reported by the *Natal Witness*, Minister of Information Connie Mulder stressed that South Africa needed to keep faith to avoid “Marxist insurrection”, which occurred in countries on their borders. “If the people of South Africa lose faith in themselves the country will yield to communism in the same way as Angola and Mozambique.”²³⁵ On 1 June 1978, the *Natal Witness* published selected quotations from a speech by Dr Piet Koornhoff, the Minister of Sport and Recreation, at the Republic Day celebrations. He addressed accusations that South Africa was expansionist in its aims. The *Natal Witness* reported Koornhoff’s statement that, “South Africa has never wanted death and destruction around its borders. Indeed the principle has as always been to prevent war, to grant another nation its right to live and to avoid death and destruction as much as possible.”²³⁶

On 12 June 1978, an editorial focused on the Walvis Bay issue in the negotiations. At the time Walvis Bay was one of the main talking points in the negotiations between the South African government and SWAPO. The writer asserted that South Africa would have nothing to lose in ceding Walvis Bay to an independent Namibia, warning that if they did not, it would potentially stall the negotiations. “To refuse to cede Walvis Bay – as it has stated it will – may well cause [SWAPO leader] Sam Nujoma to repudiate the Western proposals entirely. On the other hand, South Africa will hardly lose much in giving up Walvis Bay.”²³⁷

²³³ SAPA. ‘West’s change of heart welcome’, *Natal Witness*, 1 June 1978, p 13.

²³⁴ SAPA. ‘South Africa must do their bit’, *Natal Witness*, 1 June 1978, p 5.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ SAPA. ‘SA totally opposed to war says Koornhoff’, *Natal Witness*, 1 June 1978, p 5.

²³⁷ ‘Poker game’, *Natal Witness*, 12 June 1978, p 6.

Opinions expressed in the *Natal Witness* in this moment of 1978, regarding the violence on the South African borders, took a similar line to the government in relation to a 'communist threat' and the need for collaborative action. The fear of a potential revolution coincided with this anxiety. Despite this the *Natal Witness* still took a less aggressive, more moderate stance within its opinion pages as evidenced in its petitioning for increased negotiations in Southern Africa. This is in contrast with the South African government, which favoured a more hardline, militarist approach to the issues in Southern Africa. This once again demonstrates a lukewarm response by the paper concerning militarisation in 1978. It also provides commentary on the complex nature of liberal thought, which in itself was full of contradictions and double mindedness when it came to change in the system. It further provides indication of a conservative tone in liberalism despite attempts by liberals to set themselves apart as being thoroughly progressive.

Non-governmental voices

The *Natal Witness* aired other sources, both international and local, contributing to a more open public discourse around the South African border operations. These included sources from prominent people in South Africa such as clerics and opposition MPs. International sources consisted of statements by the UN, the OAU, the Angolan Government, SWAPO, and prominent personalities internationally. These non-governmental sources were all in opposition to the South African government, which further indicated the distance its line, took it.

On 8 May 1978, the *Natal Witness* quoted remarks by two prominent Namibian Anglican Bishops Ed Morrow and Heinz Humke, about South African conduct in South West Africa. Rev Morrow slammed Operation Reindeer as a crime against humanity. "The Ascension Day massacre in Angola of men, women and children has all but destroyed any chance of a peaceful settlement in Angola."²³⁸ In the same meeting, Heinz Hunke was reported as claiming that torture of political activists in South West Africa was commonplace throughout the country.

²³⁸ Witness Reporter. 'SA raid blew peace hopes – SWA cleric', *Natal Witness*, 8 May 1978, p 9.

He said the torture was institutionalized – it was spread all over the country, had been taking place consistently over the past 10 years, took place in special rooms with an interrogating officer present and special jargon was used amongst police to describe various tortures.²³⁹

The *Natal Witness* also recorded Hunke's eyewitness evidence for his statements.

On the credibility of reports of torture, Mr Hunke said several primitive people had accurately described the machinery used while having never seen the type of machinery before. Witnesses including Mr Hunke himself, had seen “bleeding people” coming from police stations and seen their scars and medical evidence indicated torture had taken place.²⁴⁰

Two days later the *Natal Witness* reported on statements from a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agent that the organisation and the SADF were responsible for the Cuban presence in Angola. “The CIA worked closely with South Africa in trying to wage a secret war in Angola two years ago and therefore helped legitimize the presence of large Cuban forces in Africa.”²⁴¹

From another angle, however, on 11 May 1978, the *Natal Witness* published claims by Mr K Stanley of the Namibian National Front (NNF)²⁴² that SWAPO were heavily influenced by the Soviet Union, thus diminishing their credibility as a national liberation organisation.

He said SWAPO now found itself in the company of the MPLA, the Cubans and the Russians. Even SWAPO's bases in Southern Angola were named Moscow and Vietnam, which prompts one to question their credibility. Mr Stanley said Cuba, Russia and Angola were foreign to SWA/Namibia and because of SWAPO's involvement with them, the NNF, a predominately black political umbrella organisation, could no longer support SWAPO.²⁴³

On the same page, a very different view was presented. Documentary filmmaker Michael Sanden put forth an alternative picture of the situation.

Cassinga was a well-known refugee base, he said. It had a garage, clothes-maker and clinic. Only a few SWAPO troops had been stationed there to guard the 5000 to 6000 refugees against UNITA soldiers. The South Africans had raided Cassinga in order to provoke SWAPO to break off settlement with the five Western members of the UN Security Council.²⁴⁴

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ SAPA. 'CIA-SA connection in Angola alleged by former official', *Natal Witness*, 10 May 1978, p 1.

²⁴² The NNF was a small Liberation movement in Namibia dedicated to Namibian independence, however seen as more moderate than its SWAPO counterpart.

²⁴³ SAPA. 'Namibian Front chief slams SWAPO, DTA', *Natal Witness*, 11 May 1978, p 7.

²⁴⁴ SAPA. 'Sam Nujoma often in SWA claims SWAPO', *Natal Witness*, 11 May 1978, p 7.

Thus, Sanden reported, the SADF Cassinga raid was a humanitarian disaster for the area. On 13 May 1978, the *Natal Witness* recorded a motion by the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) declaring its condemnation of South African activities in South West Africa, presenting a petition with 250 student signatories. “The motion...condemns South Africa's presence in the territory and attempts to exclude SWAPO from the democratic process of change and supports the full participation of SWAPO in this process.”²⁴⁵ Five days later, the *Natal Witness* published a review of a booklet by SWAPO claiming the authorities tortured Namibian people.²⁴⁶ “The South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) has released a booklet in which it claims that South West Africans in South African prisons have been tortured and poisoned”.²⁴⁷ The booklet further asserted, “South Africa had extended its security legislation in SWA/Namibia because of strengthened resistance by Namibians to its illegal occupation.”²⁴⁸

On 31 May 1978, the *Natal Witness* recorded defiant declarations from SWAPO that they would resist oppression from the South African government. SWAPO asserted that, “it will fight any government imposed on the people of Namibia by the South African government.”²⁴⁹ The *Natal Witness* published SWAPO claims that it would continue with all its powers at its disposal against South Africa's “Balkanization”.²⁵⁰

SWAPO also issued statements concerning South African occupation and the proposed forthcoming elections.

The question of SWA/Namibia revolved on the “brute and illegal occupation of the territory in defiance of international opinion. Therefore talks about elections referred to by John Vorster are a mockery of all known election procedures and democratic requirements”.²⁵¹

On 1 June 1978, the *Natal Witness* reported on a UN meeting concerning the South African incursion into Angola. The Angolan representative accused the SADF of using inhumane weapons. “South

²⁴⁵ Witness Reporter. 'Local students protest SRC motion on SWA', *Natal Witness*, 13 May 1978, p 1.

²⁴⁶ The *Natal Witness* did not list the name of the booklet concerned.

²⁴⁷ SAPA. 'SWAPO claims torture', *Natal Witness*, 18 May 1978, p 4.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ SAPA. 'SWAPO vows to fight any 'imposed' government', *Natal Witness*, 31 May 1978, p 7.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

African troops who invaded Angola on May 4 caused 'horrible deaths', using weapons of which the Angolans had no previous knowledge."²⁵² On 12 June 1978, the *Natal Witness* reported a story about conservative students at the University of Cape Town disrupting a meeting addressing concerns over official actions in Namibia. The article included allegations of torture and illegal detentions committed by government officials in that region. "Two churchmen from SWA/Namibia told of torture, floggings, and detentions by 'officials' in the territory and called for an impartial inquiry into the allegations."²⁵³ On the same day, the *Natal Witness* reported on a summit by African heads of states (those of Zambia, Botswana, and Kenya) regarding the South African occupation of South West Africa. It published discussions about the Walvis Bay situation, detailing that the communiqué wanted full protection for Walvis Bay as well as to prevent South Africa from using the area for military offensives.

The frontline states urgently demand that the Security Council take measures to guarantee the territorial integrity of Namibia and return Walvis Bay rapidly to Namibia. The communiqué said any attempt by South Africa to use Walvis Bay to sabotage SWA\Namibian independence should be regarded by the council as a threat to international peace and security.²⁵⁴

They said that South Africa should be prevented from making incursions into countries such as Angola and Zambia from Namibian bases. "The frontline states condemn the use of military bases in Namibia to attack sovereign states as happened recently in Cassinga – a reference to last month's South African raid on a SWAPO camp inside Angola."²⁵⁵ On 24 June 1978, accusations by the Zambian government of brutal incursions into that country via South West Africa were also published in the *Natal Witness*. "Zambia has accused South Africa of using SWA/Namibia as a springboard for what the acting minister of foreign affairs called 'barbaric acts of aggression' against the people of Angola and Zambia."²⁵⁶

These sources, aired in the *Natal Witness*, reflected and constructed a public discourse for its readership in relation to the South African border wars in 1978. Many of these sources were oppositional to the South African government approach on the border wars. They also attempted to expose government misconduct through its publication of allegations. One interpretation is that the *Natal Witness* was acting as a 'responsible opposition', to keep the South African government accountable. Yet, combined

²⁵² SAPA. 'SA troops caused horrible deaths' – claim', *Natal Witness*, 1 June 1978, p 7.

²⁵³ SAPA. 'Conservative students disrupt UCT meeting', *Natal Witness*, 12 June 1978, p 1.

²⁵⁴ SAPA. 'Frontliners demand SWA takeover', *Natal Witness*, 12 June 1978, p 3.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ SAPA. 'Zambia lashes out at South Africa', *Natal Witness*, 24 June 1978, p 4.

with much of the opinion expressed in its pages, it also supports the notion that the *Natal Witness* was trying to create a centrist, moderate approach to the border conflicts.

1981 Operation Protea

Three years later, in 1981, there was a marked change in the discourse of the *Natal Witness* regarding South African incursions into Angola. This gives insight into the gradual evolution of liberal discourse concerning the South African government's militarist approach to political conflict in the Southern African region as well as South African militarization in general. Such developments can be seen in its approach to Operation Protea, an incursion into Southern Angola, which started on 24 August and ended on 3 September 1981. The SADF and South African government, claimed that the operation had cleared out the SWAPO military camp and set the organisation's military capabilities back. One of the other objectives in the campaign according to former SADF soldier Granger Korff was to ensure that SWAPO's protection by the Angolan forces was taken away.²⁵⁷ As author Dick Lord puts it, "SWAPO forces could no longer be protected by the defensive umbrella provided by Angolan forces sited around these towns."²⁵⁸ Despite the international condemnation it received, this operation was much less controversial internationally than Operation Reindeer had been. The most significant aspect of Operation Protea was that the SADF found its first direct evidence of Soviet involvement by finding Soviet weapons as well as documents. This was a great success for the South African government's propaganda machine, which was attempting to convince the public that the Soviets were trying to infiltrate Southern Africa. However, Lord described a sobering message with this victory. "With the raising of the South African's confidence came the realization that subsequent operations would become much harder as captured or destroyed military equipment was replaced by newer and better weapons."²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ Granger Korff. *19 with a bullet: a South African paratrooper in Angola*. (Johannesburg: 30° South, 2009) p 83.

²⁵⁸ Dick Lord. *From fledgling to eagle: the South African Air Force during the Border War*. (Johannesburg: 30 Degrees South, 2008) p105.

²⁵⁹ Dick Lord. *From fledgling to eagle: The South African Air Force during the Border*. p 106.

Before the news was made public, editorials in the *Natal Witness* made clear their objections to SADF military operations in Angola as well as the secrecy surrounding them. An editorial on 27 August 1981 addressed suspicions of a SADF incursion in Angola. “Since we were not told that our troops were in Angola during the last major invasion of that country, perhaps we should not be surprised if it happened again. But why should the people of South Africa, who after all pay for and do the fighting, not be told that our defence force is being deployed outside the country”.²⁶⁰ The reporter also speculated on the possibility of igniting a direct war with Angola. “If the Angolan claims are accurate then it would seem that we are technically at war not with SWAPO but with Angola. The repercussions of such a state of affairs are likely to be considerable and the probability of sanctions will have increased dramatically”.²⁶¹

Two days later, the editorial went further in its criticism of the operation, as seen by the title ‘SA’s Vietnam’. The author conceded that the Operation Protea was ‘justified’, as it would hamper SWAPO in their efforts. “From the military point of view, South Africa’s recent incursion into Angola may have been justified. By destroying enemy bases the Defence Force has made it more difficult for SWAPO to mount its own raids across the border”.²⁶² This illustrated that from a pure military perspective the editorial endorsed the SADF actions as correct. However, on another level the author warned of severe international and political ramifications to come.

But from the political perspective the operation has been a disaster, because it has given our Afro-Asian rivals just the pretext they need to unite both the East and West against this country. From now on we can expect increased contributions to the SWAPO war chest and a greater readiness to use Cubans and the MPLA to defend Angola, as well as a unanimous condemnation of South Africa’s action in the General assembly.²⁶³

The author also asserted that pre-emptive strikes into foreign territory had always been controversial in international opinion and gave the example of the Israel, which was under international condemnation for its refusal to allow Palestinian refugees into its territory, who had been evicted from their homes following a civil war in 1948. The author, however, stressed differences between these cases.

South Africa’s case is unfortunately much weaker than Israel’s because she is regarded as being in unlawful possession of South West Africa. If there were hope of holding early elections acceptable to the UN and the republic and ending the bush warfare that benefits no one, then raids like these could be accepted as necessary

²⁶⁰ ‘Whispers of war’, *Natal Witness*, 27 August 1981, p 14.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² ‘SA’s Vietnam’, *Natal Witness*, 29 August 1981, p 6.

²⁶³ Ibid.

prelude to a settlement, but such prospects seem to be receding and advancing. The tragic possibility exists that the operational area will become South Africa's Vietnam.²⁶⁴

Thus, the editorial put forward an ambivalent argument, which from one perspective saw action by South Africa as being correct militarily but not politically. In 1981, the same themes as in 1978 emerged regarding government sources on South African militarization. On 1 September 1981, a defence spokesperson commented that Angola's accusations of continued occupation by the SADF in the country were propaganda. He also declared that SADF troops needed to stay for humanitarian purposes.

Security forces had also helped members of the local population to resettle in their homes after the operation, the spokesman said. They had also been given medical attention and food. He reiterated that Angola had been making propaganda, in view of the United Nations sitting, by saying that security forces were still occupied large tracts of Angolan territory.²⁶⁵

On the same day, the *Natal Witness* conveyed the views of Magnus Malan the then Minister of Defence regarding Soviet and Cuban involvement in southern Africa. He stressed that there was definite proof of Soviet involvement in Angola and that it was therefore imperative to maintain internal arms industries in South Africa.

I trust that the Western world has taken note that there is irrefutable proof that apart from Cubans, there are also Russian officers at the FAPLA and SWAPO headquarters. It has nothing to do with Russian liberation but rather Russian enslavement, General Magnus Malan said. The need for self-sufficiency and the value of the arms industry had again been emphasized by what happened in Angola last week.²⁶⁶

Four days later, an editorial commented on Cuban and Soviet presence in southern Africa. It supported Resolution 435, which was an initiative by the UN for independence for South West Africa as well as a ceasefire between SWAPO and the South African security forces. This resolution also attempted to ensure a free and fair election once the South African government had pulled out of South West Africa. The editorial predicted that if South Africa accepted the resolution it would ensure independence for South West Africa, facilitate free elections and end any viable reasons for Russian and communist involvement in the region. "Number one prize for the Reagan administration and the West is a settlement of the South West Africa question, which would finally remove whatever excuse the

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ SAPA. 'Landmines 'delay' SA withdrawal from Angola', *Natal Witness*, 1 September 1981, p 6.

²⁶⁶ SAPA. 'Soviets involved', *Natal Witness*, 1 September 1981, p 3.

Russians and Cubans have for being in Angola in such numbers”.²⁶⁷ It also warned the South African government that it would face isolation if it failed to cooperate with plans for Namibian independence.

Assured of US support in settling the details and perhaps in implementing them Pretoria may now be more inclined to let independence elections go ahead. If it is not and Mr. Reagan is left with nothing to show for his policies, our refusal to budge could mean the end of a short and promising friendship.”²⁶⁸

This column thus showed strong support for a Western solution, rather than one, which looked to the liberation movements in South West Africa and South Africa. On 7 September 1981 Gerald Shaw, a *Cape Times* columnist whose works were regularly published in the *Natal Witness*, wrote that fear of the Soviet Union was exaggerated. Shaw claimed that South Africa’s invasion into Angola had been a setback for Western aims in that region as well as South Africa’s security because it would justify Soviet and Cuban involvement in the region. “The South African raid into Angola was a diplomatic setback for the West because it reinforced the pretext for Cuban; East German and Russian troops to remain in Angola They purport to be there to protect the land against South African invasion.”²⁶⁹ He also stated that the Soviet hold over Angola was an exaggerated perception as Angola had financial incentives for good relations with the West and it was only the SWAPO war keeping Soviet and Cuban troops in the country.

As it stands now Angola is by no means a Soviet puppet. It is the continuing war in SWA/Namibia with SWAPO enjoying a sanctuary in Angola, which has embroiled the country with South Africa militarily and created an opening for the Soviet/Cuban bloc. Economically Angola is wholly dependent on Western multi-national big business. Most of its national budget is financed by the Gulf Oil corporation’s operations in Angola.²⁷⁰

Shaw also argued that the Soviet threat was always largely exaggerated in Southern Africa and asserted that the government could not distinguish between real and imagined threats.

The big problem is the misplaced notion, which persists in Pretoria about the nature of the communist threat. There is an inability to distinguish between Black Nationalism and communism and between adherence to Marxist ideas and commitment to the foreign policy aim of the Soviet Union.²⁷¹

Shaw’s column rejected the government line. A day later, an editorial addressed the potential confrontation in Southern Africa if the government did not support Resolution 435. The writer said it

²⁶⁷ ‘We must respond’, *Natal Witness*, 5 September 1981, p 12.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Gerald Shaw. ‘South Africa’s predicament laid bare’, *Natal Witness*, 7 September 1981, p 6.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

was preferable for a SWAPO government to come into power as opposed to continuation of a difficult war. “An election may well end in a SWAPO victory at the polls, but even such an outcome would be preferable to an eventual full-scale confrontation between SA and the rest of Africa backed by Soviet and Cuban advisors.”²⁷² It suggested that a solution would halt Soviet involvement in the region. “An internationally recognized settlement, which would reduce Soviet mischief making in the subcontinent is very much in the long term interests both of South Africa and the West itself.”²⁷³ This editorial was significant as it stressed an alternative to the increased militarization in the region. Shaw is a writer and proponent of South African liberalism who, since this period, has regularly had articles and books published which defended and promoted liberal values. His voice being quite prominent in the *Natal Witness*, gives insight into what values *Natal Witness* editors were trying to air.

On 16 September 1981, the *Natal Witness* carried a report by the chief of the South African army Jannie Geldenhuys. He proclaimed the success of Operation Protea, contending that SWAPO were unlikely to recover quickly from the disarray caused by the military offensive. “We have driven SWAPO far north into Angola and they have suffered significant casualties. Their command structure has been disrupted, for the time being, and SWAPO’s logistical supports have been effectively broken.”²⁷⁴ He also justified the attack on Angolan forces, claiming that they interfered on the side of SWAPO. “The security forces had launched a three-pronged pincer movement with one of its aims the prevention of involvement with Angolan forces. But the Angolan forces did not try to evade the security forces and intervened he said.”²⁷⁵ A *Witness* columnist who was apprehensive about the South African raids into Angola was Anthony Delius, a literary writer and prominent liberal. In his article ‘Russia is smiling’, he made a number of points supporting the opinion that the Soviet Union in fact benefited from the South African attacks, as opposed to the contrary. Delius also speculated that the South African attacks made it unlikely that the ruling party in Angola, simply because of enticing trade offers by the West, would dismiss the Russians.

²⁷² ‘Nearer a solution’, *Natal Witness*, 8 September 1981, p 12.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ SAPA. ‘SWAPO forces in chaos after action. Gen’, *Natal Witness*, 16 September 1981, p 2.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

The South African invasion or incursion (call it what you will) could make it even less likely that Angola will push out Cuban and Russian troops in order to strike a big development and trading agreement with the USA. The more probable result will be an increase in both Cuban and Russian support, and a determined building up of radar air defences to shoot raiding South African aircraft out of the skies.²⁷⁶

On 18 September 1981, *Natal Witness* editor Richard Steyn described as 'fair' a perspective on the issue of political violence, aired in the British press.

Perhaps the most fair evaluation of the situation in Angola is provided by Fred Brigland in the *Spectator* who points out that if South Africa have a great deal of violence to answer for, the same is true of Cuban, Soviet, American, British and African citizens in the region.²⁷⁷

He described Brigland's view of the West's hypocritical behaviour towards South Africa, pointing out they unfairly singled out South Africa in their condemnation.

The Cubans and Soviets have ruthlessly pursued power rather than liberty, Western policy has graduated from sopiness to opportunism. African policy is confused and ambiguously torn between a detesting of apartheid and an awareness of the Cuban and Soviet danger. But what unites and binds all of them is an astonishing hypocrisy of the assumption that South Africa must behave decently in Namibia, while they themselves have pursued practical foreign policy interests instead of high-minded idealism.²⁷⁸

Steyn urged the South African government to follow up its success on the battlefield with a wise diplomatic front that would take in mind Resolution 435 lest South Africa find itself in a tumultuous situation in South West Africa.

Unless our military successes are followed up by some farsighted diplomacy, which takes account of what the likes of Chester Crocker are trying to achieve in southern Africa there is a real risk of Namibia becoming a political quicksand from which we will not seriously try to extricate until it is too late.²⁷⁹

Four days later, an editorial, titled 'New hope', further voiced support for the implementation of Resolution 435. The writer praised the government's apparent willingness to venture elections in South West Africa under a Western settlement stating that it might have come to a realization that further conflict would be futile.

If this means that our government is ready to risk an election in Namibia and is not merely going through the motions of negotiating then it must be commended for its realism. It appears that they [the South African government] have recognized that unless there is a negotiated settlement in the territory, South Africa will be sucked deeper in a confrontation we ultimately cannot win.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Anthony Delius. 'Russia is smiling', *Natal Witness*, 17 September 1981, p 6.

²⁷⁷ Richard Steyn. 'What are we doing in Angola?' *Natal Witness*, 18 September 1981, p 10.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ 'New Hope', *Natal Witness*, 22 September 1981, p 8.

Six days later, Gerald Shaw spoke about the desperate need for a Western settlement in South West Africa in his column titled 'Sober Optimism on SWA/Namibia'. He claimed that a successful solution to the South West Africa situation would be extremely advantageous for South African interests in the region whereas a failed one could be potentially disastrous. "The advantages of a Western-sponsored settlement of the problem are overwhelming. The cost of failure on the other hand, could be ultimately disastrous for the Republic and for the subcontinent."²⁸¹ Shaw further asserted, "A co-operative South African attitude will earn this country a much closer relationship with Washington which would be a real gain for South Africa's security in a dangerous world."²⁸² His analysis pointed to the way Cold War aggressions were manifesting as heated exchanges on the African continent.

The Reagan administration is in much need of a striking coup in foreign policy, chalking up a few points against the Soviet Union. The departure of Cubans from Africa would represent such a coup, a rolling back of communism in southern Africa, as it were and would be much easier to achieve than a similarly advance of Western interests in Afghanistan or Eastern Europe.²⁸³

Additionally, Shaw spoke about the futilities of South Africa continuing its military action in South West Africa claiming that

... [a] Namibian dispute that drags on intermittently provides a pretext for further Soviet bloc interference and creates ideal conditions for communist exploitation. The last thing Soviet Russia wants to see in southern Africa is a negotiated Namibian peace coming after a Zimbabwean settlement achieved under British auspices, which was a notable setback for Soviet aims.²⁸⁴

The Soviet Union, wrote Shaw, would benefit from a SWAPO military takeover of South West Africa, as it would strengthen Soviet justification for occupation in Angola.

The current Soviet policy in this region is a Namibia liberated by a SWAPO-led revolutionary war. For Soviet purposes, the longer the war drags on, the better and the greater the propaganda value and the disruption of Western interest. The SWA/Namibian impasse and the South African raids have already provided an excuse for the Cuban presence and the involvement of Russian technical advisors in the country.²⁸⁵

Shaw also speculated about the possible implications for South Africa if no settlement was made for South West Africa's independence. He claimed that although the Nationalists exaggerated for their own

²⁸¹ Gerald Shaw. 'Sober optimism on SWA/Namibia', *Natal Witness*, 28 September 1981, p 10.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

political purposes the Soviet threat was, after all, real. He claimed that South Africa could face isolation internationally if it failed and would be in even more danger of Soviet interference. He also elevated the Western solution as the most beneficial for the region.

A Namibian peace under Western auspices would have a calming and stabilizing effect on the entire sub-continent. The departure of the Cubans would not only delight President Reagan. It would calm down South African anxieties to an extent at least. It would enable the South African government to pursue once again the rational goal of normalizing relations with Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola. In doing so, it would achieve more security of this country than any dirty tricks or military muscle can do.²⁸⁶

Shaw also continued to believe that a SWAPO victory would not necessarily be a 'disaster' because South African dominance in the region could lead to good relations if the government managed the situation 'rationally'.

The prospect must be faced that SWAPO could well win UN-supervised elections. But this need not be a disaster as this column has frequently argued, and South Africa's relations with a SWAPO led government in Windhoek, if properly approached could be calm and business like. After all, South Africa has a giant's strength in this region interest.²⁸⁷

He added that South Africa's economic and military hegemony in the region could offer them a lot of advantages in their diplomacy. "South Africa, if it tried, could probably learn to live with a SWAPO government as it learnt to live with Samora Machel in Mozambique, and given a modicum of intelligent diplomacy could do the same with Mr. Mugabe. The republic's military and economic muscle gives it great leverage in the subcontinent."²⁸⁸ His envisioning of a stable, inter-regional harmony between states differed strongly from the government line and supported the Western states' solution.

An article, published on 6 October 1981 recorded the South African authority's defence of South African foreign policy towards Angola. It recorded words of an SADF spokesperson, who stated that the, "Angolan threats to call in the aid of friendly nations against South African troops still in Angola were a desperate attempt to seek a scapegoat for the chaotic situation in that country".²⁸⁹ The spokesperson also denied reports from Angola that troops were still in the country. "The SADF has

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ SAPA. 'SADF dismiss Angolan threats', *Natal Witness*, 6 October 1981, p 11.

repeatedly said that it is not occupying villages in Angola, and it has no reason to occupy towns and villages.”²⁹⁰

In 1981, the dialogue between government sources and opinion articles continued to be engaged in the public space of the *Natal Witness*. One of the key themes emerging in the *Natal Witness*'s opinion section in 1981 was the vision of a pragmatic approach to diplomatic relations in the region and the notion that feared Soviet influence was in fact being bolstered by SADF actions in Angola.

A key difference between 1978 and 1981 was the newspaper's growing support for the possibility of a SWAPO-led government. Another example of this approach was its petitioning the SADF to stop invading Angola. The secrecy of the South African government was also under fire by the *Natal Witness*, which advocated strong arguments against it even as it simultaneously conceded to the idea of a genuine Soviet threat. This signalled a gradual progression of cynicism concerning the legitimacy of the Soviet danger, frequently propagated by the South African government. Notably too, writers like Shaw looked to 'the West' for regional solutions and sought to de-legitimise political movements aligned to 'communist' support and ideals.

These conclusions on the opinion pages of 1978 and 1981 provide evidence that liberal voices in the *Witness* were gradually altering their attitude to militarization in South Africa. Between 1978 and 1981, liberal discourse shifted from a measured response to South African militarization on its borders to adopting a very sceptical outlook on both the government's intentions and the viabilities of border wars in Angola and Namibia. Further reflected here was the growing disbelief by English speaking liberals to the supposed Soviet threat.

Another aspect based on my analysis is that the *Natal Witness* supported a Western solution as well as Western humanism in general. This effectively reflected a desire to be a part of the Westernised world. This is indicative of how the *Natal Witness* created an identity for itself as well as English language speakers in the province. These points serve as a demonstration of Anderson's point that a community

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

builds an identity around defining itself against an 'other'. Accordingly, the *Natal Witness* also might have sought to contrast the Nationalist Party government's ideology and methods against its own. Thus by defining the government's viewpoints and actions as bigoted, it would have sought to define itself as open minded and flexible. This sort of hostility nonetheless illustrates a point by Anderson in which he states that no nation imagines itself as coterminous with humanity.²⁹¹ Thereby the *Natal Witness* served as a vehicle for a liberal identity, aligning themselves to Western nations' ideologies.

Non-governmental voices on Operation Protea

In 1981, the *Natal Witness* continued to extract information from both international and local sources not connected to the South African government. These included opposition MPs, the UN, the OAU and British newspapers. On 27 August 1981, the newspaper recorded statements from a US spokesperson who said that, despite the US condemning the SADF's invasion; it had to be seen within the Southern African context. "The United States has deplored the attack by South African forces into Angola but says it must be viewed in the light of guerrilla attacks into SWA/Namibia and the presence in Angola of Cuban troops."²⁹² In the same article, the vocal international condemnation was highlighted. "South Africa's incursion into Angola was widely condemned yesterday with several countries calling for an end to the operation and others for severe diplomatic sanctions against Pretoria."²⁹³ The report also quoted a South African ambassador's defence of the incursion. "We are not invading Angola. We are taking necessary action against terrorist bases in Angola and we are acting against terrorists and not the Angolan army and people."²⁹⁴ On 28 August 1981, Angolan claims of heavy and hi-tech fighting equipment being used by the SADF were reported in the *Natal Witness*. "Angola claimed yesterday that South African forces had thrown tanks and helicopters into heavy fighting near the provincial capital of N'Giva in the South of the country."²⁹⁵ The Defence Department in Angola also claimed they had shot

²⁹¹ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. p 10

²⁹² SAPA. 'US deplores SA raid into Angola but...' *Natal Witness*, 27 August 1981, p 1.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ SAPA. 'Aircraft, tank shot claim', *Natal Witness*, 28 August 1981, p 5.

down South African air force planes. "The defence ministry in Luanda reported the Angolans had shot down a South African plane and helicopter."²⁹⁶

On the same day, strong reactions on the incursion into Angola were reported by the *Natal Witness*. Dr Van Zyl Slabbert (a prominent liberal critic in South Africa who would later form the Progressive Federal Party, one of the main opposition parties after 1983) is quoted as stating that it was an SADF responsibility to be accountable to the public about its military operations. "Dr Slabbert said the SADF could not be expected to respond to every allegation concerning its military activities, yet an intolerable situation would occur if the Defence Force engaged in large-scale action and the South African public was kept uninformed about the true state of affairs."²⁹⁷ The *Natal Witness* also quoted Mr Jaap Marais, leader of the Herstigte Nasionale Party, who recalled the secrecy of previous SADF military operations, citing the example of the invasion into Angola in 1975. "Since the South African government had broken the law by entering Angola in 1975 and then claimed it had done so at the request of the US there has been a loss of confidence."²⁹⁸

A day later, the *Natal Witness* documented the applause for SWAPO by the governments of Botswana and India. Leaders of those nations complimented SWAPO on their tireless fight for justice against oppression. "A joint statement issued by the two countries at the end of a state visit by the Botswana President also praised SWAPO's heroic liberation struggle in SWA/Namibia."²⁹⁹ On the same page, Australian Minister Malcolm Fraser attacked the South African government for its policies, which he said encouraged Soviet intervention in southern Africa. This viewpoint was in line with the discourse familiar within the opinion pages of the *Natal Witness*. "He attacked South Africa saying their policies offered the best invitation to the Soviet Union to become involved in southern Africa."³⁰⁰ Once again, this time from the Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, who, despite being differently placed geographically, was regarded as a 'Western' leader. On 1 September 1981, the *Natal Witness*

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Parliament Reporter. 'Opposition leaders react strongly to SA raid into Angola', *Natal Witness*, 28 August 1981, p 15.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ SAPA. 'Botswana, India praise SWAPO' *Natal Witness*, 29 August 1981, p 9.

³⁰⁰ SAPA. 'Africans will oust Cubans', *Natal Witness*, 29 August 1981, p 9.

documented claims by the Angolan government news agency Angop that the SADF was invading Angolan cities. “South African forces were still occupying the towns of N’Giva and Xangongo along with other areas in Angola’s border province Angop said.”³⁰¹ The agency further alleged that several cities had sustained severe damage and a great number of lives were lost from bombing by the South African Air Force (SAAF).

Angop said 81 buildings including schools and medical posts have been destroyed in the first bombing raid on Cabama on August 23, the day before two South African motorised columns crossed the SWA\Namibian border to attack. The agency had been made homeless in the attack.³⁰²

These details in themselves represented an oppositional position because it was precisely such details, which the South African government denied or would not disclose. The government had maintained it had pulled out from the region, but these allegations directly contradicted its claims. Implications of these allegations, if true, meant a humanitarian crisis and crime against Angolan civilians.

Representing the other end of the political spectrum, on 3 September 1981, the *Natal Witness* ran an article from the British press regarding an alleged capture of a Soviet soldier in Angola. The *Times* viewed it as conclusive evidence of direct Soviet Union encroachment in the area. “The *Times* said that it would be the first time that Soviet military involvement in southern Africa has been revealed.”³⁰³ It also printed the *Time*’s opinion that the Soviet Union had previously relied on working through the Cubans in countries such as Angola and Ethiopia. “The *Times* reported, ‘Up to now Moscow preferred to operate through Cuban proxies so far as Angola is concerned. The same applied to Ethiopia in its war with Somalia, though massive supplies of Soviet weaponry were flown in.’”³⁰⁴

On 4 September 1981, further accusations by Angola of SADF invasions and occupation of parts of Angola, were recorded by the *Natal Witness*. Despite South African claims of pulling out, the Angolan ministry again alleged that South Africa was still there and wanted permanent occupation to provide a bulwark between SWAPO and MPLA forces.

³⁰¹ SAPA. ‘Angola claims SA forces still invading cities’, *Natal Witness*, 1 September 1981, p 1.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ SAPA. ‘Angola claims SA forces still invading cities’, *Natal Witness*, 1 September 1981, p 1.

³⁰⁴ ‘UK Press plashes capture of Soviet’, *Natal Witness*, 3 September 1981, p 13.

The Luanda authorities say there is no indication that the South Africans are pulling back from known positions up to 150km inside Angola and insist that Pretoria's objects go much further than simply attacking SWAPO sanctuaries. Angola says the South Africans are destroying major targets such as roads, bridges, and government buildings in an attempt to turn the south of Angola into a buffer zone.³⁰⁵

The Luanda government claimed that the development would hamper both SWAPO and MPLA efforts in the region. "This would make it more difficult for SWAPO to operate across the border into Namibia and easier for UNITA to establish themselves in that part of Angola."³⁰⁶ Two days later, the *Natal Witness* reported the assertions of 'Western diplomats' (it gave no further details of who the sources were) that the SADF had moved into Angolan territory to supply rebel movements with ammunition. "A South African motorised column had thrust deep into Angola apparently to re-supply dissidents fighting the Marxist government, Western diplomats said yesterday."³⁰⁷ The SADF had invaded with the intention of, "destroying radar installations built along the Angolan border to give advance warning of South African air raids."³⁰⁸ The *Natal Witness* also printed the counter statement from a SADF representative. "In Pretoria a South African spokesman described reports of the third column in the east as ridiculous propaganda".³⁰⁹ On the same day, the newspaper published Nujoma's denials of SWAPO bases in Angola, as well as Soviet involvement with the organisation. He stated that, "SWAPO does not have any military bases in Angola, let alone Soviet personnel in its ranks."³¹⁰ Another article announced that South Africa had been banned from the General Assembly meeting over the future of South West Africa because of its inability to cooperate with the UN over the matter. The *Natal Witness* reported the rumour that the UN Assembly had voted, with a huge majority, to exclude South Africa from the Emergency Special Session about the territory's future.³¹¹

On 9 September 1981, the *Natal Witness* continued its publishing of viewpoints that were in clear opposition to the South African government line. Soviet authorities alleged that South Africa had deliberately misled the world over Cuban and Soviet troops fighting for SWAPO.

³⁰⁵ SAPA. '3 SA columns into Angola – claim', *Natal Witness*, 4 September 1981, p 1.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ SAPA. 'Not Out?' *Natal Witness*, 5 September 1981, p 1.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ SAPA. 'Nujoma denies Angolan bases', *Natal Witness*, 5 September 1981, p 1.

³¹¹ SAPA. 'Out SA ejected from assembly', *Natal Witness*, 5 September 1981, p 1.

Yesterday the Soviet Communist Party newspaper said South Africa was trying to destroy and discredit SWAPO. Thus the South African propaganda services resort to open disinformation, declaring that SWAPO has no bases in Namibia and that foreigners are fighting in the ranks of the liberation forces.³¹²

On the same date, the British-based *Guardian* was reported as suggesting that South Africa was deliberately destroying southern Angola to create a bulwark against possible hostile forces. "South Africa's real aim is to devastate southern Angola and create a buffer zone north of the territory of Namibia which it illegally controls. It makes no difference to Pretoria who gets in the way."³¹³ The following day, new accusations were reported from international governments. "The Soviet Union yesterday charged South Africa with waging war against its neighbours, and Sweden said South Africa seemed determined to turn the region into an area of big power rivalry."³¹⁴

On 14 September 1981, the *Natal Witness* recorded accusations from the OAU that South Africa's main intention was to occupy Angola. An envoy stated that he was able to, "establish that this is not a simple attack, but an occupation, a violation of the territorial integrity of the People's Republic of Angola, which shows South Africa's clear will to continue and if possible extend its occupation."³¹⁵ Also reported were calls by the OAU for military action against SADF troops in Angola. "Through the chairman of the OAU, we appeal to all member states to extend, as a matter of urgency, every possible assistance and in particular military aid."³¹⁶ The organisation appealed for international assistance and condemned US President Reagan for supporting South Africa.

The summit meeting appealed to the international community to give and step up assistance to the people of Angola for the defence of their country against South Africa. It condemned the Reagan administration for what it described, as support for the "South African white minority racist regime", thereby encouraging the country to be more daring in the perpetuation of its heinous criminal acts against Angola.³¹⁷

The *Natal Witness* also confirmed that support for the South African government was forthcoming from within liberal political circles. On 14 September 1981, a PFP Member of Parliament justified the SADF

³¹² SAPA. 'SA trying to discredit SWAPO', claims Moscow.' *Natal Witness*, 9 September 1981, p 1.

³¹³ SAPA. 'Guardian on SA' *Natal Witness*, 9 September 1981, p 7.

³¹⁴ SAPA. 'SA accused of waging a war', *Natal Witness*, 10 September 1981, p 9.

³¹⁵ SAPA. 'SA planning to occupy Angola, says OAU man', *Natal Witness*, 14 September 1981, p 9.

³¹⁶ SAPA. 'Urgent call to give Angola military aid', *Natal Witness*, 14 September 1981, p 9.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

incursion into Angola. He implied that the attack was necessary because of the build up of hostile guerrilla forces on the borders.

Mr Cronje who recently visited the operational area said activity during the past few weeks was an attempt, by the SADF to de-escalate the guerrilla build up outside South Africa's borders. The amount of arms and equipment captured and destroyed by the South African army showed that, it was not quite small guerrilla type warfare.³¹⁸

In Mr Cronje's view, "[t]he army existed basically to protect the country from action from across the borders or the overthrow of the government and to safeguard the security of the citizens."³¹⁹

On 14 September 1981, the *Natal Witness* recorded additional accusations from the OAU that "this is not a simple attack, but an occupation, a violation of the territorial integrity of the People's Republic of Angola, which shows South Africa's clear will to continue and, if possible, extend its occupation."³²⁰ On the same day, the *Natal Witness* printed further allegations of South African atrocities in the region. An Angolan official asserted that the SADF had stripped all the resources of occupied lands. "We know that they are taking everything from farm tractors, bulldozers, civil transport vehicles and cattle into Namibia – in fact all the technical means necessary for rebuilding the country."³²¹ Four days later, the *Natal Witness* reported Angolan accusations that South Africa was demolishing structures in the country. "The Angolan communiqué said the South Africans had destroyed government buildings and the water tower at N'Giva, the capital of Kunene province."³²²

On 24 September 1981, the *Natal Witness* documented the PFP leader Mr Schwarz's views on the SADF role in southern Africa. These were aligned with the NP conception of politics on the border. In parliament, Schwartz put forward the view that the SADF should protect the country from hostile external forces whilst South Africa dealt with its internal problems peacefully. "Mr Schwarz described the SADF as a shield to protect South Africa from aggression and violence while South Africans used peaceful means to find a solution for coexistence."³²³

³¹⁸ Witness Reporter. 'Need to understand reasons for SA's actions', *Natal Witness*, 14 September 1981, p 1.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ SAPA. 'SA planning to occupy Angola, says OAU man', *Natal Witness*, 14 September 1981, p 9.

³²¹ SAPA. 'Angola accuses SA of pillaging', *Natal Witness*, 15 September 1981, p 1.

³²² SAPA. 'SA still in Kunene province – Angola', *Natal Witness*, 19 September 1981, p 1.

³²³ Parliamentary Reporter. 'Govt, PFP show some agreement over role of SADF', 24 September 1981, p 15.

On 1 October 1981, the *Natal Witness* recorded charges by Angola that the SADF was, “laying minefields among the frontier with SWA/Namibia.”³²⁴ On the same page, the paper recorded an accredited observer who sympathized with the South African government geopolitics.

He said there would be no early settlement because South Africa would have to be assured of its own security and would make efforts to ensure that a SWAPO led government never got into power. Examples of this way of thinking were the pre-emptive strikes into Angola.”³²⁵

On 6 October 1981, the *Natal Witness* reported on statements by African leaders who stressed that the region would become embroiled in a struggle between the Soviet Union and Western powers. “Africa will be engulfed in an east-west struggle.”³²⁶ They warned that conflict would prevail if the issues of South West Africa’s independence were not resolved. “If the negotiations do not succeed and they have got to succeed, we would face a situation in which war will escalate.”³²⁷

In these pages, following Operation Protea, the *Natal Witness* published a number of strikingly diverse views and claims about the truth of militarization in Angola. It notably did not speak directly against the SADF incursion and appeared to have largely embraced a sense of just cause and the fears of terrorism and Soviet influence in the region. However, in its use of a variety of international sources, it conveyed to its public the fierce debates and contestations over truth that accompanied military actions.

On this side of the border: Debates around internal terror, Soviet infiltration and the ANC

Paralleling news in conjunction with the South African border wars and the discourse on the continent’ were reports in relation to internal threats to South Africa. This perceived internal threat was directly related to events on the border, as it was seen as another front of attempted Soviet encroachment into South Africa itself. It could therefore be perceived as an extension of the border wars and awareness of this is thus vital in understanding discourses around Operation Reindeer and Operation Protea. Anti-government organisations believed to be infiltrated by ‘communists’ were the perceived internal threat

³²⁴ SAPA. ‘SA troops mining border – claim’, *Natal Witness*, 24 September 1981, p 13.

³²⁵ Witness Reporter. ‘Expert tells of why SA stalls over SWA settlement’, *Natal Witness*, 1 October 1981, p 13.

³²⁶ SAPA. ‘West warned of high stakes over Namibia’, *Natal Witness*, 6 October 1981, p 11.

³²⁷ Ibid.

for the South African government and their supporters. This included organisations such as ANC and Pan African Congress (PAC), which had been banned since the 1960s. The identified internal threat had a significant effect on the discourse regarding the South African border wars. I will discuss this briefly, looking through the pages of the *Natal Witness* from two sets of dates: 6 May to 16 June 1978 and 27 August to 12 September 1981, which roughly correlate with the two military manoeuvres in question.

On 6 May 1978, the *Natal Witness* reported a possible Russian influence inside South Africa. The article reported that two ‘terrorists’ had been arrested and found with Russian weaponry. “The arrests were confirmed by the head of Special Branch, Brigadier C. Zietsmann, who said Russian weapons and ammunition had been used.”³²⁸ On the same day, a black teacher living in Pretoria was reported to have been charged under the Terrorism Act. A witness at the school claimed that, “Mr. Mbatha said that black people would have to fight the whites to get back their land. He said the whites were armed. So don’t get too close to them. He told the students how to put petrol in a bottle with sand and matches to throw at them.”³²⁹ The article described how Mr Mbatha was accused of attempting to assist South African citizens outside South Africa to be placed into military camps. “The students would go from Swaziland to Mozambique for the military training camp and then come back to South Africa and fight the whites.”³³⁰

Three days later, the *Natal Witness* continued its coverage of the man described as “Terror Teacher”. It reported that Mbatha was accused by the state of encouraging violence against whites and promoting communism.

The teacher claims, the witness said, that blacks in South Africa were oppressed and that Mozambique should be an example to countries under oppression. He said that FRELIMO and the blacks in Mozambique had fought the Portuguese and had driven them out and that blacks in the Republic should fight to get back their land. Mr Mbatha allegedly praised communism, saying that the people (under communism) all enjoyed the wealth, e.g. a country on an equal footing, and that it should be introduced to South Africa.³³¹

³²⁸ SAPA. ‘Terrorists arrested’, *Natal Witness*, 6 May 1978, p 1.

³²⁹ SAPA. ‘Pupils told of Boers deceit alleges witness at terror trial’, *Natal Witness*, 6 May 1978, p 3.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ SAPA. ‘Terror teacher praised communism – witness’, *Natal Witness*, 9 May 1978, p 2.

In a follow up article two days later, the *Natal Witness* documented the headmaster's evidence that Mr Mbatha was a "terrorist". The headmaster disclosed that, "one of his teachers accused in the terrorism trial – had attempted to get passports for a number of pupils so they could go to Swaziland."³³²

These articles relate the external context of the South African border wars to what was happening in the country at the time, and this is similarly seen in the debate over the role and nature of the ANC. From 8 May 1978 to 24 May 1978, the *Natal Witness* published a series of letters by the public concerning the nature and policies of the ANC both before and after its banning. This debate included discourses on communism in South Africa and definitions of violence. On 8 May 1978, a letter by Mrs. A.C. Whitfield referred to the nature of the ANC before being banned by government. She claimed that communists who were linked to the Soviet Union and intent on invading South Africa had infiltrated the ANC.

The ANC became a front organisation for the Communist Party in their campaign aimed at creating unrest and revolution in SA. A communist document stated that the "Liberation movement" was to be headed by the ANC and its fighting wing the Umkonto – Sizwe. The government became intransigent because of the infiltrated ideological communist doctrines of the ANC militants and not the other way round, as liberals continue to have us believe.³³³

The writer asserted that the militant character of the ANC was exposed at the Rivonia treason trial of 1963-1964. "Revolutionary violence was exposed without a shadow of doubt at that trial and to make a statement that the ANC was always in favour of non violence is blatant propaganda."³³⁴ On 10 May, the *Natal Witness* printed a response to Whitfield by C.O Gardner, who appears to have written an earlier piece to which Whitfield was responding. Gardner asserted that the ANC only turned to violence once banned and that Whitfield's account did not prove that wrong. "My main assertion was that the ANC turned to force only after it was banned. None of the facts she offers (not that I accept them all) contradicts this central statement."³³⁵ In addition, Gardner concurred that there was communist influence in the ANC but disagreed over its extent. "It is true that there were communists within the ANC in the years before it was banned, but it is not true that the whole of the ANC was under

³³² SAPA. 'Headmaster gives evidence at terrorism trial', *Natal Witness*, 13 May 1978, p 3.

³³³ A.C. Whitfield. 'ANC was a front for the Reds', *Natal Witness*, 8 May 1978, p 6.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ C.O.Gardner. 'She missed the point', *Natal Witness*, 10 May 1978, p 8.

communist influence. Chief Albert Luthuli, for example, could hardly be described as a communist.”³³⁶ He also asserted that the ANC was not banned because of communists in its ranks “for the PAC was banned at the same time and that organisation was specifically opposed to communist influences.”³³⁷ Nine days later, Whitfield again wrote to the *Natal Witness*. In this second letter, she argued that the ANC had a long history of violence before its banning. She brought as evidence events such as the African mineworkers strike in 1946 and the 1952 Defiance Campaign to illustrate her points. Whitfield also acknowledged that the PAC was anti-communist but claimed that violence was the central tenet of its policy.

The statement on the anti-communist stance of the PAC is quite correct. It was also anti white regarding its membership. But the PAC did not need the Commies. It was prepared to swim in the blood of the innocents. The PAC was banned for its public statements in support of violence and overthrow of the government.³³⁸

In her view, the extent of the communist influence had been concealed from Albert Luthuli. “Chief Luthuli was deliberately kept uninformed of the extent of communist infiltration in the ANC.”³³⁹ Whitfield criticized the “Liberal Left” on the actions by the ANC and PAC. “I wish to conclude this correspondence by stating quite categorically that I refuse to be hoodwinked by the Liberal Left trying to whitewash the bloody revolutionary actions of infiltrated organisations by subtle means.”³⁴⁰

The May 24 issue had Gardner again disputing Whitfield, argued that she had a distorted view of what violence was. Actions, he said, which do not do bodily harm to anyone or destroy property, could not be construed as violence.

I can’t escape the impression that Mrs Whitfield thinks that any activity by black people which might annoy or put out the dominating whites is by definition violent. She enumerates pass-burning, campaigns, strikes, the “defiance” campaign; but these events are precisely what I and most people would describe as tough but non-violent. Violent actions are those, which aim at deliberate destruction of human life or of buildings etc.³⁴¹

On the same day, a J.Vynne responded to Gardner. Vynne argued that the historical non-violence of the ANC was no longer relevant and that ANC was now waging a ‘Marxist war’ against South Africa,

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ A.C. Whitfield. ‘Won’t be hoodwinked’, *Natal Witness*, 19 May 1978, p 14.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ C.O. Gardner. ‘Definitions of violence’, *Natal Witness*, 24 May 1978, p 12.

which was directly supported by the communist powers. “Never mind what the organisation stood for at inception, the point is, what has it developed into? It is an undisputed fact that the ANC is at present engaged in an undeclared war against South Africa. They are sending trained and armed Marxist killers into South Africa to murder, plunder and commit sabotage.”³⁴²

The debate represented in this exchange shows that readers of the *Natal Witness* occupied a range of ground in relation to political change in South Africa and, more specifically, about the nature of black politics. The accusations by Whitfield, which tag all protest action as violent and communistic, are refuted by Gardner who, notably, appears to share an aversion to communism and violence. In addition *who* was involved in the debates is a significant factor to consider, especially with regard to the fact that C.O Gardner was a member of the Liberal Party of South Africa, as well as the chair of the Christian Institute. He later joined the UDF and eventually the ANC in 1990. For both, Chief Albert Luthuli appears as the ideal black leader, contrasting with the radical politics of the later ANC. This argument over the nature of the ANC and black politics displays the diversity of liberal responses to state militarization, political violence and black politics. Thus, this illustrates that liberal responses to many issues were not homogenous and liberalism cannot be categorised as a single homogenous unit.

In 1981, such concerns continued to be aired in the pages of the *Natal Witness*. On 4 September, it published an article describing some arrests made over the finding of Soviet arms. The article reported that the men had been, “Held under Section 22 of the Terrorism Act, the security police said yesterday. Among the weapons found at the house in Botha's Hill were Russian made Kalashnikov AK 47 assault rifles, M 26 grenades and FN rifle and pistol and 2500 rounds of 9mm ammunition.”³⁴³ On 16 September, a story appeared that told of an attack on a farming couple in Boomval, attributing it to Soviet influence and “Russian weapons”.³⁴⁴ It was titled ‘Stabbed terror attack survivor tells of prayers in the sun’. The article described how “[Mrs.] and Mr. Steyn were attacked on the farm Boomval in the Nietverdiend district. Police later shot and killed two men armed with Russian weapons. The search

³⁴² J Vynne. ‘Policy before ANC banning’, *Natal Witness*, 24 May 1978, p 12.

³⁴³ SAPA. ‘Arms cache detention’ *Natal Witness*, 4 September 1981, p 1.

³⁴⁴ SAPA. ‘Stabbed terror attack survivor tells of prayers in the sun’, *Natal Witness*, 16 September 1981, p 1.

continued for a third man but it was thought he might have fled across the Botswanan [sic] border”.³⁴⁵ The link to the border wars were implicit to readers in the motives attributed to the assailants, their killing by police and the idea that the escapee would have run across the border. What is clear is that, as represented in the pages of the *Natal Witness*, communist and terrorist threats within South African borders were seen as an extension of Cold War fears across the border.

A frequent claim in both 1978 and 1981 was the link between Soviet influence and internal black militancy inside South Africa. The perception that South Africa faced conditions of extremity from all sides was clearly not merely an NP view, but was a radicalized fear expressed also by the ‘liberal’ readership of the *Natal Witness*. A strong part of the newspaper’s oppositional politics was situated in the view that the government was perpetuating, rather than deflecting, communist influence and violence in the region. One of the chief dangers of continued ‘racial policies’ as fashioned by the NP was South African isolation from Western influence and a Western (capitalist) way of life.

The *Natal Witness* published editorials expressing concern over cold war battles in Africa. For example, in 23 May 1978, the editorial ‘Lessons of Kolwezi’ described an incidence of horrific violence in which many people were massacred in Zaire. Initiators of the violence were rebels fighting against Mobutu’s Zairian state. Angola supported the rebellion because of Zaire’s support of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), who had been enemies of the MPLA government in the Angolan civil war. There were strong suspicions of Russian and Cuban involvement. The author saw ‘tribalism’ as an opening for communist influence: “While it is still too early to draw firm conclusions from the confusion in Zaire, to us three things are clear. The communist bloc’s exploitation of tribal grievances and secessionist aspirations in Africa had reached new levels of sophistication and daring”.³⁴⁶ The editorial also claimed that the situation would heighten pressure on South Africa to abandon its racial policies.

For South Africa there is little satisfaction to be gained from the events in Zaire and any subsequent stiffening of resolve on the part of the West. Current Western strategy is predicated upon the belief that South Africa’s race policies are a hindrance rather than a help to the West. Efforts to make conditions less

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ ‘Lessons of Kolwezi’, *Natal Witness*, 23 May 1978, p 4.

favourable for communist exploitation are thus likely to mean an increase rather than a decrease in pressure on the South African government to change its ways.³⁴⁷

South Africa's 'racial policies' were creating, in the view of *Natal Witness* editors, a dangerous distance from the protective powers of 'the West' in the Cold War climate. On 3 June 1978, an editorial asserted, "collaboration with the South African regime will be too much of an embarrassment to the Western powers in whatever efforts they make to counter the threat".³⁴⁸ Two days later, an editorial titled 'About time', discussed the increasing Cuban and Soviet involvement in the African continent. It stated that in countering communism 'the West' had to limit alignment with South Africa because of its racial policies.

But what is clear is that the spectacular rise in their military power in Africa has become a problem, confronting not only Africa, but also the West. It is clear too that in attempting to counter that power, the West cannot afford to be seen as too closely aligned with South Africa. And that is a sobering thought.³⁴⁹

Three years later, the view that apartheid heightened the communist threat continued to be expressed. This discourse is vital to understanding the *Natal Witness's* reaction to Operation Protea. The uncovering by the SADF of Soviet involvement perpetuated fears of their infiltration. The trend is viewed on 3 September 1981, where former British Prime Minister, Mr. Edward Heath was reported as stating that

...political reforms in South Africa were significant but were not remotely adequate. No formula for a constitution will successfully defuse the growing forces of unrest if it does not provide for a universal franchise at national level.³⁵⁰

Heath elaborated, claiming that "[t]he fury and the frustration of the non-white population in South Africa which is born of the system of apartheid and fanned by the emergence of black majority rule elsewhere in Africa, constitutes one of the greatest opportunities."³⁵¹ Heath proclaimed that the West would not help South Africa in the event of a revolution, as it would cause irreparable damage to their reputation. "Neither in peacetime nor in war would the West stand in strategic alliance with South Africa as long as it pursued a policy considered to be profoundly insulting to the rights of the

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ 'Sobering thought', *Natal Witness*, 3 June 1978, p 6.

³⁴⁹ 'About time', *Natal Witness*, 3 June 1978, p 6.

³⁵⁰ SAPA. 'Equal rights or face revolution – Heath', *Natal Witness*, 1 September 1981, p 2.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

overwhelming majority of its people. To do so would violate our deepest principles, it would also have unimaginable consequences for racial harmony at home.”³⁵²

The next day, the *Natal Witness* ran an editorial commenting on Heath’s statements. The editorial reiterated that South Africa would face inevitable isolation and face a possible revolution without any assistance by the West if the government did not heed his warnings. “If our political leaders fail to heed this warning, if they allow themselves to be duped by the current congeniality of US-South African relations and a travesty of a rugby tour of New Zealand into believing that the worst is over, they may be in for a rude awakening.”³⁵³ To add to the argument, on the same day, the Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda was quoted, claiming along the same lines, “There could be no peace in southern Africa while there was apartheid.”³⁵⁴

On 17 September 1981, Anthony Delius also linked South Africa’s internal racial laws to an advancing Soviet threat, with examples drawn from both internal conflict and conflict on the border.

Russian calculations about southern Africa are long term and take great cognizance of one major fact that of the situation there. The policy of apartheid and the apparent determination to maintain it by naked force by shooting Black youngsters in Soweto or Angolan soldiers in Angola makes white South Africa the diplomatic polecat of the world, especially of Africa and the third world.³⁵⁵

Delius also claimed that if involved in a conflict with the South African state, Russia would be seen as defenders of African interests in contrast with the Americans whose image would be damaged if they were seen to be bolstering the apartheid regime.

If the American or the Western powers generally want to get further tainted by the polecat in appearing to defend white South Africa (and by the same token apartheid), while Russians are seen to be dying or risking their lives to defend African integrity, Moscow must reckon it is gaining quite a lot in the long-term battle for a dominant influence in the continent.³⁵⁶

Russia would have an easy time maintaining its hegemonic hold in southern Africa because it would rely on African sentiment against the apartheid regime.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ ‘Chilly winds’, *Natal Witness*, 2 September 1981, p 6.

³⁵⁴ ‘No peace while there's apartheid’, *Echo Natal Witness*, 2 September 1981, p 4.

³⁵⁵ Antony Delius. ‘Russia is smiling’, p 6.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

Compared with difficulty up North the Russians would [in South Africa] regard their problems as child's play. Without having to direct too much energy from the Mediterranean and the Red sea, they can rely on the emotions aroused by apartheid and periodic South African raids to keep southern Africa's dependency on it and divide the Western allies.³⁵⁷

On 26 September 1981, an editorial confirmed the Soviet interest in South Africa in a view aligned with National Party assertions.

General Magnus Malan drew attention to the threat of encroaching Soviet imperialism. Having viewed on television the vast quantity of Soviet and satellite arms captured by the Defence Force in Angola, and having been shown by the cameras a Russian tank sailing along our shores, we do not doubt the reality of the threat.³⁵⁸

Again, the editorial stated that the country's racial policies needed to be changed if the country were to defend itself against communism. "It is a political cliché that we have to win the hearts and minds of the people. Are we succeeding? Vague promises of a *verligte* future are not enough. What is needed is an immediate and noticeable improvement in the lot of the black majority".³⁵⁹ This kind of change was entirely within governmental power, and it was the reluctance for meaningful change that threatened society.

Communist propaganda is making converts because it promises the black masses what they want. Many of these promises are so much pie in the sky. But the government has the advantage in that it can do something tangible now. But its counter to this threat is only to announce minor palliatives, such as an amendment to the liquor act.³⁶⁰

The "shield" of the SADF on the border would not ultimately be a safeguard.

Mr. Harry Schwarz made a realistic assessment of the situation when he described the Defence force as a shield that would protect the country for a limited period. Unless that period is used to carry out generous and imaginative reforms, we shall lose a battle far more important than any fought on the border.³⁶¹

As illustrated in the editorials and opinion columns, the *Natal Witness* adopted much of the South African government discourse concerning the Soviet threat to South Africa. It expressed fears of a revolutionary black majority and the encroachment of violence. However, a central contention put it in formal opposition to the governments 'racial policies', that apartheid was polarizing Cold War politics in the region, offering an advantage to Soviet style communism. Without significant political reforms

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ 'Soviet threat', *Natal Witness*, 26 September 1981, p 6.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

Africans would be tempted to align themselves with the Eastern Block, leaving white society isolated from the protection of the West.

Conclusion

Based on evidence found in its pages, I conclude that in 1978 and 1981, the *Natal Witness* facilitated a discourse, which reflected an alternative stance on the issues of the border wars and South African militarization. Presenting itself as a rational and moderate voice - a voice between extremes of rigid racial supremacy and communist terror, it reproduced a view of itself as aligned to the West's analysis of local events. In the Cold War context, which framed discourse over the border conflicts and militarization, the liberal press expressed acute anxiety over 'communism' and 'terrorism' and saw democracy as the solution. Monica Popescu asserted that "[a]fter the Iron Curtain descended and divided not only Europe, but political allegiances throughout the world, the two camps were taken for granted if not as the absolute representatives of good and bad political allegiances throughout the world, as least as necessary positions that even sophisticated writers were forced to take."³⁶²

The most explicit theme in this chapter is an allegiance in the *Natal Witness* discourse to the principles of Western countries such as the USA and Britain particularly, for finding solutions for the conflict in Southern Africa. In addition, its embrace of Western values such as individual freedom, protection of property rights indicates that the *Natal Witness* tried to create an identity intrinsically connected to the Western world. It thus could have connected itself to what it saw in the West as a more Anglicized world of Britain and the United States, different to the excesses of Afrikaner nationalism and Soviet communism. This also furthermore fits with Heywood's definition of nationalism as being a cultural entity rather than a political one. The *Natal Witness* effectively integrated Western cultural viewpoints concerning political and military issues as part of its adoption of the Westernised Anglophone world. Thus it exposed a desire to be apart of the Westernised nations, an internationalized identity, feeling alienated from Afrikaner nationalist culture.

³⁶² Monica Popescu. "Mirrors: Communists, Capitalists and Voortrekkers of the Cold War". Peter Vale and Gary Baines, eds. *Beyond the Border War: new perspectives on Southern Africa's late-Cold War conflicts*. (South Africa: UNISA Press, 2008) p 125.

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³⁶³ Monica Popescu. "Mirrorings: Communists, Capitalists and Voortrekkers of the Cold War". Peter Vale and Gary Baines, eds. *Beyond the Border War: new perspectives on Southern Africa's late-Cold War conflicts*. (South Africa: UNISA Press, 2008) p 125.

It furthermore transmits these aspects onto a liberal culture amongst white English speakers in Natal, thus serving as an agent for its cultural values. Further promoting this point is its implicit propagating of a view of Western nations as the upholders of civilised values such as peace, freedom, liberty and order in contrast to the communist East, the Soviet Union, black revolutionaries and Afrikaner nationalists. This sort of discourse illustrates the fact that the *Natal Witness* as an agent and a representation of an English liberal culture was still caught in 19th century imperialistic discourse, which sees the role of the West as civiliser.

The *Natal Witness*'s role as a moderate and rationalizing voice serves part of the overall identity that English language speakers felt. However, the paper's arguments also demonstrate, especially, views belonging to the middle class. Therefore, even though there were indications that it was claiming to be for the working class and their objectives, this was never the case. Thus despite its petitioning for the end to the hardliner race laws, the *Natal Witness* and liberal interests still defended the capitalist class, fearing possible destruction in the potential clash of radical sides. This middle class also possibly feared the loss of their lifestyle, and a consequent loss of privileges. Despite their alienation from the National Party, the Natal English speakers were still benefiting from the capitalist system in place.

The liberal stance is seen in the paper's support for the end of apartheid to curb the possible threat of communism. In this stance, the *Natal Witness* tried to create a discourse around Western ideology by quoting experts from the USA, Australia and especially Britain. This discourse was also used in its discussion of the Angolan and Namibian situations where the *Natal Witness* advocated a Western based compromise between SWAPO and the South African government as well as between the ruling party in Angola and the MPLA. The fear of communism is certainly a feature of the class and cultural positioning of the *Natal Witness* readership. This is seen in both the opinion sections and articles from external sources. It can also be surmised that the *Natal Witness* viewed itself as an organ of responsible opposition, presenting a range of information and sources, with moderate editorials that offered an alternative to the official views.

Chapter 3

1987: Die Rooi Gevaar, Total Onslaught and Cuito Cuanavale

By 1987, the overall militarized system in South Africa had deepened substantially from earlier in the decade. This was influenced not only in relation to the momentum of anti-apartheid politics reinvigorated by youth activism of 1976 and to ongoing military action on the borders, but also by the presidency of P.W. Botha. His position represented an increased influence on government by militarists within the party. Tomaselli and Louw in their paper, *Militarization, hegemony and the South African media, 1976-1980*, argue that the military had a large influence in the country: “[t]he military do not rule South Africa. They are only one part of the hegemonic bloc, but do have a major capacity to influence government policy.”³⁶⁴

In this chapter, I will discuss the *Natal Witness*'s coverage related to the South African Defence force incursions into Angola at the battle of Cuito Cuanavale with the ruling party of Angola the MPLA,³⁶⁵ between September 1987 and March 1988. According to James W. Martin, this was the most significant land battle in Africa in terms of the number of combatants, since the Second World War.³⁶⁶ I will cover a sample of *Natal Witness* reports of this conflict, namely those falling between the dates of 2 November 1987 and 14 December 1987. In this period, the key event discussed in the papers was Operation Modular, which was part of the SADF attempted takeover of Cuito Cuanavale. Significantly, the SADF clashed with the Cuban armed force directly in early December 1987. It was a time in which editorial and public opinion can again be seen as undergoing important shifts and forging a ‘liberal’ position in relation to specific events.

³⁶⁴ Keyan Tomaselli and Eric Louw. *Militarization, hegemony and the South African media, 1976-1980*. p 4

³⁶⁵ The MPLA were a militarist popular movement in Angola who fought for Angolan independence. It was thought to have espoused Marxist values. They eventually took over the governing of Angola in 1975.

³⁶⁶ Susan Herlin Broadhead. *Historical dictionary of Angola, 2nd ed.*, p 14.

³⁶⁷ ‘Wasted efforts’, *Natal Witness*, 2 November 1987, p 8.

To get a better understanding of the discourse crafted within the *Natal Witness* during these weeks, changes in the international situation also have to be considered. At this period, the Soviet Union was in decline and was looking increasingly unlikely to retain its superpower status. This weakened the anxiety surrounding Soviet expansionism internationally and played a role in the change of discourse regarding the Cold War. Still, this did not prevent militarization of policies in relation to local attack, with PW Botha's conception of 'total onslaught' figuring as a new communist threat. The 'Swart Gevaar', previously used as propaganda by the NP government, which had promoted the idea that South Africa was under threat by uncivilized black masses, was replaced by the 'Rooi Gevaar'. Botha believed South Africa was surrounded by hostile communist 'red' enemies, who wanted to take over South Africa. In this conception, the Soviet Union was ultimately behind every extra-parliamentary opposition to the government, and movements such as the UDF and ANC were 'pawns' of the Soviet Union.

Contested views on Cuito Cuanavale

There were several themes, which threaded through the *Natal Witness*'s coverage of the SADF and the battle of Cuito Cuanavale. These include national security, the question of government secrecy and misinformation, and the use of government resources. In many ways, these were discussions of cost/benefit around the single question of whether engagement on the border was justified.

On 2 November 1987, an editorial titled 'Wasted efforts' questioned the viability of South African operations into Angola. The editorial asserted that absolute victory was impossible as too much was at stake for the Soviet Union in terms of international prestige and credibility to allow their defeat. "One thing is clear; any talk of a 'decisive victory' must be discounted. The Soviet Union cannot afford to have MPLA defeated, and Luanda overrun by UNITA. There may be strategic retreats, but there will be no surrender."³⁶⁷ The editorial objected to so many of the country's resources going into the Angolan civil war whilst other areas, such as disaster management, were being neglected. It additionally questioned the extent of the threat to South Africa if the MPLA did rule Angola fully. "South Africa's

³⁶⁷ 'Wasted efforts', *Natal Witness*, 2 November 1987, p 8.

resources are being poured into a war of dubious value at best. How much does our security hinge upon what happens in Angola? And, in the meantime, it is surely pertinent to ask where are the government resources for flood relief in Natal?”³⁶⁸ This editorial illustrated scepticism about the importance of the SADF incursions to South African internal security and a scepticism around the ideology of total onslaught.

On 3 November, the *Natal Witness* published justifications of SADF incursions made by the Minister of Defence, Magnus Malan. He contended that, “[t]hose who were harbouring terrorists had to remember SA was prepared to pay the price of freedom, in the interests of its people and its territorial integrity.”³⁶⁹ In a letter on the same issue, K. Asslop lamented the fact that so much taxpayer's money was being spent in Angola, essentially a futile and illegal conflict

SADF's involvement in Namibia and Angola may seem on the surface of things, two separate issues. However it is time for the South African public to question how our tax money is being spent and to ask the government to account for the R1million spent daily to maintain a war which is ultimately unwinnable? Bearing in mind Namibia has been declared illegal by the Hague court.³⁷⁰

Asslop asked, “[c]ould this vast amount of money not be spent more wisely on urgent needs like flood relief, the establishment of secure, durable housing and the addressing of other needs created by the system of apartheid?”³⁷¹ This letter was a strong condemnation of the South African government for its continuing war in Angola and the waste of key assets. It also suggested that apartheid was the cause of public destitution. On 4 November, an editorial questioned the morality of ongoing secrecy of the authorities regarding the Angolan war, suggesting that it had deep, personal ramifications for the families of troops. Furthermore, it argued that it was unacceptable not to inform parents of the details regarding their sons' deaths and that a patriotic speech was not good enough.

Were our troops readily involved in operations in support of Jonas Savimbi's UNITA movement, as foreign news agencies have been suggesting for some weeks? It is not good enough for General Magnus Malan in expressing sympathy to next of kin to talk in generalities about the “high price of freedom”. The bereaved would surely wish to know exactly where their sons died, and in what cause.³⁷²

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ SAPA ‘The price of freedom’, *Natal Witness*, 3 November 1987, p 1.

³⁷⁰ K, Asslop. ‘Money could be used more wisely’, *Natal Witness*, 3 November 1987, p 6.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² ‘Futile events’, *Natal Witness*, 4 November 1987, p 12.

This suggested that the government was accountable to its citizens but it was questionable whether the potential victories were worth the costs. “Many would query whether strikes against SWAPO, widely regarded in Namibia as a respectable nationalist organisation, are a worthy cause for which to be asked to lay down one's life. Certainly SWAPO members would see themselves as being called to pay the high price of freedom.”³⁷³ The welfare of troops again was at issue in a report on 11 November in which the SADF denied troop deaths. “The SADF has rejected as absurd and hodgepodge a report in the British *Sunday Telegraph* newspaper that five South African troops had been wounded by a cluster-bomb dropped by an Angolan fighter while they were withdrawing after the November 1 attack on a SWAPO base.”³⁷⁴ The *Natal Witness* included the report from the *Telegraph*, which claimed that SAAF planes had been shot down while operating in Angola. “The report also claimed that two South African Mirage fighters had been lost in the past few weeks – one shot down in a dog fight over Cuito Cuanavale and the other lost to ground fire over the UNITA strong hold of Mavinga.”³⁷⁵ This report was an example of how the *Natal Witness* skirted censorship and how it laboured to hold government accountable to truth.

Two days later, in a response relating to the SADF denials, an editorial appeared entitled ‘The truth’. The editorial claimed that foreign news agencies and media reporting on SADF activities had been proven correct in the latest events and that government information had been deliberately distorted.

The chief of the Defence Force has revealed that South African soldiers have indeed been pushed into offensive action on Angolan soil against Russian and Cuban troops. So the reports of news agencies, which we are so often told are unreliable and distorted, were true. So the reports given to the South African people by their own news media, which are prevented by law from revealing the full truth about such matters have proved to be unreliable and the statements of South African authorities to be distorted.³⁷⁶

In addition to its criticism of secrecy and misinformation, the *Natal Witness* also addressed the issue of increased militarization in the South African government. This was significant because of its show of support for, and alignment with, foreign newspapers, which were criticized heavily by the South African government. The editorial on 13 November 1987, regretted that the SADF had taken over the running of government affairs.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ SAPA. ‘SADF denies report on attack’, *Natal Witness*, 11 November 1987, p 5.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ ‘The Truth’, *Natal Witness*, 13 November 1987, p 12.

South Africa's generals are contributing to a dangerous escalation of a conflict which threatens to become a major war. Whether they are doing so with the full sanction of the country's elected leaders, or whether like their Soviet counterparts in Afghanistan they are now their own masters, is unclear. Certainly, they are not restrained by democratic accountability to a fully informed electorate.³⁷⁷

The editorial highlighted a liberal principle of government as accountable to its citizens and it suggested the military might no longer be under the control of the country's elected leaders. Certainly, militarization should be kept in check. A day later, a tally of total deaths in the previous week was published. An increasing number of South Africans were dying in a dubious war. The author reported that "[n]ine SA soldiers have now been reportedly killed this week, raising the total number of South African and South West African Territorial Force soldiers killed in the battle against Soviet and Cuban led Angolan forces in Cuando-Cubango province to 23".³⁷⁸ The article also included statements by the Angolan government owned news agency, Angop that the MPLA army were inflicting increasing damage on SADF and UNITA troops, a reality denied by the SADF. "Angola said yesterday its troops had forced UNITA guerrilla forces into retreat and were inflicting heavy casualties on South African forces. The SADF denied allegations that 32 Battalion, a unit composed mainly of black soldiers formerly living in Angola, had suffered heavy losses."³⁷⁹

Controversy over South African involvement in the Angolan war was also the issue raised by Robin Hallett, an African historian working as a lecturer at the University of Stellenbosch who contributed articles to the *Natal Witness*. He described the SADF war in South West Africa as futile for South Africa and inhumane for all those involved. For him, it called to mind the suffering of combatants on both sides, "if you are a young Namibian – and a young white South African – forced to spend hot, uncomfortable and dangerous months in the 'operational area' of a colonial war that has been dragging on for close on 20 years."³⁸⁰ Hallett also claimed that the South African government aimed to oppress the Namibian people via tribal rule and thus keep full autonomy over Namibia. "Pretoria would clearly like to see an effective internal settlement ensuring the transformation of Namibia into an autonomous homeland whose authorities could undertake the work of repression needed to ensure that SWAPO

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ SAPA. 'Another five SA soldiers die in battle', *Natal Witness*, 14 November 1987, p 1.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Robin Hallett. 'Namibia in the 1980s', *Natal Witness*, 14 November 1987, p 4.

should never come to power.”³⁸¹ He also described the extreme suffering of the Namibian people who had to cope with the ongoing militarization of the area around them. “The suffering in Ovamboland, as church leaders stress with growing anguish, is now immense. Their life is a daily struggle to escape from paralysing fear. Their land is an armed camp. Their ethnic leaders live behind wire fences and high sandbagged walls, protected from the people they claim to represent.”³⁸² Hallett’s critique of military strategy was entwined with the secrecy and misinformation propagated by the NP government. “The merits of a strategy that seeks to achieve domestic reform by propping up militarised dissidents in a neighbouring country.”³⁸³

This column was highly critical of the South African government and very concerned with pointing out the excesses of militarization in South African society, and the tragic repercussions on both a humanitarian and political level. The *Natal Witness* also published Robin Hallett’s defence of SWAPO, on the brink of effecting Namibia’s independence, in which he implied that it would not be a threat to South African security. “SWAPO, working with the United Nations (UN) have drawn up elaborate plans for a post independent Namibia, plans which seem essentially pragmatic and remarkably moderate.”³⁸⁴ He continued: “South Africa can hold Namibia only by committing more financial and military resources to shore up the complex system of administration.”³⁸⁵ This indicated a running theme in the newspaper’s pages over the financial cost of the continued militarization of government policy. Prescribed repeatedly was a discourse of practicality and moderation, constructed against an extreme background of heavy military involvement.

On 16 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* presented Malan’s justifications for South Africa’s role in combating MPLA and Cuban troops in Angola. It recorded his statements that the offensive would spread further south if UNITA failed. “If South Africa allowed the Cubans and Russians to destroy

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

UNITA there was no guarantee they would stop in the south east of Angola.”³⁸⁶ The *Natal Witness* summarized his justifications for government secrecy over SADF offensives.

He said the protection of the lives of South African soldiers was a priority for the army and that no unnecessary risks were taken. There had been great pressure from the media for details but “nowhere in the world are operations of this nature broadcast from the clock tower.” This was for very clear reasons, like the safety of the troops and operational circumstances.³⁸⁷

South Africa had a direct interest in the region for a numerous reasons, such as preventing a Soviet takeover of the region and ensuring South African security. Its hopes rested with UNITA.

If UNITA emerged from the struggle with honour, then, it could be the start of a new chapter in the southern African context in terms of stability and progress. South Africa has a direct interest in this and that is why we took the latter (option), General Malan said. If the Cubans and Russians should destroy UNITA, there is no guarantee for us they will stop in the South East of Angola. With the weaponry available to them ... The road is open through the Caprivi Strip to Botswana, to Zimbabwe, Zambia and particularly also SWA/Namibia.³⁸⁸

On the same day, there appeared another editorial strongly opposed to the SADF role in Angola, which indicated the *Natal Witness* was not in agreement with Malan’s justifications of South African presence in Angola. The editorial commented on increasing fatalities and potentially high numbers of wounded among SADF and Namibian troops: “We are increasingly worried, not only for the fact that since September 33 South African and Namibian soldiers have died in combat (and no one knows how many have been wounded).”³⁸⁹ The author asserted that the increase in Cuban involvement in Angola was a direct result of South African interference in the region. The article pointed out that the war was as futile as the American experience in Vietnam and other costly and indecisive conflicts.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that [Cubans] came in response to the South African invasion, not the other way round. More South Africans on the one side therefore, are very likely to produce more Cubans on the other. The logical consequence for us can only be to be sucked into the sort of situation, which the Americans got themselves into in Vietnam, and from which the Russians are now trying to exonerate themselves in Afghanistan. The hope of being able to inflict a once and for all defeat is as much a mirage as the naïve confidence that the Great War was a war to end all wars.³⁹⁰

Examples such as US involvement in Vietnam and Soviet involvement in Afghanistan provided compelling comparisons. Both conflicts had weakened and discredited the superpowers involved and

³⁸⁶ SAPA. ‘No guarantee where offensive will end – Malan’, *Natal Witness*, 16 November 1987, p 2.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ ‘Angolan involvement’, *Natal Witness*, 16 November 1987, p 6.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

the editorial was once again stating that the conflict in Angola would be futile and harmful for South Africa. The editorial also asserted that there was no validity behind Malan's claim that southern Africa was under threat if UNITA lost ground. "The Minister of Defence has suggested that present SADF action is safeguarding Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Namibia from Soviet proxies. What is the evidence for this?"³⁹¹ Notably differing from editorial views aired six years previously, here was a de-emphasis of the Russian threat to southern Africa and scepticism about the notion of 'total onslaught'. Still, significantly, there were concessions to that 'myth' but it was implied that South African aggression would be to blame if a 'fight with the Russians' ensued – the very possibility a threat to national security.

While we believe that the "total onslaught" is a myth of fevered nationalist imaginations, we can also not imagine Russia standing idly by while her protégés are being chased around the Angolan bush by South African troops. Her great power status alone must prevent any such occurrence. And getting dragged into a fight with the Russians is just about the last thing that South Africa needs right now.³⁹²

A day later, Hallett again described the Angolan civil war as catastrophic and futile. He stated that "both sides" were to blame for the conflict.

Fidel Castro's bold and courageous decision to send a large expeditionary force to Luanda was a direct riposte to the South African invasion. But the South African move was itself in part a response to earlier Cuban moves made at the request of the MPLA to counter growing CIA support for the FNLA. Only dogmatists — of whom there are on both sides — would populate this confusing stage with culpable villains.³⁹³

The statement that all sides were guilty to an extent underlined the pursuit of a moderate and objective approach to analysis. He also underlined the intense suffering of the civilians in the conflict, and inferred that UNITA strategy was mostly to blame. This description of UNITA³⁹⁴ held important implications as the organisation received South Africa's full support.

Thousands of mines have been sown in abandoned cornfields from which hundreds of thousands of peasants have fled to the cities, making the once self-sufficient country heavily dependent on food imports. For UNITA's strategy has clearly been to cause such devastation to the country's economy — a process that inevitable involved killing, maiming and orphanage thousands of children — that the MPLA will eventually agree to negotiate.³⁹⁵

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Robin Hallett. 'A devastating stalemate', *Natal Witness*, 17 November 1987, p 6.

³⁹⁴ Before Angolan independence, UNITA were an anti-colonial liberation movement that fought against Portuguese rule. However they became embroiled in a civil war with the MPLA over post independent rule. The movement eventually became an ally of the SADF who joined the fight against the perceived Soviet aligned MPLA.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

In conclusion, he suggested that apartheid needed to end before there could be peace in Angola. “Gloomy experts predict that the civil war in Angola could last another thirty years and the fundamental change in Angola is directly linked to fundamental change in South Africa. I cannot find any way of contradicting the logic of this forecast.”³⁹⁶ This here shows an important linkage between the border wars and apartheid in the *Natal Witness* discourse.

Two days later, the front page of the *Natal Witness* reported more deaths of SADF troops.³⁹⁷ On 21 November 1987, an editorial lambasted the government over its policies and claimed that they were a consequence of the leaders of the SADF being allowed to make high-level decisions.

The hawks seem to be in control. The incursion into Angola, the failure to curb RENAMO, and the menacing tone adopted towards other neighbouring states are all symptoms of the Magnus Malan syndrome. Survival according to this line of thought depends on keeping our neighbours destabilised and helpless.³⁹⁸

This editorial again leaned in favour of the approach of the US and Britain. On 23 November 1987, Gerald Shaw criticized South African militarization, contending that South Africa could never hope to compete with the Soviet Union on that front, and he warned of a response by capital interests. “The cost to South Africa of seeking to match the sophisticated weaponry of a superpower is mind-boggling, not to speak of the human cost. It will in time cause the country’s business leaders to call a halt, denying the soldiers their toys.”³⁹⁹ Shaw also drew on the comparison of the US intervention into Vietnam, claiming that a similar southern African disaster would be devastating for an already suffering civilian population. “By any criteria the prospect of a southern African Vietnam is daunting, given the scale of misery and devastation already visited upon the civilian populations of Mozambique and Angola.”⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ SAPA. ‘Two more soldiers die in Angola’, *Natal Witness*, 18 November 1987, p 1.

³⁹⁸ ‘Western Connection.’, *Natal Witness*, 21 November 1987, p 4.

³⁹⁹ Gerald Shaw. ‘Nearing a moment of truth’, *Natal Witness*, 23 November 1987, p 8.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

On 24 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* reported the South African government's statement that it was willing to withdraw troops from Angola if all sides were prepared to follow suit.⁴⁰¹ According to the report,

It remained the Government's firm conviction that the only route to peace in the sub-region "lies not in sterile confrontation in international forays outside our region, and still less via military confrontation inside our region. Rather it lies in the real willingness of all parties concerned to come together to address their differences and thereby contribute towards stability and progress within the region to benefit all our peoples."⁴⁰²

Malan repeated his point that the SADF role in southern Africa was necessary for security purposes in the region. "South Africa is determined to defend its interests against foreign aggression in the regions and, as you know; senior representatives of many of the governments around this table have also visited the area. South Africa could not sit back and allow these forces to threaten its security interests by flooding the whole region with Soviet troops."⁴⁰³

On 26 November 1987, a letter, entitled "The price of freedom" from Black Sash⁴⁰⁴ member Fidela Fouche, expressed anger at Malan's comments of 13 November. This letter set the issue of border wars within the social context of apartheid. Fouche claimed that Malan's defence for SADF fighting in Angola was absurd as freedom and civilized order was not to be found in South Africa.

Magnus Malan hopes to justify the killing and maiming of young men in Angola on the grounds that sacrifice is needed if we are to preserve freedom, democracy and civilised values. The fact that Malan speaks as if these ideals have already been achieved in South Africa (one can only preserve something that one has) shows him to be ignorant of what democracy and freedom are shows him to have, to put it mildly, an eccentric concept of civilised values.⁴⁰⁵

On the same day, the *Natal Witness* printed another letter, which commented on the earlier editorial, titled "The truth". This letter, written jointly by Tony Balcomb, Anthea Garman and others, stated that South African domestic policy was destructive to economic growth. "We believe, in fact, that the course on which the government has set itself is a course that will lead to an increasing spiral of

⁴⁰¹ SAPA. 'Pull all foreign troops out of Angola by December 9 – SA', *Natal Witness*, 24 November 1987, p 1.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Black Sash was a woman's oppositional organization that opposed both apartheid and military conscription in South Africa. It was both a prominent and influential movement in white liberal circles.

⁴⁰⁵ Fidela Fouche. 'Eccentric concept', *Natal Witness*, 26 November 1987, p 6.

violence that will hasten the demise of human and economic life inside and outside her borders.”⁴⁰⁶ The writers also expressed their views on lack of public accountability and poor justification for the war.

Commitment of hundreds of troops to fighting a war that is outside the borders of their country has to be soundly legitimised before a potentially suspecting public will accept it. So at best you put a blanket of secrecy over your involvement and at worst you lie about your involvement, while you give yourself time to shape up public opinion in such a way that when the truth does come out people will actually believe that when their sons die on the border (and there are increasingly more of these probably a lot more than we led to believe) they do so as heroes fighting a wonderful cause.⁴⁰⁷

A link between conscription and secrecy is also highlighted here. These two letters were among those expressing direct opposition to a government, which they saw as fostering an inhumane society. Four days later, Fouche’s views were repeated in Shaw’s column, ‘Pretoria’s next move.’ He strongly condemned the South Africa government for waging war in Angola, stating, “South Africa has no business to be in Namibia, never mind Angola, and certainly has no business to be invading Angola from military bases in Namibia, which it undertook to leave as long ago as 1978. It certainly has no business to get involved in the Angolan civil war.”⁴⁰⁸ Shaw was sceptical of the fear of Soviet expansionism, claiming that South African intervention in Angola continued to fuel Soviet interest in the region. “If anything the South African intervention in the Angolan civil war has had the effect of vastly boosting the limited Soviet involvement in the region. And General Malan’s public appropriation of the credit for saving UNITA from the Russians has angered Dr Savimbi, making him look like a puppet of Pretoria.”⁴⁰⁹

Shaw also expressed his cynicism regarding South African military occupation of Namibia. “So far, military considerations have been decisive with the SADF much happier to have hung on to Namibia as a proving ground for new weapons and an ideal training ground for counter insurgency, not to speak of its ability as a killing ground to keep hostilities far from South African soil”.⁴¹⁰ In making this accusation against the South African government, Shaw put forward a much more radical anti-government discourse. On 2 December 1987, another editorial warned of destabilization in the

⁴⁰⁶ Tony Balcomb, et al. ‘The truth is finally out’, *Natal Witness*, 26 November 1987, p 6.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Gerald Shaw. ‘Pretoria’s next move’, *Natal Witness*, 30 November 1987, p 10.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

region.⁴¹¹ The next day, the government again justified its involvement in Angola, stating that “[t]he concept of pre-emptive strikes against SWAPO bases in Angola remained decisive in preventing SWAPO insurgents from operating freely.”⁴¹² According to the official view, SWAPO’s two-pronged propaganda strategy of spreading rumours about alleged South African atrocities and military attacks was meant to undermine the security forces in South West Africa.

SWAPO through an intensified propaganda campaign was trying to convey on the one hand that it was scoring military successes. On the other hand SWAPO propaganda was trying to create the impression that there were problems with morale among members of the security forces and that they were committing atrocities. General Meyer said SWAPO could not advance militarily and its insurgents were avoiding direct contact with security forces.⁴¹³

On 7 December 1987, a reader named Cloe Gray wrote to empathize with soldiers stationed in the Angolan conflict, stating that she felt “a strong inner pain at the loss of so many young lives on both sides of the border. Their opinion needs to be publicised in all South African newspapers to try to bring sanity to the situation.”⁴¹⁴ A day later, Hallett, made his case against South African propaganda of Soviet Union expansionism. He argued that,

Soviet policy in Angola cannot be properly assessed unless it is fitted up to the context of Soviet global policy. Recent development – particularly the arms negotiation with the United States – makes it clear that for reasons of the profoundest self-interest the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev needs a lessening in political tension throughout so that scarce resources can be diverted from defence to other areas of the economy.⁴¹⁵

In its discourse on the SADF role in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale, the *Natal Witness* created a much stronger opposition to the South African border wars than it had in 1978 and 1981. It had introduced many debates over the use of South African resources in a war whilst humanitarian aid was lacking for flood relief in Natal and basic rights for its black citizens. The editorials and columns also denounced the futility of the war and its long-term damage to South Africa on a financial level, and, as a part of this discourse, drew comparisons with US intervention in Vietnam and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. It reported on troop deaths at Cuito Cuanavale, which highlighted the cost of the war to South Africans as well as Angolans. Another important aspect of public narrative was scepticism surrounding the fear

⁴¹¹ ‘Denials’, *Natal Witness*, 2 December 1987, p 12.

⁴¹² SAPA. ‘Strikes at SWAPO decisive- SWATF.’ *Natal Witness*, 3 December 1987, p 4.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Gray, Cloe. ‘In agreement’, 7 December 1987, p 7.

⁴¹⁵ Hallett, Robin. ‘What are the Soviets up to?’, *Natal Witness*, 8 December 1987, p 10.

of Soviet expansionism in which editorials and columns disputed the idea and suggested that the SADF war in Angola was not vital to South African national security.

Its appeal to an international level also highlights a feeling of separateness from the rest of the country at the time. As Anderson, in his view on nations, states, “no nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind.”⁴¹⁶ Thus, the feeling of Natal as a separate province is characterised here. It also creates a feeling of an established connection as part of international peace movements. Perhaps a key part of the *Natal Witness* identity is seen here, namely, their linkage to the western world. Despite it being on a lesser scale, there was still an anxiety about a possible communist revolutionary takeover, therefore despite its venomous anti-war rhetoric, class interests of its readership still lie at the forefront of the discourse.

Exposure: international and local sources

The *Natal Witness* also aired the views of non-governmental sources from international newspapers, world bodies and prominent international personalities. As already documented, these sources included statements from Angolan authorities and reports from the Angolan media agency, Angop. This was significant as the *Natal Witness* was taking reports from a declared enemy of the South African government. These international sources allowed the *Natal Witness* to report on issues that the South African government refused them to legally report on firsthand. These included reports of South African military losses, operations and alleged atrocities committed by the SADF and its ally UNITA.

Local organisations were also allotted space to express their views and the picture portrayed in the paper was of a climate of dissent and protest. On 2 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* reported on a protest by members of the Black Sash concerning SADF activity in Angola. “A picket protesting the presence of the South African Defence Force in Angola and South African aid for the rebel movement UNITA was held in Church Street.”⁴¹⁷ The slogans of protesters included messages such as “Bring them home”.

⁴¹⁶ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, p 23.

⁴¹⁷ Witness Reporter. ‘Picket protests SADF in Angola’, 2 November 1987, p 4.

This publishing could be seen as further evidence that the *Natal Witness* was trying to create an oppositional discourse, in line with its opinion pages. It published conflicting reports on casualties in the border conflicts. “Angop stated that government forces had killed almost 100 South African soldiers and shot down 29 planes and helicopters since South African army troops invaded areas of Southern Angola on September 2.”⁴¹⁸ Yet, went the report, UNITA had claimed “a decisive victory in its biggest battle ever.”⁴¹⁹ Beyond the numbers at stake was the very question of South African involvement.

South Africa has acknowledged its troops are operating in Southern Angola to defend South Africa's interests in the region. UNITA, which on Friday claimed to have captured two Cuban airmen after shooting down their sophisticated MIG-23 jet, has made no mention of South African support. Angola, on the other hand, stated that Angola had so far resisted an onslaught of South African heavy artillery fire bombing raids and armoured car attacks. But it added that South Africa was massing forces for further Angolan attacks.⁴²⁰

The *Natal Witness* also published accusations of atrocities committed by UNITA:

Angolan authorities on Saturday accused anti-government rebels of killing 100 civilians and wounding many others at a settlement in the central province of Huambo. The report said rebels of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) attacked the settlement of Salanda, near the town of Tchinjene on October 24, killing and wounding inhabitants and destroying property.⁴²¹

UNITA was an important ally of the South African government, supported by it financially and militarily. The South African government praised Savimbi and UNITA in its propaganda. Judith Matloff points out that, “One of the great myths about Savimbi was that he was self reliant militarily and a phenomenal strategist. Nevertheless, he was dependent on the outside world and that was part of the problem with Jamba. South Africa had sought him out not because Pretoria liked him, but because UNITA was a convenient way to control the ANC and SWAPO.”⁴²²

The next day the *Natal Witness* recorded an SADF announcement that it had attacked SWAPO militants on the Angolan border. “More than 150 SWAPO guerrillas were killed in a SWAPO base, ‘north of Ovambo’ the South African Defence Force announced yesterday”.⁴²³ However, the *Natal Witness* also covered SWAPO chairperson Sam Nujoma’s denials on the matter. He was reported as stating that,

⁴¹⁸ Tony Oosthuizen. ‘Conflicting reports on Angolan battle’, *Natal Witness*, 2 November 1987, p 1

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ SAPA. ‘UNITA accused of mass killing’, *Natal Witness*, 2 November 1987: p 4.

⁴²² Judith Matloff, *Fragments of a forgotten war*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1997) p 247.

⁴²³ SAPA ‘160 die as SADF strikes at SWAPO’, *Natal Witness*, 3 November 1987: p 1.

“[n]othing like this has happened. This is the same kind of deceit and lies that Pretoria always tells us when they want to cover up its military aggression in Angola.”⁴²⁴ On 5 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* recorded statements by Angolan President, Dos Santos, denying the loss of as many troops as claimed by UNITA. “Referring to reports that between 2000 and 4000 members of the government forces had been killed, he said not more than 300 had died.”⁴²⁵ These battles over numbers offered the public a chance to doubt official South African national sources.

Four days later, the *Natal Witness* reported on a UN statement attempting to pressurize the South African government into ceasing its occupation of Namibia. A week later, the *Natal Witness* also publicized Angop’s assertions that South Africa’s admission of involvement in the Angola conflict proved that it had been directly at war with the country. “The confession only confirms denunciations by Angolan authorities that Angola is the victim of an undeclared war carried out by the racist regime and it is not a civil war.”⁴²⁶

The *Natal Witness* reported on claims by papers such as the *Namibian*. On 21 November 1987, for example, the *Namibian* was disclosed to have published that a large number of South West African Territorial Force (SWATF) troops had metaphorically thrown down weapons. “More than 400 SWA Territory Force members have “gone on strike” after refusing to fight on behalf of UNITA against Angolan FAPLA forces, the newspaper *Namibian* has reported.”⁴²⁷ According to the *Namibian*, “360 soldiers had already been sent to the Walvis Bay military prison while another 48 had resigned.”⁴²⁸ But

...[r]esponding to the allegations, the SWATF said in a statement that 47 members of 202 Battalion were discharged from duty at the end of the end of last month after they had failed to comply with military standards. Concerning the 101 battalion in Ovambo, the SWATF said there had been dissatisfaction among 27 members of the unit concerning their deployment last month, but since then, all problems had been ironed out.⁴²⁹

The personal account of an anonymous source gave weight to the suspicion that the denials were fabricated. “In August this year we were transported to Mavinga to fight against our will on the side of

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ SAPA. ‘Angola denies troop losses’, *Natal Witness*, 5 November 1987, p 1.

⁴²⁶ SAPA. ‘Pretoria preparing for bigger role’, *Natal Witness*, 16 November 1987, p 2.

⁴²⁷ SAPA. ‘SWATF troops on strike – claim’, *Natal Witness*, 21 November 1987, p 1.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

UNITA.”⁴³⁰ Accounts like this underlined the unpopularity of UNITA as a movement. In the same article, the *Natal Witness* also reported on further allegations of “South African incursions deep inside Angola.”⁴³¹ Reported in the pages of the *Natal Witness*, the Angolan authorities claimed that they had found evidence of attacks by South African pilots. “Angolan troops have recovered the remains of a South African still strapped in his seat after his jet was shot down near the SWA/Angolan border last week.”⁴³²

Strong UN opposition to South Africa’s fuelling of the civil war continued to be aired.

The UN Security Council considering Angola’s charge that South Africa committed aggression against its territory was expected to vote on the resolution yesterday. South African ambassador Mr Les Manly said Pretoria was ready to withdraw its forces from Angola beginning on December 9 – if all foreign troops including Soviet and Cuban were recalled. Brushing aside this proposal, Argentina, Congo, Ghana, the United Arab Emirates and Zambia addressed their draft resolution to the South African invasion.⁴³³

Anger at the secrecy of military practices across the border was fuelled when, on 3 December 1987, the *Natal Witness* documented claims by the Angolan government that Prime Minister Botha had illegally entered the country a few times. “South African president made three secret visits in the early 1980s to the headquarters of UNITA, the Mozambiquen [sic] news agency reported yesterday.”⁴³⁴ This was backed up by a UNITA officer’s statement which “claimed that Mr Botha while Prime Minister of South Africa, had visited UNITA’s headquarters at Jamba in south-eastern Angola in 1981, 1982 and 1983.”⁴³⁵ Six days later the *Natal Witness* published a denial by the Angolan President that Cuban troops were in the country to help the war effort against UNITA. The report quoted a government spokesperson denying a fresh Cuban battalion had arrived to help fight against UNITA.⁴³⁶

The publishing of non-governmental sources both hostile and oppositional to the South African government had the overall effect of discrediting official sources. It signalled that the *Natal Witness*

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Witness Reporter. ‘Body of SA pilot found in downed jet wreckage – Angola’, *Natal Witness*, 26 November 1987, p 1.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ SAPA. ‘P.W has visited Angola before.’ *Natal Witness*, 3 December 1987, p 1.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ SAPA. ‘No Cuban troop build up’, *Natal Witness*, 9 December 1987, p 2.

was indeed intent on fuelling an oppositional perspective. The publishing of overseas newspapers was significant as these papers were heavily criticized by the South African government. Use of external sources could be a way the *Natal Witness* wanted to keep the government in check. The general distrust of government sources in the opinion sections seemed to give the foreign sources greater value, demonstrating the deep uncertainty about the political truth of militarized action in this period.

Factors affecting perceptions of the border wars

In 1987, the dangerous internal security situation in South Africa had intensified with the ANC sabotage and bombing campaigns in the country. The internal threat from the ANC included attempted sabotage on perceived vital government facilities such as communications, justice and defence networks. This included the setting off of car bombs in Johannesburg one outside a Magistrate's Court and on a SADF compound in May 1987 and again in July of that year. The government discourse linked this internal unrest to the South African border wars, claiming it as an extension of 'Rooi Gevaar'. All together, there were thirteen pieces in the *Natal Witness* dealing with the ANC guerrilla warfare in the period covered by my sample.

On 2 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* reported on suspected ANC activity on South African borders. According to the *Argus* newspaper, "[c]hildren from the Cape Peninsula aged between 14 and 18 have been smuggled out of South Africa by a highly organised African National Congress cells and given extensive training in neighbouring countries before infiltrating back into their communities."⁴³⁷ The *Natal Witness* also reported on a disclosure by MP Patrick McKenzie that "he had correspondence from the parents of youths recently arrested for allegedly committing acts of arson, attempted arson, public violence and attacks on homes of policemen while "acting under the influence of the ANC".⁴³⁸ Also on 2 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* reported on the charges pressed by police against an ANC man who allegedly shot an SADF soldier dead. "An African National Congress man who shot dead a South African soldier pursuing him and two colleagues across the border into Swaziland is to be

⁴³⁷ SAPA. 'Youth smuggled out by ANC', *Natal Witness*, 2 November 1987, p 1.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

prosecuted.”⁴³⁹ On 6 November 1987, a story was aired that reported a petition by ANC members to be tried as prisoners of war rather than common criminals or terrorists. “The court had heard evidence that the ANC was a signatory to Protocol 1 of the Geneva Convention, he said. The protocol regulated armed conflict, and the accused therefore fell under international law.”⁴⁴⁰

On 20 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* printed a letter by a member of the public which decried the release of Govan Mbeki: “What does one say of a government which releases an unrepentant convicted member of a terrorist organisation while presumably still being subjected to the ‘total onslaught’.”⁴⁴¹ Five days later the *Natal Witness* printed an accusation by the Minister of Finance for South Africa that Botswana was shielding ANC militants. “The African National Congress had asked Botswana to allow its territory to be used as a conduit for infiltrating insurgents into South Africa.”⁴⁴² Between 25 and 28 November, the *Natal Witness* also reported on a trial of an alleged South African spy in Zimbabwe. This was the trial of Ms Odile Harrington, accused of spying on the ANC in Zimbabwe. It was alleged that she worked for the covert security forces in South Africa. She was found guilty and given a 25-year sentence by Zimbabwe’s High Court.

Also reported on 25 November was the killing of three ANC members who were found to have been in possession of Soviet made weaponry. “Weapons of communist origin were found in the house along with the bodies of the three men – as yet unnamed after police stormed the building.”⁴⁴³ Claims by the South African government, that “...the African National Congress had asked Botswana to allow its territory to be used as a conduit for infiltrating insurgents into South Africa” appeared in a separate article.⁴⁴⁴

On December 9, the *Natal Witness* reported the US embassy spokesperson's assertions that Botswana was *not* guilty of harbouring ANC militants, despite allegations to the contrary. “The United States is

⁴³⁹ SAPA. ‘ANC man to be charged’, *Natal Witness*, 4 November 1987, p 3.

⁴⁴⁰ Witness reporter. ‘No POW status for four ANC accused – supreme court’, *Natal Witness*, 6 November 1987, p 5.

⁴⁴¹ ‘Now who’d soft on security’, *Natal Witness*, 20 November 1987, p 6.

⁴⁴² SAPA. ‘SA protest at ANC in Botswana’, *Natal Witness*, 25 November 1987, p 1.

⁴⁴³ Rickard Carmel. ‘ANC suspects killed in Natal battle’ *Natal Witness*, 25 November 1987, p 1.

⁴⁴⁴ SAPA. ‘SA protests at ANC in Botswana’, *Natal Witness*. 25 November 1987, p 1.

completely satisfied that Botswana to the best of its ability, is maintaining its longstanding policy of preventing the use of its territory for incursions against any of its neighbours.”⁴⁴⁵ Two days later the *Natal Witness* reported on a police raid on ANC members. “Four suspected ANC guerrillas were killed in a pre-dawn raid on a house in Soweto Port Elizabeth yesterday, and a quantity of arms and ammunition was seized.”⁴⁴⁶ The paper also reported that “[a]rms included an AK-47 with three spare magazines; a Soviet made hand grenade and a Star 9mm pistol and magazine.”⁴⁴⁷ On the same day the *Natal Witness* reported on speculation by the ANC of a possible attack on them by the South African government. “South Africa is planning a campaign of attacks and assassinations against ANC militants in neighbouring countries over the Christmas period.”⁴⁴⁸ Although the *Natal Witness* did not provide much comment in this section, its discourse on the Angolan wars indicated that it did not support the government discourse on the ANC.

Reporting on trials, events of sabotage and accusations of and by the African National Congress, the *Natal Witness* kept its publics aware of the dissent raging throughout the country in this period. With commitment to the legitimate role of reporting various views under a principle of objectivity and balance, it also gave its readers indications of the regional and local state of affairs, signalling the international condemnation and growing protest, and the government’s weakening hold on legitimacy.

Conclusion

The *Natal Witness* expressed a more critical oppositional voice on the South African war in Angola than it had previously in the years 1978 and 1981. The most significant part of the discourse was the increased scepticism about South Africa's role in Cuito Cuanavale. This was coupled with its rejection of the South African claims that the Soviet Union was expansionist in its aims in southern Africa and further, and included arguments over the flow of resources into the Angolan war, including young lives that were being lost. Another aspect was their support for a Western solution to the crisis in Southern

⁴⁴⁵ SAPA. ‘Botswana ‘Stops incursions’, *Natal Witness*, 9 December 1987, p 3.

⁴⁴⁶ SAPA. ‘Police kill 4 ANC suspects’, *Natal Witness*, 11 December 1987, p 1.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ SAPA ‘SA ‘Planning attacks on ANC’, *Natal Witness*, 11 December 1987, p 1.

Africa, which favoured UN involvement and a negotiated Western settlement. This chapter once again touches on the ongoing Anglophone identity crafted within the *Natal Witness* at the time. Its appeal to Western international thought indicates alienation from the Afrikaner nationalist government. Anderson's point of how no nation ever adopts an aspect of coterminous relations is further illustrated here. The paper's view also indicates a desire for South Africa to be part of the West, modelling a similar approach to governance. What is also expounded here is a moderate middle road approach seeking rationalism; this was promoted as part of the white English liberal identity. This is also consistent with its interests as a social class. Both extremities from rightist and leftist politics would have threatened these class interests as they could have precipitated a revolution or a possible invasion of the country by socialist forces such as Cuba. The values of freedom, equality and liberty are seen here in the *Natal Witness* as forming a key part of the identity of English liberals. However many theorists such as Tomaselli, and others have dismissed this sort of attitude as pretentious.

Chapter 4

Militarization on the doorstep: Conscription and the UDF-Inkatha war

With the border wars escalating, the *Natal Witness* reported on the issue of conscription and protests against it. Under the Defence Act of 1957, all white men over the age of 18 were required to do compulsory military service for nine months. This was extended to two years in 1980. It was an issue that hit close to home for white, English speaking people in Natal whose sons and brothers were legally compelled to serve in the SADF. Another key issue with a provincial focus was the violent conflict between Mangosutho Buthelezi's Zulu nationalist organisation Inkatha and the ANC-supported UDF, which was fought bitterly in the townships around Pietermaritzburg, as well as many other locations. This conflict occasionally spilt over into the 'white areas' of city centre and the suburbs.

Debate and discourses over military conscription

There were several points of discussion regarding the debate over conscription in the *Natal Witness* during 1987. These featured in the opinion columns and non-governmental sources. One theme centred around the distress over young men dying on South African borders. Another is found in several articles, which suggested alternatives to combat such as conscription in the health and emergency services. There were also calls for an extension of the current conscientious objection provisions. The conscription law at the time allowed white men to abstain from military service based exclusively on religious reasons and some voices in the *Natal Witness* called for this exemption to be extended for those not willing to serve in the SADF for political and moral reasons.

An important narrative regarding resistance to conscription was around the figure of Doctor Ivan Toms, a medical doctor and former officer in the SADF, who refused his repeat call-up for the army after his initial service of two years between 1978 and 1980. Toms was a prominent provincial voice against apartheid in the 1980s and a cofounder of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC). The ECC was an

organisation launched in 1983, which vigorously opposed the conscription law in South Africa. It aimed to counsel potential conscripts on their choices and it regularly held rallies against the apartheid system and the South African wars in Angola. A key ally of the UDF, it also launched campaigns against the SADF war in Angola and occupation of Namibia. Significant events included the campaign against SADF troops in South African townships. Even more significant however was its banning by the South African government, which sparked much domestic condemnation from many sectors in the country.

On 3 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* reported Tom's refusal, on political grounds, to fight in the SADF. He was reported stating that he would be fighting for an institution whose values were contrary to his faith. "I am a Christian trying to live out my life by being true to my faith. I have seen the evils and injustices of apartheid and I know that the SADF is the ultimate upholder of this evil system."⁴⁴⁹ The article additionally recorded his alleged harassment by the SADF in their continuous call-ups to him. "Since then my lawyers have sent the SADF a letter saying in effect that it was harassment to repeatedly call me up and then withdraw the call-up and that it was psychologically disruptive."⁴⁵⁰

The next day, an opinion column featured Ivan Toms and the harassment question in its discussion and aligned itself with Toms' cause. "He has for more than a year been the victim of a campaign of growing harassment, which he believes is directly linked to his highly publicized stand as an objector. In 1986 he narrowly escaped serious injury when wheel nuts of his car were deliberately loosened, and a wheel came off as he was driving."⁴⁵¹ It also reported his belief that the authorities were using covert actions in a bid to make him relent. "Dr Toms believes the harassment was aimed at 'cracking' him before next week's call-up, forcing him either to leave the country as some objectors have done, or to accept an SADF uniform."⁴⁵² On the same day, a notice was published in the *Natal Witness* advertising that Ivan Toms would be speaking at an ECC meeting on his reasons for refusing national service. It notified that "[a] military officer, Dr Ivan Toms, will be talking in the city today on why he will not serve in the

⁴⁴⁹ SAPA. 'Objector harassed if call-up cancelled', *Natal Witness*, 3 November 1987, p 5.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ 'Harassment of a conscientious objector', *Natal Witness*, 4 November 1987, p 12.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

South African Defence Force again. The talk has been arranged by the End Conscription Campaign and the public is welcome to attend.”⁴⁵³

A report on the meeting on 5 November 1987 further set out Tom’s moral objections. This article cited his reasoning that he would fight for the underprivileged and suppressed people in the country. “Dr Toms concluded his talk by saying, “I have decided I must make a stand. For me the side of justice and honesty is the side of the poor and the oppressed and that is what I want to be on.”⁴⁵⁴ Another point covered was the need for an expanded definition of the law regarding conscientious objection as seen in the publishing of his quote.

Speaking at a public meeting, Dr Toms, who was an officer in the South African Defence Force, told the meeting that only religious pacifists may be exempted from military service in forms of existing legislation. “I hope my stand will add a little to the pressure already, on the government to change the legislation and broaden the definition of conscientious objection to include political and other objectors.”⁴⁵⁵

The *Natal Witness* also reported on Toms’ support for his organisation the ECC. The paper reported his statement that many conscripts faced an ethical dilemma over their induction into the SADF.

Toms also stated his support for the ECC, “I support the End Conscription Campaign’s call for constructive alternative service for all objectors. ECC is concerned about the dilemma conscripts face and knows that many of them have no other choice but to go to the SADF”. He added, “I am involved in counselling service and there has been a dramatic increase in the number of conscripts who grapple with moral problems when faced with a call up. The interesting thing is that these people are no longer simply educated university graduates.”⁴⁵⁶

The *Natal Witness*’s generous coverage of Toms is indicative of support for his cause and that of the ECC. Five days later the *Natal Witness* reported on Catholic objections to the current law on conscription. Added to the debate were their suggestions for an alternative service for conscientious objectors.

We repeat our call to the authorities to alter the law concerning compulsory service, to allow conscripts to object doing military service not only on religious grounds but also on conscientious grounds. We also call for an alternative to the law, which would allow conscientious objectors to do community service for a period equivalent to the period of military service.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵³ ‘Ivan Toms to speak in city’, *Natal Witness*, 4 November 1987, p 3.

⁴⁵⁴ Witness Reporter. ‘Tom hopes his stand will bring about change’, *Natal Witness*, 5 November 1987, p 5.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ SAPA. ‘Ease law on objectors – Catholic Leaders’, *Natal Witness*, 10 November 1987, p 4.

Three days later the *Natal Witness* reported a supporter of Toms' statements on his decision not to serve in the SADF. It stated that Toms chose not to serve because the SADF made war on its own people. "Dr Toms felt he was doing the right thing, one has to make a stand in a civil war. One has to take sides."⁴⁵⁸ On 2 December 1987, the paper continued to update readers on the activities of the ECC and to show itself as an active, vocal voice in its promotion. It gave information on another upcoming meeting of the organisation concerning the situation in Angola. "Current events in Angola will be highlighted at an End Conscription Campaign meeting tomorrow. Speakers include Mr Pierre Cronje (MP) who will address South African involvement in Angola."⁴⁵⁹ Around the issue of conscription, the *Natal Witness* was taking an explicitly activist stand.

The *Natal Witness*, in an editorial, introduced another element in the argument on conscription 4 December 1987. The author argued that vital skills were being wasted in South Africa because many young men who did not want to be conscripted into a dubious war left the country.

But there is very little hope of stemming the flow, let alone reversing it, while conscription hangs over the heads of young men, who very understandably are not willing to risk life or limb in dubious military escapades. Until the authorities come up with the option of doing National Service that is truly national as distinct from military, the brain drain can only continue.⁴⁶⁰

In July and August 1988, there were several debates in South Africa over the continuation of military conscription. This was largely because South African involvement in Angola was at its end and peace talks were on the agenda. The government rejected calls for an end to conscription much to the consternation of many liberal and left wing agencies in South Africa. In August, the South African government banned the ECC – a move that activists protested vigorously. The *Natal Witness* discourse on conscription in 1988 was steeped in this context.

One of the prominent narratives in the paper's reportage on conscription in 1988 was that of David Bruce – a member of the ECC who was sentenced to six years in jail for refusing to do military service, based on his conscientious objection to fighting for an army that he felt bolstered the apartheid system. On 26 July 1988, the *Natal Witness* reported on his sentencing at the Johannesburg court. The article

⁴⁵⁸ SAPA. 'Objector Toms Charged', *Natal Witness*, 10 November 1987, p 5.

⁴⁵⁹ 'Meeting on Angola', *Natal Witness*, 2 December 1987, p 4.

⁴⁶⁰ 'Brain drain', *Natal Witness*, 4 December 1987, p 12.

documented his personal reasons for refusing military service and further reported that it was the first time a conscript had refused this service on political grounds. “Bruce had objected on grounds that the SADF upheld a racist political system. He is the first conscript to have objected to military service on grounds other than religious or pacifist.”⁴⁶¹ The article also described his purported patriotism to South Africa as well as his supporters’ actions in the courtroom. “Bruce told the court he regarded himself as committed to his country and to finding a future for South Africa without racism. Supporters wearing yellow button holes reminiscent of those worn in solidarity with Vietnam draft dodgers, packed the courtroom.”⁴⁶² His commitment to patriotism held an important place in the article as those who refused military service were frequently labelled as unpatriotic by the South African government. This denoted that the *Natal Witness* saw an alternative form of patriotism to the government line, one that valued community service as a form of patriotism.

The next day the *Natal Witness* recorded the reactions to Bruce’s sentence. The article covered the views of prominent figures such as Dr Alan Boesak, a leader of the UDF and anti-apartheid activist; Helen Suzman, leader of the PFP; and Alan Wynand. “Helen Suzman viewed the savage sentence with deep dismay. Dr Alan Boesak... in a message of support read on his behalf expressed great admiration for Bruce. National Democratic Leader Mr Wynand said the refusal to do military service should not result in a jail sentence.”⁴⁶³ The article also described additional support by liberal activist organisations. “Other messages of support came from organisations including the Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee and the National Union of South African Students.”⁴⁶⁴ Thus, these two articles reporting on left and liberal voices demonstrated a strong anti-government approach by the *Natal Witness*.

Another narrative in the conscription debate was the sexual assault on Toms in Cape Town’s Pollsmoor Prison. For his stand the previous year, he had been incarcerated for refusing to serve in the SADF. On 27 July 1988, the *Natal Witness* reported on his application for a transfer because of the assault. “Jailed conscientious objector Ivan Toms has applied for a transfer to Pretoria Central Prison after an alleged

⁴⁶¹ SAPA. ‘Objector Bruce gets 6 years’, *Natal Witness*, 26 July 1988, p 1.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ SAPA. ‘Dismay at Bruce’s sentence’, *Natal Witness*, 27 July 1988, p 1.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

sexual assault in the Pollsmoor Prison showers.”⁴⁶⁵ The article also reported on the reaction of an anonymous member of Black Sash to the attack. “A decent moral person such as Ivan Toms should not be treated as a common criminal.”⁴⁶⁶ In December 1987, Toms’ stance was reported in the *Natal Witness* and he was generally venerated as a hero in the paper’s pages. This story highlighted the plight and sufferings of those who refused conscription. It showed that the *Natal Witness* continued to strongly back their cause. On the same date, the paper informed the public of a booklet produced by the ECC.⁴⁶⁷ The article gave details of the book and its reasons for publication.

The booklet outlines options available to conscripts as well as the rights of conscripts within the SADF. Local ECC spokesperson, Kathryn Strachan, said the booklet contained information relating to the sorts of questions that were regularly asked by conscripts. She said it had been produced as a means of distributing advice on conscription more widely.⁴⁶⁸

The trend continued in the printing of a letter by Fidela Fouche and Pat Merrett on 3 August 1988 – both members of Black Sash. They addressed the issue of Ivan Toms’ sexual assault in prison. The writers berated the government for putting Toms in jail despite his numerous deeds for South Africa and called for alternative service for conscientious objectors.

We consider it abhorrent that a man, who has been imprisoned for nothing more than his high moral principles, should have been subjected to such a gross violation of his person. Surely incidents of this kind in themselves, should give those who support conscription, serious reason to question the nature of the punishment inflicted on conscientious objectors. We reiterate our call for alternative service.⁴⁶⁹

The next day, the *Natal Witness* reported on conscripts rejecting military service in reaction to Bruce’s sentence. It reported, “more than 140 young white conscripts from all over South Africa yesterday made a public declaration refusing to serve in the defence force and calling for alternative service for all conscientious objectors.”⁴⁷⁰ The article further quoted Dr Patrick’s statements concerning conscription. Significantly, his brother had been killed while doing service for the SADF. The article recorded his assertions that conscripts were government pawns used to maintain oppression in South Africa. “Our actions in the SADF served the interests of the South African government in its need to commit this

⁴⁶⁵ SAPA. ‘Ivan Toms to be moved after jail assault’, *Natal Witness*, 27 July 1988, p 2.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ This booklet is not named by the *Natal Witness* but I believe that it was most likely part of the series of booklets called *Know your Rights*. This series sought to inform future conscripts of their options when called for national service.

⁴⁶⁸ SAPA. ‘ECC to launch booklet’, *Natal Witness*, 27 July 1988, p 10.

⁴⁶⁹ Fidela Fouche and Pat Merrett. ‘Alternative Service’, *Natal Witness*, 3 August 1988, p 10.

⁴⁷⁰ Witness Reporter. ‘143 men refuse SADF call-up’, 4 August 1988, p 1.

injustice in order to maintain white supremacy.”⁴⁷¹ It also cited Mr Timothy Mosdell’s comments and viewpoints on the SADF role in the Angolan war: “He said he believed that war was fundamentally wrong, particularly if one is fighting an unjust war.”⁴⁷² Mosdell had formerly served in the SADF, which gave impetus to his credibility as a source. The *Natal Witness* further reported that serving in the SADF went against Mosdell’s convictions: “He said that he had become convinced that the aims and methods of the SADF were contrary to his moral convictions and it would be unsuitable for him to serve in the SADF again.”⁴⁷³ The paper went on to record his statement that the SADF was the upholder of apartheid: “Speaking for the Natal section, Patrick said they were opposed to apartheid and believe that the SADF contributed to upholding this unjust system.”⁴⁷⁴ Thus, the *Natal Witness* included the important moral argument against having to serve in an army that supported apartheid. This was emphasised by the fact that Mosdell had served in the SADF, which gave impetus to the argument against conscription as it suggested that he had learnt his convictions from serving in the SADF.

On 5 August 1988, the *Natal Witness* recorded comments by Mr Wilhelm Liebenberg, the chair of the organisation (unnamed by *Natal Witness*) in which 143 conscripts refused to do military service. Liebenberg said that “[t]he action was a largely spontaneous response to the harsh six-year sentence meted out on David Bruce, the presence of SA troops in Angola and the lack of acceptable alternatives to compulsory military service he said. Furthermore, no national ECC office bearer took part in the action”⁴⁷⁵

In the same article, the *Natal Witness* reported on the attention given to the ECC by government, which included possible legal action against the organisation. The article provided a comment on the action by Minister of Law and Order, Mr Adriaan Vlok, that “[t]he ECC’s actions are receiving attention. However, I have not got any indication on when and if there will be any action taken.”⁴⁷⁶ A day later the *Natal Witness* reported on statements by Magnus Malan, the Minister of Defence, rejecting an

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Witness Reporter. ‘ECC under government scrutiny’, *Natal Witness*, 5 August 1988, p 2.

⁴⁷⁶ Witness Reporter. ‘ECC under govt scrutiny’, *Natal Witness*, 5 August 1988, p 1.

adjustment to conscription on any grounds. “He repeated his statement of earlier this week that no citizen could decide on his or her own which laws to respect. This was his stand on the ECC and individuals who evaded national service.”⁴⁷⁷ The *Natal Witness* also recorded his assertions that the ECC was an enemy of South Africa and its defence force.

“The ECC aims at disrupting SADF activities through a negative influence on the positive attitude and morale of national service. The loyalty of men doing national service “weighed more heavily than their individual political outlooks and the so called unjustness of our society.” Organisations which disrupted the tradition and pride of the SADF were anti-South African, Malan said.⁴⁷⁸

On the same day, the *Natal Witness* discussed objections to military service by the group of 143 who displayed solidarity with David Bruce. The editorial stated that the Nationalist hardline policy had led to a backlash against conscription.

It is another example of the miscalculations to which the Nationalists are prone. They evidently believe that ‘kragdadigheid’ can accomplish anything. Make punishment sufficiently severe and all forms of dissent will end. Yet history teaches the opposite. Whenever a regime enforces policies that are seen by the public to be harsh and unjust, martyrs will be created.⁴⁷⁹

The editorial lamented government closed-mindedness on the morality debate over conscription. “The government has been repeatedly urged to take into account political as well as religious objections to military service, but has refused to do so, unable to accept that there may be moral and ethical values beyond its understanding.”⁴⁸⁰ This editorial shows antipathy to the uncompromising attitudes and authoritarian behaviour of the South African government.

On 8 August 1988, the *Natal Witness* publicised a Black Sash protest against conscription. It recorded a spokesperson’s statement that “military conscription caused much suffering for many youths and families.”⁴⁸¹ This article combined with previous ones was a further demonstration of the paper’s support for organisations opposing conscription such as the Black Sash and the ECC. A day later, the *Natal Witness* published three letters concerning the sexual assault on Ivan Toms in prison. The first letter, by a member of the public, claimed that Ivan Toms was wrong to evade national service and that

⁴⁷⁷ SAPA. ‘Conscript laws will not be changed, Malan’, *Natal Witness*, 6 August 1988, p 1.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ ‘Conscientious objectors’, *Natal Witness*, 6 August 1988, p 4.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Witness Reporter. ‘Black Sash Protest’, *Natal Witness*, 8 August 1988, p 2.

the government could not make any exceptions: “As far as I’m concerned he must accept the fruits of his folly. The poor taxpayer will have to pay for his six-year sojourn in prison. I’m definitely one of those who feel it unfair that some should be granted exemption while others have to serve.”⁴⁸² The second letter by Buck Taylor pointed out the absurdity of the law and its implementation in the South African judiciary by providing two contrasting court sentences found in the *Natal Witness*. “Two reports of the *Natal Witness*. One: July 26 1988 – refusing to serve the SADF in any capacity on moral grounds, David Bruce was imprisoned for six years. Two: Found guilty of murder, Joan Marais was sentenced to imprisonment for four years. Justice is done.”⁴⁸³ The use of irony by Taylor was a powerful commentary on the irrationality of the South African law regarding violence. This is also seen in the third letter by G.A Derby Lewis, which commented on the Ivan Toms incarceration. The author questioned, “[w]hy are conscientious objectors held with common criminals? Why was this prisoner not offered adequate protection despite his earlier complaint of harassment?”⁴⁸⁴ The author pointed out the sacrifices that Toms made: “This man is a hero. If it is the law that out-standing South Africans be treated in this shameful way, because of their moral repugnance for military service, then the law must be changed. At the very least, our courts must be given the discretion to sentence a period of community service instead of jail.”⁴⁸⁵

On 12 August 1988, the *Natal Witness* reported on support for conscription objectors by leading church members in South Africa. “Senior Durban church leaders have expressed support for the 143 conscripts who last week announced they would not do military service in the South African defence force.”⁴⁸⁶ The article also cited comments of Mrs Mary Burton, President of Black Sash, regarding the conscripts’ stand. She said that the “young men who were not prepared to serve in the defence force should be given the choice of alternative service.”⁴⁸⁷ On 15 August 1988, the *Natal Witness* publicized segments of a speech by Adriaan Vlok in an address to a religious youth group. He played down the issue of conscientious objection in South Africa citing that there were only a few who decided not to serve, and the quality of those who did service was superb: “Those who objected to national service were so few

⁴⁸² ‘Letter’, *Natal Witness*, 9 August 1988, p 8.

⁴⁸³ Buck Taylor. ‘Letter’, *Natal Witness*, 9 August 1988, p 8.

⁴⁸⁴ G.A Derby-Lewis. ‘Letter’, *Natal Witness*, 9 August 1988, p 8.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Witness Reporter. ‘Clergymen support conscripts stand’, *Natal Witness*, 12 August 1988, p 5.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

that they made headlines when they refused their call-ups he said. “The calibre of young men who joined the security forces was remarkable.”⁴⁸⁸ A day later, the *Natal Witness* recorded a statement by Mr Breytenbach, the Deputy Minister of Defence, which refuted rumours of conscription reduction. “The African National Congress was, if anything, trying to increase the level of violence.”⁴⁸⁹

On 17 August, the *Natal Witness* reported on the ECC response to the government refusal on ending military conscription. The organisation emphasised the loss of skills for South Africa. “By not granting alternative service, thousands of skilled professionals will continue to leave the country, while others choose to waste away in jail. South Africa cannot afford this loss.”⁴⁹⁰ On the same day, the paper speculated on the possibility of ending conscription: “If the government is unwilling to consider a reduction at this stage would it not be reasonable for it to do so once South Africa withdraws from Namibia? Having been relieved of the burden of occupying that country, the SADF could surely do with far less manpower than it has at the moment.”⁴⁹¹ Added to that, it would be economically beneficial for the government to do this: “A shortening in the period of conscription would not only save a vast amount of money but would also free human resources for productive economic activity.”⁴⁹² Thus, both these articles continue a key argument that conscription resulted in a loss of valuable human resources, a key argument against the law.

On 22 August 1988, the South African government officially banned the ECC. On 23 August 1988, the *Natal Witness* reported on Alan Hendrickse’s views concerning the banning of the ECC. Hendrickse was a member of the Labour Party that was the dominant party in the Coloured House of Representatives within the tri-cameral parliament in 1983. As a result, he was frequently attacked by the ANC and UDF for collaborating with the government despite his pledged opposition to apartheid policies. The featured article reported his attack on the ban. “Condemning the restrictions as another step on the road to totalitarianism by a government unable to take cognisance of opposing views, Mr Hendrickse said the organisation was entitled to oppose conscription while the army is seen as

⁴⁸⁸ SAPA. ‘Objectors only a little problem’, *Natal Witness*, 15 August 1988, p 2.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ SAPA. ‘ECC responds to call-up policy’, *Natal Witness*, 17 August 1988, p 5.

⁴⁹¹ ‘Conscription’, *Natal Witness*, 17 August 1988 p 12.

⁴⁹² ‘Conscription’, *Natal Witness*, 17 August 1988, p 12.

supporting apartheid policies.”⁴⁹³ The article also quoted a spokesperson for the PFP saying that the “banning was the action of a desperate and dictatorial government.”⁴⁹⁴ These viewpoints once again raised attention to the moral issue around serving in a defence force that propped up the apartheid system.

On 23 August 1988, the *Natal Witness* addressed the ECC banning. The editorial asserted that the resistance to conscription depended not on political preferences but an ‘abhorrence’ of an unjust system. “In South Africa objections to the call up are not based on petty political differences but on rejection of a system that is universally deemed to be abhorrent. Rightly or wrongly the SADF is seen as defending and supporting apartheid and people have refused to serve because their conscience will not allow them to.”⁴⁹⁵ It also emphasized that the number of conscripts actually motivated to serve was very low.

As long ago as 1975, Mr P.W Botha, as Defence Minister, acknowledged that only 20% to 30% of conscripts were highly motivated – in that 3000 men failed to report for duty. By 1985, after large scale deployment of troops in the townships, the figure had jumped to 7589 for the January intake alone. Since then accurate figures have not been made public.⁴⁹⁶

The editorial assured that banning the ECC would not work and would take away a responsible source of protest. “By effectively banning the ECC, the government has blocked a legitimate channel for those who have doubts about defending apartheid. This is unlikely to stop conscripts from refusing to serve.”⁴⁹⁷ The next day the *Natal Witness* reported on the ECC response to the ban on the organisation by the government. A representative stated that “[t]he action was being considered in the light of spurious reasons given by Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, for the effective banning of the organisation.”⁴⁹⁸ The article also mentioned the further opposition to conscription.

In Durban and Pietermaritzburg yesterday, 15 people signed a declaration calling on the government to allow alternative service for all recruits. The list was released at a press conference to focus on alternative forms of service, the stand taken by 143 conscripts who earlier this month refused to serve in the SADF and the restriction of the ECC. Sapa reports that during a meeting at the University of Cape Town yesterday 20 men said they would join the stand taken by the 143 others.”⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹³ SAPA. ‘Hendrickse and Malan clash over ECC banning’, *Natal Witness*, 23 August 1988, p 1.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ ‘The ECC’, *Natal Witness*, 23 August 1988, p 6.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Witness Reporter. ‘ECC to fight ban in court’, *Natal Witness*, 24 August 1988, p 1.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

The next day the *Natal Witness* printed the views of Magnus Malan, concerning anti-conscription supporters. The article reported his statements that national service evaders were aiding the terrorists. “By choosing to side with national service evaders and against the SADF, people played right into the hands of the terrorists who wanted to murder innocent South Africans. These sympathisers were also choosing to side against stability and order necessary for the broadening of democracy.”⁵⁰⁰

On 26 August 1988, the *Natal Witness* reported on statements from university representatives condemning the government ban on the ECC. The paper carried the University of Natal’s official position as conveyed by its Vice Chancellor, Professor Booysen. “It remains unwaveringly committed to the view that matters of social concern such as these should be the subject of free speech”.⁵⁰¹ The Wits University Vice Chancellor stated, “...conscription affected thousands of lives of our university students and it was a legitimate subject for debate.”⁵⁰² The article also cited the Rhodes University Vice Chancellor Dr Derek Henderson: “It is natural that (students) should want to debate and even express themselves in strong terms on what is an important moral issue and in which their lives are at stake.”⁵⁰³ These statements give insight into the values of the *Natal Witness* on issues such as academic freedom and general freedom of speech. The article also quoted the South African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC) statements, which put forward the view that the government was becoming out of touch with the present youth. “Anyone who had close contact with white youth in recent years would only be too aware of the increasing anguish that young men underwent as they faced the issue of national service.”⁵⁰⁴

On 29 August 1988, the *Natal Witness* printed assertions from Magnus Malan that attack on national service in South Africa was effectively support for communist objectives. “When it attacked national

⁵⁰⁰ SAPA. ‘Evaders of national service support terrorists’, *Natal Witness*, 25 August 1988, p 13.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Witness Reporter. ‘English speaking Universities strongly condemn ECC banning’, *Natal Witness*, 26 August 1988, p 5.

service, the ECC was supporting the most evil of systems, communism, which was aimed at the oppression of men, the suppression of religion and the subjugation of nations.”⁵⁰⁵

Further indicating its support for the movement on 30 August, the *Natal Witness* informed the public of an ECC meeting. “A meeting to protest the effective banning of the End Conscription Campaign will be held today at the University of Natal.”⁵⁰⁶ The next day the paper reported on the meeting proceedings, quoting a university representative. According to the representative, the ECC was a response to the unjustness of the system and its consequent grievances. “The End Conscription Campaign (ECC) was the manifestation of the moral dilemma facing conscripts to the Defence Force in South Africa.”⁵⁰⁷ The story indicated the grievance against fighting in a defence force that was working to uphold an unjust system. The article further reported his comments that “[t]he ECC would not have been silenced if it was merely a fringe group of universal pacifists agitating that South Africa should not defend itself against foreign aggression.”⁵⁰⁸ This gives further evidence that the *Natal Witness* discourse on the ECC sought to portray the organisation as morally just.

On 2 September 1988, the *Natal Witness* reported on the alleged harassment and smear campaign by the SADF on the ECC. The article quoted Mr Sydney Kentridge, a representative of the ECC: “The SADF’s argument that the courts had no jurisdiction was a dangerous assertion of power and could be likened to the pretensions of a South American Junta.”⁵⁰⁹ In the 1980s, the South American continent had military takeovers in countries such as Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. This was his frame of reference for what the South African state had become. The article further reported on the SADF’s admission of producing smear pamphlets: “The SADF has conceded distributing smear pamphlets as part of its covert actions to counter ECC activities.”⁵¹⁰ This not only showed antipathy against conscription but also illustrated concerns over South African society’s militarization as well as the excesses of the authorities interfering with the rule of law. The rule of law dictates that the law is above everybody including the authorities and is an important aspect of liberalism.

⁵⁰⁵ SAPA. ‘ECC has been dealt with – General Malan’, *Natal Witness*, 29 August 1988, p 5.

⁵⁰⁶ Witness Reporter. ‘Meeting on ECC ban’, *Natal Witness*, 30 August 1988, p 2.

⁵⁰⁷ Witness Reporter. ‘Campus Protests ECC ban’, *Natal Witness*, 31 August 1988, p 1.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ SAPA. ‘SADF attitude a danger, court told’, *Natal Witness*, 2 September 1988, p 2.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

This narrative of coverage reveals that the *Natal Witness* clearly took an active role in alerting the public to ECC activity and generating a discourse of opposition around the issue of conscription. It showed strong support for the idea of alternative service for those conscientiously opposed to military service. Two features in this discourses included dispute over the flow of South African human resources and the number of young men avoiding service by migrating from South Africa. Its coverage of the troop deaths in the Angolan war, as outlined in Chapter 3, seemed to highlight this viewpoint further. When the ECC was banned the *Natal Witness* produced editorials rejecting this move indicating a strong support for the ECC. Its articles focusing on protests against the banning backed this up. The support for the ECC was largely two-fold, being in sympathy with its objectives as well as setting out to defend the rights of free speech. Free speech is seen as a component in liberalism and is linked to the overall notion of individual freedoms.

The issue of the paper's role in galvanising an English-speaking, white public is raised by these discussions. Anderson describes how print capitalism helped fuel nationalism in communities. "Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search, nor made it more fruitful, than print capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways."⁵¹¹ The concern for the moral dilemmas and lives specifically of young, white men conscripted to fight outside of a just war context highlights the way that concerns about political violence were being debated in a much less abstract context than before.

The UDF–Inkatha conflict

In the second half of this chapter, I will discuss the *Natal Witness*'s coverage of the Inkatha–UDF conflict in Natal. The UDF was a liberation organisation founded in 1983 with the overall aim of dismantling apartheid. It was a broad alliance of women's, youth and church organisations as well as trade unions. This organisation was popular in black townships across the country and became the

⁵¹¹ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. p 15

most prominent liberation movement against apartheid in the 1980s. Inkatha was a Zulu nationalist liberation association, which, while opposing apartheid, competed with other forms of black opposition and took a stand against strategies – such as the disinvestment campaigns, workers strikes and boycotts – that threatened capital investments in the region. It was linked to both the homeland government body of the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly and to regional development initiatives, such as the Buthelezi Commission, which focussed on economic growth in KwaZulu.

This conflict between Inkatha and the UDF started in 1985 and centred on the Pietermaritzburg district with most of the violence breaking out in the townships surrounding the small city. Matthew Kentridge, in his book, *An unofficial war: inside the conflict in Pietermaritzburg*, describes this conflict as civil war and explained that the Inkatha–UDF violence was a battle towards post-apartheid political dominance in the province. At this time, the apartheid state looked as if it was coming to an inevitable end and both sides were fighting for their future stake in the new system. Kentridge states that Pietermaritzburg, as the capital of Natal, was important to Inkatha’s overall regional dominance and Buthelezi would fight hard to keep it.⁵¹² In my analysis of the *Natal Witness*, I will describe its representation of issues around police involvement in the crisis, the role of SADF troops in the Pietermaritzburg townships, where they were sent in to contain the violence, as well as the general nature of the conflict and the organisations involved.

Because of security laws prohibiting news of unrest without official approval, the process of reporting the UDF–Inkatha conflict was very difficult for newspapers. Despite the press having evidence of police bias towards Inkatha, they were not allowed to publish it. An example of this is given by Kentridge in an interview with a member of staff at the *Natal Witness*. The reporter described that there was “a lot of evidence of police assisting Inkatha, but we can’t report it.”⁵¹³ Furthermore, the press found it difficult to find first hand accounts of the violence as they were excluded from areas of unrest. The restrictions on coverage extended to photographs – for example, pictures of buildings damaged by

⁵¹² Matthew Kentridge. *An unofficial war: inside the conflict in Pietermaritzburg*. (Cape Town: David Phillip: 1990.) pp 7-8.

⁵¹³ Ibid, p 138.

the violence could not be published without consent by the authorities. Reporters were also subject to intimidation by police who would regularly confiscate materials and cameras.

On 4 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* reported on the court case of David Ntombela. In the 1980s Ntombela was an alleged notorious warlord who was a leader in the Inkatha movement. He was widely considered responsible for much of the violence in Zululand at the time and was alleged to have attacked both UDF supporters and suspected ones. In a story by Strini Moodley⁵¹⁴, the paper reported an attempt to have a restraining order placed against him by a Mr Mandla Mkhize, who claimed that he had murdered his two relatives. “Mr Ntombela and other men had come to his home on October 9 this year and allegedly murdered his mother Mrs Angelica Mkhize and his sister Miss Petronella Mkhize. Mr Mkhize's application was supported by a number of affidavits in which witness's accounts of the killings were given.”⁵¹⁵ The article also documented claims concerning the lack of police action around Ntombela's killings. “Mr Mandla Mkhize alleged that Mr Ntombela and others had been released shortly after they were arrested.”⁵¹⁶ On the same day the *Natal Witness* reported on a gun given illegally to an Inkatha leader by a high ranking member in the South African security services: “A Slangspruit Inkatha leader had received a firearm from a member of the security branch of the SA police.”⁵¹⁷

On 5 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* reported on the defamation trial where Buthelezi was suing the newspaper *Frontline* for its assertions that Inkatha was an organisation run by thugs. Buthelezi stated that he “had no personal impis who were thuggish operators”. “My commitment to non-violence is my entire life, he said.”⁵¹⁸ The organisational nature was benign in design: “Inkatha was organised in a paramilitary way like the boy scouts but no violence was involved.”⁵¹⁹ *Frontline* countered that Inkatha was acting not only in self-defence when attacking rivals, and gave statistics from a PFP report, which stated that Inkatha members were in the minority of violence victims. “Mr Edwin Cameron, for

⁵¹⁴ Strini Moodley was a founder of the Black Consciousness Movement and a member of the South African Students Organisation. A strong anti-apartheid activist, he was imprisoned on Robben Island. He was also very much involved in social welfare such as being the director of the Durban Indian Child Welfare Association. This is relevant to what a paper such as the *Natal Witness*.

⁵¹⁵ Strini Moodley. ‘Witnesses tell of township murders’, *Natal Witness*, 4 November 1987, p 1.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Witness Reporter. ‘Police gave Inkatha man gun’, *Natal Witness*, 4 November 1987, p 2.

⁵¹⁸ Rikard Carmel. ‘Inkatha like boy scouts – Buthelezi’, *Natal Witness*, 5 November 1987, p 1.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

Frontline, read Dr Buthelezi statistics from the PFP unrest monitoring report. “Of the 89 killed in the Pietermaritzburg townships and September this year, the local KwaZulu representative has identified 18 as members of Inkatha.”⁵²⁰

The accusation as accounted in the *Natal Witness* provided evidence that Inkatha were by no means the passive victims in the conflict. On the same day, the *Natal Witness* reported on Cosatu's assertions that Inkatha was deliberately destroying political rights in the townships. “A campaign of violence is organised to destabilise the democratic processes in Pietermaritzburg’s townships.”⁵²¹ Further, “[a] legal team had been appointed to examine the recent conflict in the city and had found that a warlord phenomenon had emerged in the townships.”⁵²² The trade union, a UDF aligned actor, stated “Conservative organisations like Inkatha that had their political legitimacy challenged as a result of these campaigns and [in response] initiated the violence.”⁵²³ However, the *Natal Witness* also carried denials of intimidation and coercion in their recruitment of members by Inkatha’s secretary. “Dr Oscar Dhlomo denied that Inkatha were killing people and forcing them to join the organisation. He accused the UDF of being dishonest in its intentions”⁵²⁴

The next day the *Witness* reported that SADF troops had been deployed in the Pietermaritzburg townships allegedly to control the violence between Inkatha and UDF. The story quoted the SADF spokesperson, Commandant Ian Buck, who stated that, “...the SADF does act in support of the SAP in the maintenance of law and order.”⁵²⁵ It also quoted the mayor of Pietermaritzburg’s statements on the situation: “I am very, very sorry to hear the news, but I am not surprised. From meetings we have had with leaders of the organisations involved, it is clear that they have no control over the situation.”⁵²⁶ The paper also reported on Inkatha’s support for the initiative with its representative stating that there was no other option available to them. “Under normal circumstances Inkatha was against the army

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Strini Moodley. ‘Organised campaign to destroy democratic processes’, *Natal Witness*, 5 November 1987, p 1.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Wyndham Hartley, Wyndham and Strini Moodley. ‘Troops deployed in city townships’, *Natal Witness*, 6 November 1987, p 1.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

becoming involved in the townships. However both the organisations have failed to solve the problem and we must try harder than ever before to come together so that we can demand that the SADF moves out of the townships.”⁵²⁷ However, it also quoted Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) secretary general, Alec Erwin, as saying that the army would only heighten the tension and conflict around the townships. “More troops or police will only exacerbate the situation as the residents are suspicious because of their harrowing experiences they have had.”⁵²⁸ The *Natal Witness* also recorded UDF spokesperson, Mr A.S. Chetty’s claims that the ‘warlords’ were the main problem and they were the ones needed to be dealt with to solve the situation. “The well known perpetrators are well-known warlords linked to Inkatha. All that is required is for these men to be apprehended and that does not need mass police and army.”⁵²⁹ Thus, the *Natal Witness* carried debates around the militarization of local life, and brought discourses around the SADF closer to home as well as suspicions that the SAP was working with Inkatha to destabilize UDF opposition.

The SAP denied these latter allegations: “We deny the general statements that the police allegedly refused to act against vigilantes, that we refuse to protect residents, and that we refuse to intervene in the clashes.”⁵³⁰ They further stated that it was neutral politically and did not side with any organisation. “We have made it clear that the SAP is apolitical and impartial.”⁵³¹ On 7 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* printed further allegations that the SAP was not doing anything to stop an Inkatha ‘warlord’ named Sichizo Zuma who had committed several violent crimes against the community. It cited Mr Mkhize – an alleged victim who had complained that the police did not take an interest in prosecuting Zuma. “He said it appears to the applicants that the South African Police had neither the inclination nor the will to intervene to protect them or their community from Mr Zuma as they have on several occasions brought to the attention of the police crimes committed by him.”⁵³²

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Witness Reporter. ‘Police deny allegations of complicity with vigilantes’, *Natal Witness*, 6 November 1987, p 2.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Witness Reporter. ‘Court restrains leader of Inkatha branch’, *Natal Witness*, 7 November 1987, p 2.

On 7 November 1987, a *Natal Witness* editorial provided comment on troops moving into Pietermaritzburg townships. It favoured this solution, suggesting that the deployment of troops in the townships was unavoidable: "Violence and counter violence has become intolerable and the leaders of the black organisations have lost control over their follower. Faced with such a situation, the authorities cannot be blamed for choosing the option of sending in the troops."⁵³³ The editorial also acknowledged that the SADF would be seen as upholders of apartheid. "The reputation of the troops will suffer as a result; they will be seen as the upholders of the system that is to blame for the whole sorry mess."⁵³⁴ Therefore, despite acknowledging the possible repercussions, the editorial did recognize the move as unavoidable, thus suggesting a possibly different line on the SADF as opposed to the SAP.

On 12 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* published a letter by an anonymous author, which petitioned for more information on the crisis in Pietermaritzburg. The letter spoke of the rising number of deaths in the conflict. "Since the beginning of the year more than 150 people have been killed in the Pietermaritzburg region in acts of political violence, more than 50 of them in October alone. Hundreds more have been injured and thousands driven from their homes."⁵³⁵ The letter also emphasized the suffering of the people there and effects on the economy. "In many areas organised life is breaking down, the education system is collapsing, and residents are living in a state of permanent fear. Pietermaritzburg's economy is also beginning to suffer."⁵³⁶ The writer criticized the police for refusing to detail information, which kept the Pietermaritzburg population ignorant of the violence around them. Again, as in the case of conflict across the border, the issue of secrecy was raised, this time in relation to military actions in the province. "The police are giving out a minimum of information: the emergency regulations thus act to foster ignorance, rumour-mongering and complacency in an already isolated white community."⁵³⁷ Significantly, he blamed the press for their lack of analytical information, only reporting at face value. "The press, though prevented by the emergency regulations from publishing details of the violence, is free to investigate and comment on the background. It has done little of

⁵³³ 'Troops', *Natal Witness*, 7 November 1987, p 4.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ 'Need for more news', *Natal Witness*, 12 November 1987, p 6.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

this.”⁵³⁸ The letter implored both the government and press to allow for a more rounded picture of what was actually happening and the reasons for it happening in the Pietermaritzburg townships.

The Pietermaritzburg Democratic Association called on the government to lift the regulations which prevent the people of South Africa from knowing what is happening in their own communities. It calls on the press, especially in Natal, to inform the public of the real causes of the violence which is destroying community life in the Pietermaritzburg region.⁵³⁹

The letter finally laid blame on the apartheid system as the main instigator of the violence in South Africa and called on white organisations to be more vocal against the government’s apartheid policies. “It calls on the white community through its organisations and public representatives to put pressure on the Government to begin to dismantle the structures of apartheid which are the real causes of political violence in South Africa.”⁵⁴⁰

The next day the *Natal Witness* published Inkatha's claim that the UDF had not responded to a proposal of peace talks by the organisation. “Inkatha has challenged the United Democratic Front to explain why the organisation has not responded to a proposal for participation in a joint monitoring committee at checking violence.”⁵⁴¹ The paper also published the petitions for clarification on the UDF policies regarding violence and democracy. “The UDF must make its position clear. Does it believe in democracy and does it believe in non violence and if it does, is it prepared to meet with the leadership of Inkatha to end violence.”⁵⁴²

On 17 November 1987, an editorial criticized police arrests during the peace talks, saying that this was hindering the process. It also suggested that this discredited claims by Buthelezi that his organisation was a main target of the police. “It needs to be said that the authorities’ action in detaining members of the UDF currently involved in peace negotiations in Pietermaritzburg serves to undermine Buthelezi’s position and lend weight to Cosatu minister’s claim that it is being victimised.”⁵⁴³ What this statement in the editorial suggests is the casting of suspicion that police were helping Buthelezi. The editorial also

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Witness Reporter. ‘Inkatha calls for answer to talk’s initiative’, *Natal Witness*, 13 November 1987, p 5.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ ‘Unhelpful’, *Natal Witness*, 17 November 1987, p 8.

pointed out that the peace meetings would be severely disrupted because of the SAP actions. “Peace in the townships will be difficult enough to achieve as it is. It will never be achieved if one side is to be summarily deprived of its leadership. Both Inkatha and the UDF agreed that their talks will only succeed if leaders are given a mandate by their followers and are able to report back on them.”⁵⁴⁴ The author further stated that the police role “...should be to crack down hard on the actual perpetrators of violence, and leave the politicians alone to try and resolve their differences.”⁵⁴⁵ Continued allegations of police bias and disruption of peace talks continued the next day. Thus despite being prohibited from reporting directly that the SAPS were in league with Inkatha, the *Natal Witness* nevertheless was able to find ways around this. This not only gives an illustration of its opposition towards the South African authorities but on a deeper level, how its exposure of SAPS activities and government wrongdoings played a key part of this paper’s identity, that of being a watchdog in society as well as a shield against a totalitarian authority.

An article documented that “[a]nother 18 United Democratic Front and Cosatu members were detained yesterday – only two days before the start of crucial peace talks aimed at ending the violence in the city’s townships.”⁵⁴⁶ The article also gave an overall estimate of the number of arrests for that week. “A total of 38 UDF and Cosatu members have been held since Friday including two key people in the talks: UDF Natal Midlands joint Secretary Mr Martin Wittenberg and Mr Skumbuzo Ngwenya.”⁵⁴⁷ The report further emphasized the timing of the procedure and suggested that the disruption of peace talks had been deliberate, and that police were working against the UDF. “The police raid took place while the Chamber of Commerce, Cosatu, and the UDF were discussing the first of the peace talks which were to be held tomorrow.”⁵⁴⁸

Two days later, the *Natal Witness* published the SAP response to press criticism. The press secretary for Minister of Law and Order, Leon Mellet denied that the arrests were to disrupt peace talks and denied political bias. “If people are being arrested, it is in connection with crimes that have been committed

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Lesley Van Duffelen. ‘Another 18 held on eve of peace talks’, *Natal Witness*, 18 November 1987, p 1.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

and not because of their membership of any political organisation.”⁵⁴⁹ The *Natal Witness* also quoted National Party MP in Pietermaritzburg, Brian Edwards, who stated “[t]o my knowledge the police are doing their utmost to defuse the situation.”⁵⁵⁰ However, on the same day, in an article titled “Detention - hit UDF quits peace talks”, the *Natal Witness* gave a report detailing how police arrests had made the UDF temporarily pull out of the peace negotiations because of a loss of important members. The article quoted Mr A.S. Chetty, chair of the UDF Midlands committee, who claimed that it was impossible to go on with the peace talks because of the arrests. “How can we sit at a negotiating table when those involved in the process are being detained?”⁵⁵¹ It also cited Inkatha spokesperson, Mr V Ndlovu’s criticism of the arrests. “I don’t see the point of these detentions; the problem won’t be solved by detaining these people.”⁵⁵² The *Natal Witness* also published the PFP’s condemnation of the arrests. “The situation in Edendale demanded the direct involvement of the leaders of Inkatha and the UDF to bring about peace. Detaining the leadership of the UDF sets back the talks and disrupted, rather than contributed, to law and order.”⁵⁵³ The PFP declared, “[p]eople who have been involved in criminal acts must be brought to trial. But leaders who are involved in sensitive negotiations must be set free to help bring about a sense of normality to the lives of the people in the townships.”⁵⁵⁴

Also on 20 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* called arrests by police a ‘strange logic’. The editorial marked the suffering of the people around Pietermaritzburg and warned of potential trouble to come into the city. “For how much longer can ordinary men, women and, more disturbingly, children be expected to live out their daily lives in a state of permanent fear? How much longer before the city becomes flooded with refugees? And how much more remote becomes the prospect of ultimate peace amongst our damaged and brutalised young?”⁵⁵⁵ The editorial also criticized the role of police, questioning “[b]y what strange logic can they carry out on the one hand their peaceful missions, yet with the other systematically remove from the scene leaders attempting to bring together the warring factions?”⁵⁵⁶ It

⁵⁴⁹ Witness Reporter. ‘Arrests crime related – police’, *Natal Witness*, 19 November 1987, p 1.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Witness Reporter. ‘Detention – hit UDF quits peace talks’, *Natal Witness*, 19 November 1987, p 1.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ ‘Strange logic’, *Natal Witness*, 20 November 1987, p 16.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

also questioned the criminalization of leaders by the security forces. “To label them wholesale as criminals as Brigadier Mellet has done is further to strain our already stretched credibility.”⁵⁵⁷ The author finally added that these arrests would lead to repercussions both in the short and long term. “We shall maintain our belief that detaining leaders and those ready to negotiate a truce is short-sighted folly, guaranteeing to exasperate an already intolerable situation.”⁵⁵⁸ Thus, strong criticism of the SAP is shown in this period.

On the same day Richard Steyn, editor of the *Natal Witness* at the time, gave a detailed analysis of the civil war in Natal in response to a letter sent the week earlier. In his column, he defined it in crudely Cold War terms as a conflict between communism and capitalism. “At the local level it is a dispute over strategies to replace apartheid. At a higher level, it is the clash of world views – over not only the make-up of the future South African society, but whether that society should be capitalist or socialist.”⁵⁵⁹ He also outlined the two different strategies adopted by these organisations which he stated provoked a clash of interests.

Because it has no resource base to offer rewards to its supporters the organisation (UDF) has to build support by articulating grievances, and by mobilising grassroots oppositions in the townships to anything it regards as supportive of government, apartheid or anti-worker (i.e. capitalist interests). Here it runs headlong into Inkatha whose considered strategy is to work within state run institutions to achieve social and political reform.⁵⁶⁰

Steyn defended Inkatha, explaining that it was perceived as being a government lackey because of its middle path strategy, which predisposed it not to support popular resistance activities. “Precluded by its position in the middle from supporting populist resistance to government policies, Inkatha has become an open target for those who depict it as a handmaiden of apartheid.”⁵⁶¹ Steyn denied that it was clear who was responsible for starting the violence.

“As to who initiated the violence, the argument is that of the chicken and the egg. Cosatu claims that the trouble began in 1985 when progressive organisations began to challenge Inkatha's political legitimacy and Inkatha responded with violence. Inkatha retorts that it is committed in principle to non-violence and only reacts in its own defence.”⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Richard Steyn. ‘Behind the township violence’, *Natal Witness*, 20 November 1987, p 16.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

Thus, Steyn himself tried to create a centrist approach, with social breakdown explaining the criminalization of youth: “An as yet unexamined aspect of the conflict is the activity of young township thugs, the lost generation deprived of education, jobs or money who bitterly resent others going about their daily lives in relative peace and prosperity.”⁵⁶³

On 23 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* reported that peace talks were still on despite setbacks. “Tomorrow’s peace talks are still on despite the fact that a number of political and trade union leaders in the city have gone into hiding following the detentions of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and Cosatu leaders.”⁵⁶⁴ The article also gave details of the statistics in the detentions. “Almost 300 people have been detained since the beginning of November, forcing several mid-level leaders of UDF and Cosatu into hiding.”⁵⁶⁵ A day later the *Natal Witness* reported on the continued violence giving details of the gruesomeness of the assault on a man: “A man was stabbed to death and decapitated by a group in Inandi. Another male victim, also stabbed and decapitated, was found in Ashtown.”⁵⁶⁶

On 24 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* again published a letter, which condemned police involvement in sabotaging of peace process, as well as an assertion that the police were being distracted by crimes that are more trivial. “Not only have they carried out a superbly timed swoop on leading UDF peace negotiators at precisely the moment when there was apparently a danger of negotiations getting somewhere, but they have also managed to arrest some 289 people for crimes like loitering and gambling.”⁵⁶⁷ The letter was bitter in its criticism: “Loitering, standing around doing nothing is one of the major social evils facing South African society today. Why take on the warlords and arrest the known hitmen when it is so much easier to arrest students for standing around and chatting on the pavement?”⁵⁶⁸ Another letter that day was from Sarah Nuttall, who wrote of ‘doubts’ about the motives of police arresting UDF leaders. The letter speculated the possibility that the police were deliberately sabotaging the peace process to suit their own ends. “Are we to assume by the actions of the security

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Witness Reporter. ‘Peace talks still on course – UDF’, *Natal Witness*, 23 November 1987, p 1.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Yvonne Grimbeek. ‘Two beheaded as violence continues’, *Natal Witness*, 24 November 1987, p 1.

⁵⁶⁷ Maugham Brown. ‘Into action’, *Natal Witness*, 24 November 1987, p 4.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

police, which we regard as inappropriate and unjust, that the latter do not want peace talks to proceed? Does what they have termed black on black violence suit their own ends in what continues to be a repressive society?"⁵⁶⁹ It further argued that the detentions were not justified as learnt by experience. "Finally, I wish to take this opportunity to address those readers who think they have done something wrong, as it were, in order to be detained. To us who live and work with the students who have been detained in the past and are in detention at present, it is clear that the contrary is true."⁵⁷⁰

On 26 November 1987, the *Natal Witness* reported on charges faced by Inkatha members for violence. "Two of three Inkatha leaders who were interdicted earlier this month from assaulting, killing or intimidating various residents from the surrounding townships are already facing criminal charges."⁵⁷¹ The *Natal Witness* also speculated on the possibility that police were failing to charge Inkatha warlords, reporting and discussing Cosatu's allegations of them doing so. "This action follows allegations from the UDF and Cosatu that police have failed to take action against Inkatha warlords in the townships. However, details of the charges against Mr David Ntombela and Mr. Sichizo Zuma are not known and charges have been laid against a third leader Chief Zuma."⁵⁷² Two days later the *Natal Witness* commented on meetings between Inkatha and the UDF. "Statements made by UDF and Inkatha condemning the violence and especially such practices as forced recruitment are encouraging indeed."⁵⁷³ Nonetheless, the editorial was cautious. "However it is going to be extremely difficult to unravel the web of vengeance and anarchy in which our townships are ensnared."⁵⁷⁴ Thus, the editorial speculated that there was going to be a lack of control in the townships.

On 1 December 1987, the *Natal Witness* reported on a speech by Mr. Ngwenya, joint secretary of the UDF Midland's branch, at Edendale in which he encouraged more harmony with Inkatha members. "He said ordinary members of Inkatha were not the enemy of the black community and emphasised that unity was the main weapon for establishing peace and democracy."⁵⁷⁵ He also identified apartheid as

⁵⁶⁹ Sarah Nuttall. 'Doubts', *Natal Witness*, 24 November 1987, p 4.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Witness Reporter. 'Inkatha warlords face charges', *Natal Witness*, 26 November 1987, p 1.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ 'On the ground', *Natal Witness*, 26 November 1987, p 8.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Prakash Naidoo. 'Ease way for Inkatha to join us – UDF', *Natal Witness*, 1 December 1987, p 1.

the real foe. Ngwenya “named apartheid as the main enemy of peace and said it had to be removed.”⁵⁷⁶ On the same day, the *Natal Witness* covered Buthelezi’s views: “The UDF and Cosatu are not worthy of the status of organisations to whom Inkatha needed to be reconciled.”⁵⁷⁷ The article recorded his blame of the UDF for fomenting violence during peace talks: “It is their choice that death keeps us apart. There is no reconciliation with a spear being in your throat or with a match setting alight the necklace.”⁵⁷⁸ Violence, he said, was the policy of the ANC. “The violence in the city’s townships epitomised the real intentions of the ANC, the chief said. His people were dying hideous deaths because they wanted to make townships a no-go area for Inkatha.”⁵⁷⁹

On the same day, an editorial in the *Natal Witness* speculated over the modifying nature of the Inkatha–UDF conflict. This editorial addressed the despondency of Pietermaritzburg’s mayor regarding the violence, but stated that it was no longer a simple matter: “The mayor is probably correct when he states that the continuing violence is no longer a straight fight between Inkatha and the UDF. All around the city traditional structures of control appear to have broken down as rival factions, not necessarily associated with either organisation claim territory for their own.”⁵⁸⁰ However, the editorial emphasized the need for talks to continue. “Under the circumstances it is easy to despair. But the latest killings emphasise only that more, not less, talking is required. At this point, it matters not who started the slaughter. What is clear however is that neither the emergency regulations nor the security forces are able to restore peace?”⁵⁸¹

On 4 December 1987, an article by Yvonne Grimbeek⁵⁸² recorded that two prominent businesspersons, Paul van Utricht and Rob Pater, were involved in peace talks - both motivated by their concern that violence affected the local economy. “Most strategic planners now no longer talk about the aim of

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Witness Reporter. ‘UDF, Cosatu not worthy of Reconciliation Buthelezi’, *Natal Witness*, 1 December 1987, p 1.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ ‘Prove it’, *Natal Witness*, 4 December 1987, p 10.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Yvonne Grimbeek worked as a full-time journalist in the *Natal Witness*. At the time, he was president of the South African Union of Journalists, an organisation founded to promote editorial freedom and fight apartheid in the country.

business being of maximization of profit but rather talk in terms of maintaining the flow of resources. We believe quite simply that the persons most affected by the violence are our workers and our customers.”⁵⁸³ They speculated on a possible solution to the violence. “Both the men agree that the solution lies with the community and that any involvement on a national level – either from this government or any other organisation is not desirable.”⁵⁸⁴ This article depicted a possible anxiety over the threat to businesses, which would have affected the social class of *Natal Witness* readership.

From June 1988 to September 1988, the war between Inkatha and UDF revived after a period of relative calm. On 27 July 1988, the *Natal Witness* reported on violence around the Pietermaritzburg townships, which had led to more deaths. The article reported on an Inkatha meeting that deteriorated into violence. “A meeting on Sunday in Gezobuso called by Chief Shayabantu Zondi, a senior member of Inkatha, in an attempt to resolve differences and end the fierce fighting in the area, resulted in attacks on homes after the crowd had dispersed.”⁵⁸⁵ Two days later the *Natal Witness* gave an analysis on political violence in Natal and its record statistical high so far that year: “Political violence has flared again in Natal and five more deaths reported yesterday has made July the bloodiest this year.”⁵⁸⁶ The commentary also detailed the incidents from Hammarsdale and Sweetwaters: “In the latest incidents, a group stabbed a man to death in Sweetwaters and another sustained serious stab wounds when he was attacked. Two were killed and another injured in separate incidents at Henley Dam after groups attacked with pangas.”⁵⁸⁷ The editorial speculated that the conflict was caused by a recent forced migration of people into the townships. “Tensions which have wracked Natal townships have been exacerbated in the area by the influx of 600 people who were moved to make way for the Inanda dam.”⁵⁸⁸

That same day, King Goodwill Zwelethini (traditional monarch of KwaZulu) was reported as having “called on his subjects in the unrest torn area around the city to resolve their differences and to show

⁵⁸³ Yvonne Grimbeek. ‘Fears that violence would hit economy’, *Natal Witness*, 4 December 1987, p 6.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁶ ‘Violence’, *Natal Witness*, 29 July 1988, p 4.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

respect for one another.”⁵⁸⁹ On 3 August 1988, the *Natal Witness* began its report on the court case between the family who lived in Sweetwaters and Mr Ncgobo, an Inkatha supporter, who was alleged to have killed or participated in the murder of two family members. The narrative pointed out that it was the second death in the family since the application for restraining orders against an Inkatha member. “Mr Ernest, the second son to have been killed since his family applied for the interdict.”⁵⁹⁰ The article detailed the testimony of Mr Mthembhu that his father’s dying words proved an Inkatha member, Ncgobo, had done it: “The court heard that in his dying moments Mr Ernest had identified his killer as one of the respondents, Mr Ncgobo.”⁵⁹¹ The next day the *Natal Witness* continued its coverage on the trial, this time reporting the alleged assaults by police on the family. The journalist reported Mr’s testimony that the police, with an Inkatha member, were guilty of assaulting his family. “They were then sjambokked and assaulted in other ways and then arrested in connection with an incident 17 weeks earlier, in which one of his sons, Simon, had been shot and injured by an Inkatha man”.⁵⁹² On 6 August 1988, the story of continued. Inkatha insisted that the court action was a ploy to discredit them. “A submission from the family applying for protection from three Inkatha men was an attempt by the ANC and UDF to bring Inkatha into disrepute was dismissed in the Supreme Court.”. The article quoted Mr Justice Alexander explaining why the claim was not viable and that “he had problems with the submission as it could not prove that the complaints were without substance.”⁵⁹³

On 9 August 1988, the *Natal Witness* reported on a peace initiative between Inkatha and UDF members in the Western Cape. “The initiative had not been widely publicised as the idea was to keep the talks as low key as possible.”⁵⁹⁴ The story also quoted Imbali town councillor Ben Jele: “We are not trying to keep anything secret, and we don’t want any premature statements or publicity to damage the chances of success.”⁵⁹⁵ The family court case was also in the news that day. The *Natal Witness* journalist reported allegations that lawyers had been intimidated: “Supporters of three Inkatha men at the centre of an

⁵⁸⁹ ‘Stop fighting King pleads’, *Natal Witness*, 29 July 1988, p 1.

⁵⁹⁰ Witness Reporter. ‘Court shown where Imbali man gunned down’, *Natal Witness*, 3 August 1988, p 5.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Witness Reporter. ‘Mthembhu family shamboked by police at service’, *Natal Witness*, 3 August 1988, p 5.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Witness Reporter. ‘New peace initiative for city’s townships’, *Natal Witness*, 9 August 1988, p 1.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

interdict in the city have allegedly threatened and intimidated lawyers acting for the applicants.”⁵⁹⁶ The reporter also documented, Mr Mkhize’s lawyer’s [lawyer not named] statements that a number of “Inkatha supporters were coming to court with weapons.”⁵⁹⁷ Further, “he had received reports of subtle and unsubtle threats being made to the family attending the hearing.”⁵⁹⁸ The article also aired an Inkatha counter-claim that “[t]wo women were told by UDF people that they would be killed if they came and testified against the applicants.”⁵⁹⁹

One the same day, the *Natal Witness* devoted two more articles to the trial, the first being Mr ’’s explanation of his feud with Inkatha members. The article concerned reported his statements that the only reason Inkatha attacked him and his family was because of his refusal to join Inkatha: “All I can say regarding Inkatha is that (Abdul) Awethu (an Imbali town councillor) was pleading with me for a long time to join Inkatha, but I did not because I have seen the fruits of what Inkatha is doing.”⁶⁰⁰ It also explained his reasons for not reporting the incidents to the police: “I had adopted that attitude because when I reported other matters to the police, they had regarded them as trivial. I rather told my attorneys. So often I reported to the police, but nothing happened.”⁶⁰¹ The second article detailed Mr Ncgobo’s court appearance for his alleged murders of two of the Mthembhu family. “An Inkatha member who was temporarily restrained by the Supreme High Court from killing members of an Imbali family appeared in court yesterday in connection with the death of one of the family members.”⁶⁰² The next day the *Natal Witness* provided comment on these events in an editorial. It asserted that courts had a responsibility to quell these actions. “The courts should therefore not hesitate to use their contempt powers to mete out severe punishment to intimidators, and the police must also play their part in protecting citizens from violence irrespective of the source.”⁶⁰³ This editorial thus admonished the police for failing to adopt a neutral role, in light of the suspicion that police were siding with Inkatha.

⁵⁹⁶ Witness Reporter. ‘Mthembhu family lawyers threatened’, *Natal Witness*, 9 August 1988, p 3.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Witness Reporter. ‘We never provoked Inkatha – Mthembhu’, *Natal Witness*, 9 August 1988, p 3.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Witness Reporter. ‘Inkatha man in court’, *Natal Witness*, 9 August 1988, p 6.

⁶⁰³ ‘Intimidation’, *Natal Witness*, 10 August 1988, p 8.

On 11 August 1988, the *Natal Witness* continued its documentation of this trial. The article publicised Mr's revelation that they had thrown stones at Ncgobo: "Under rigorous cross examination about the incident yesterday, Mr Mthembhu said they threw stones at Mr Ncgobo after he started shooting, and while they were retreating from his car."⁶⁰⁴ It also reported from Ncgobo's lawyer. "The crowd Mr Mthembhu was with blocked the road and stoned Mr Ncgobo. He also said a shot was fired at Mr Ncgobo. He pointed out that no mention had been made of stones being thrown in either Mr Mthembhu's or his brother's affidavits."⁶⁰⁵ Justice Alexander "said he found it difficult to understand how it was possible to flee from Mr Ncgobo, while at the same time attacking him with stones."⁶⁰⁶ It is clear that the *Natal Witness's* commitment to airing various views on events was also determined by a severe lack of clarity on what was happening. A 'white paper' reporting on violence in racially segregated spaces perhaps explains why editorial voices were less clear on the morality of various 'sides' in comparison to its much less neutral reporting on the ECC.

For example, a column by Robin Hallett, appearing on 12 August, speculated on the confusion behind the rebound of violence between Inkatha and the UDF in Pietermaritzburg.

"The reasons for this escalation are not clear. Sources in the trade union movement maintain that there was never any peace that people have not stopped killing, and that large security has merely kept the lid on the pressure cooker and that now after simmering fiercely for a few months is starting to boil again."⁶⁰⁷

This also highlighted scepticism about the effectiveness of the security forces' ability to quell the violence. Hallett emphasized that the state of anarchy had continued: "It is also evident that respect for the law has not been re-established."⁶⁰⁸ Hallett also quoted Brigadier Prinsloo on the changed nature of the conflict. "Now there are smaller groups focusing on specific people, homes and families as targets. This makes the violence more difficult to prevent."⁶⁰⁹ Prinsloo claimed "...the troublemakers and provocateurs have filtered back into the greater Pietermaritzburg area."⁶¹⁰ However, Hallett drew on sources, which "...attribute[d] the upsurge to yet another forced recruitment drive by Inkatha. They say

⁶⁰⁴ Witness Reporter. 'We threw stones at Ncgobo – Mthembhu', *Natal Witness*, 11 August 1988, p 4.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Robin Hallett. 'The resurgence of violence', *Natal Witness*, 12 August 1988, p 5.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

similar tactics in September 1987 caused the huge increase in violence then and is doing so again.”⁶¹¹ This indicated a prominent journalistic viewpoint that Inkatha was predominantly to blame for the violence. The issue of police favouritism towards Inkatha was highlighted in the column’s claims that the police were deliberately confiscating weapons of the UDF. “The claim that the police have taken their weapons – such as they were and now Inkatha has free reign in the conflict and is intensifying their conflict.”⁶¹² Hallett also emphasized the police were predominantly Inkatha supporters: “Among the special constables (kitskonstabels) were a large number of Inkatha members and supporters. One was interdicted by the Supreme Court against perpetrating acts of violence.”⁶¹³ This criticizes the police role in the conflict and this is further emphasized by its critique of the arrests, which Hallett claimed damaged the peace process. This led to a breakdown in the peace talks organized by the chamber of commerce.

On 13 August 1988, the Mthembhu trial was again in the pages of the *Natal Witness*; this time it was reporting a police officer’s eyewitness account of murder. “Inkatha Youth Brigade leader Mr Sichizo Zuma shot and fatally injured a son of the Mthembhu family from close range and then told his colleagues not to stone the man, so he could shoot the dog himself.”⁶¹⁴ The reporter also quoted Mr Zuma’s lawyer who said he “was ambushed and attacked by members of the Mthembhu family.”⁶¹⁵ It went on to describe the provocation by Mr Mthembhu: “When he went outside he observed Mr Simon Mthembhu armed with a bush knife and a stick. Mr Mthembhu had struck the back window of the vehicle and then went to the driver’s side.”⁶¹⁶ On 18 August, the *Natal Witness* continued reporting on ‘both sides’ of the violence. The first report was on the Inkatha school, burnt down allegedly by UDF supporters. “Inkatha officials said yesterday that the school had been burned down and those classes were continuing in one of the remaining classrooms.”⁶¹⁷ The *Natal Witness* also reported an attack on

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

⁶¹² Ibid.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Witness Reporter. ‘I saw Zuma shoot – officer’, *Natal Witness*, 13 August 1988, p 3.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Witness Reporter. ‘Inandi School burned down’, *Natal Witness*, 18 August 1988, p 3.

an Inkatha youth, and quoted from an Inkatha spokesperson that he “[w]as attacked by a boy who is not a scholar. He (the assailant) stabbed Cele after accusing him of being a *thelewini* (Inkatha vigilante).”⁶¹⁸

On the same day, the *Natal Witness* reported on building tensions within the greater Pietermaritzburg areas. “Bloodshed will prevail in Sweetwaters if people killed in clashes with supporters of the local Inkatha are brought into the area for burial.”⁶¹⁹ On 20 November 1988, this story continued with a request by a family in Sweetwaters for police to provide protection during a funeral. “The Masango family request for protection follows the circulation of leaflets warning Sweetwaters residents not to bring into the area bodies of those killed in clashes with local Inkatha supporters.”⁶²⁰ The report covered the Induna’s denials of his warnings to the Masango family. “Mthalane said that it was incorrectly reported yesterday that he had warned the Masango family not to hold a funeral in Sweetwaters. He said when members approached him to report the death of Mr Masango; he had told them he was not their Induna.”⁶²¹

The next day, a column by Martin Williams commented on the inept handling of the violence by South African authorities. Williams cited a monitoring group who predicted rightly that violence would occur. “A spokesman for a Durban monitoring group says, ‘If something is not done immediately I fear the death toll could rise every day.’ Since then, there have been several ugly incidents, including one, which left ten dead. Another spokesman told *New Nation* that chiefs in the Molweni area are trying to drive out newcomers, who are refugees from other violence in Natal.”⁶²² Williams maintained that “[i]f monitoring groups can predict violence, authorities should be able to act in time to prevent violence”⁶²³ On 24 August 1988, an article stated that “...at least 1000 people have been killed in the greater Edendale since the start of unrest last year.”⁶²⁴ From a hearing in the magistrate’s court, the *Natal Witness* cited H.R Upton, a captain of the SAP, that “...the number of unrest related murders rose during

⁶¹⁸ Witness Reporter. ‘Inkatha youth assaulted’, *Natal Witness*, 18 August 1988, p 3.

⁶¹⁹ ‘Burials will lead to bloodshed – leaflet’, *Natal Witness*, 18 August 1988, p 3.

⁶²⁰ Witness Reporter. ‘Police asked to protect mourners’, *Natal Witness*, 20 August 1988, p 3.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² Martin Williams. ‘The violence in Natal’, *Natal Witness*, 21 August 1988, p 4.

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ Witness Reporter. ‘1000 have died in Edendale unrest – evidence’, *Natal Witness*, 24 August 1988, p 1.

the past two months. The number of murders during July and August is 52.”⁶²⁵ This indicated the amount of attention the conflict was getting in the *Natal Witness*.

On 2 September 1988, the *Natal Witness* published more statistics of violence-related deaths. “Eleven deaths were reported following incidents of political violence in and around the city at the weekend”⁶²⁶ This added to the overall death toll “...for July, with at least 20 deaths occurring in the townships around Pietermaritzburg and the other nine in Mpumalanga and Hammarisdale.”⁶²⁷ The article cited Dr Peter Kirchhoff a member of PACSA⁶²⁸ on the state of the unrest: “There has been a definite increase in the unrest, and this has been borne out by the growing number of refugees.”

Conclusion

In 1987, the *Natal Witness* attempted to steer a mid-path in its coverage of conflicts between Inkatha and the UDF in Natal. It printed editorials and columns that criticized the SAP for arrests of prominent UDF members thus stalling peace talks. It also printed articles suggesting police were deliberately siding with Inkatha. In addition, the *Natal Witness* included criticism of secrecy over the conflict by authorities. The further issue was the view of moderate black opposition, which the paper indicated was a breakaway from the Inkatha movement that had been seen as advocating for a peaceful solution in South Africa before then. By July 1988, the violence in Pietermaritzburg had spread to other areas and the newspaper continued to criticize the authorities for the lack of action as well continued suspicions around the police role in the violence.

As indicated by the relatively large number of editorials and articles on this issue, it can be surmised that the *Natal Witness* acted in its role of enlightening its community of the violence in areas literally in the neighbourhood. The white community in South Africa as well as in Natal has often being seen as

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ ‘Weekend of violence leaves 11 people dead’, *Natal Witness*, 5 September 1988, p 1.

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ *Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA)* was a non-governmental organisation formed to research and exposes the consequences of apartheid policies such as the forced removals for example, on ordinary people in South Africa.

insulated from events that were happening very close to them. The *Natal Witness* acted to expose the violence to its readership. Another part of its discourse in this period criticises the police violence. However, one of the most significant trends was its breaking with vocal support for Inkatha, in contrast to the previous year when the *Natal Witness* was more supportive of moderate black resistance such as Inkatha. This is significant especially concerning the PFP's relationship with Inkatha since 1985. The alliance had been formed because Inkatha adopted pro-market policies as well as its purported ideology of resistance to apartheid by constructive engagement. In the same period the Natal Indaba was launched, which involved a planned alliance between big business and Inkatha with a view of creating a federal state in South Africa. The coverage in the *Witness* serves as an indication that some elements of liberalism were moving away from moderate black politics and gravitating more to the UDF.

What stands out in coverage of local violence is not the lack of ability to verify information and the strategy; but rather the ability to report allegations and accusations on each 'side'. In contrast, the coverage of the ECC suggests that the *Natal Witness* presented an almost activist position on conscription and the misinformation about activities on the border. Both situations point to historical conditions in which secrecy and misinformation prevailed. The press worked within a sense of professional boundaries of balanced, objective reporting. Editorials and letters speculated more openly about circumstances. Yet, overall, the manner of reporting on events, allegations and accusations as they unfolded modelled a kind of middle-path or neutral position. It demonstrates too the gap between the world of white conscripts, where calls for meetings to discuss viable options for family members could be explored, and the alienation from black suffering in the violence, where meetings to negotiate conflict remained more distant. However, interests of the *Natal Witness's* readers as a social class would have played a role in the discourse.

Conclusion

In his book, *White Power and the Liberal Conscience*, Paul Rich has argued that South African liberalism was very adaptable to changes in the political environment and has concluded that “...the overall assessment of South African liberalism must not be guided by, as many liberal historians have imagined, the simple ability to keep certain political values, but by the way particular situations are confronted.”⁶²⁹ The overall theme of my work bears out this observation. My focus has been on the textual production of South African liberalism by the English language press in the period of militarization from 1976 to 1988 through a case study of the *Natal Witness*. Through a narrative documenting the content of newspapers during key clusters of events, the thesis describes how a variety of formats and sources in this newspaper aired information, debates and themes around issues of violence nationally, trans-nationally and within the region that was local to the press. In my view, my description of four key periods of social militarisation in South Africa supports the idea that opposition was fluid and constrained, but still important as a medium for public debate and the airing of crucial information.

From June to July in 1976 the *Natal Witness* gave scathing appraisals of the South African government apportioning to it the majority of blame for the Soweto uprisings. It largely dismissed the government line that agitators had caused the uprisings and instead perceived government actions as the real cause of violence. It also revealed insight into the living conditions of black people during that time. This combined with coverage of progressive individuals, such as Nadine Gordimer and Bayers Naudé, does indicate a strong oppositional discourse in this period.

In 1978, the *Natal Witness* discourse on militarisation was sceptical but largely *supportive* of the South African raid into Angola. In 1981, this discourse changed with its increased doubt over the constructiveness of SADF incursions into Angola. This was combined with much more exposure of the South African border wars in its opinion columns. In 1987, this had turned to general hostility and the

⁶²⁹ Paul Rich. *White Power and the liberal conscience: racial segregation and South African liberalism*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984) p 123.

viability of the South African role in Angola was questioned. As time progressed, hostility increased. Another issue to study pertaining to the South African border wars and militarization is the response of this liberal paper to the ideology of 'total onslaught', which began in 1979 with the presidency of P.W. Botha. In 1981, the *Natal Witness* partially embraced this ideology of the South African government but also argued that apartheid was encouraging potential communist revolution in South Africa. In 1987, columns in the *Natal Witness* spurned 'total onslaught'. The strong hostility towards SADF incursions into Angola and its occupation of Namibia, suggests that although the *Natal Witness* was ambivalent about liberation movements, it was nonetheless a strong opposition towards the NP. These conclusions support the findings of Helen Suzman, David Welsh, Gerald Shaw and other defenders of the liberal English language press. Related to the war in Angola and South West Africa, were the arguments in the *Natal Witness* that apartheid was exacerbating the threat of communism and Soviet expansion in South Africa, particularly in 1978 and 1981. In 1987, this progressed to arguments that the South African involvement in Angola and Namibia was an *explanation* for Soviet presence in southern Africa. This was essentially an example of liberalism's responses to violence and conflict in the southern African region.

Related to the theme of flexible responses to political violence are the *Natal Witness* discourses on black opposition and the idea of power sharing. This issue is illustrated in 1976 where the paper mainly recorded the viewpoints of perceived moderate blacks and negatively portrayed those who used violence against the system of white domination. In 1978 and 1981, the paper displayed ambivalent support for a SWAPO-led government. In 1987, there was stronger support for black opposition in southern Africa, but of a particular - moderate - type. This was helped by SWAPO's acceptance of Western based solution which would have ensured a free market system and was in keeping with Western interests. What clouded the *Natal Witness*'s line towards SWAPO was its discourse on SWAPO's military actions, which it most often portrayed as 'terrorism'. However, support for a moderate SWAPO government was an indication that the *Natal Witness* saw the need for negotiation between moderates in the southern Africa struggle. As Paul Rich states in his book , *Hope and Despair*, "[i]t became clear

that a far more direct engagement had to take place between intellectuals in South Africa and the popular political movements.”⁶³⁰

All these issues give insight into the potential discourse on a future ANC led government that also followed a predominately Western-backed system, which involved adopting a free market system, turning away from socialist ideologies and halting its military struggle. The discourse on the SWAPO led government thus gives insight into the position of liberalism in relation to apartheid and the liberation movements in South Africa. Adding to this knowledge was my research into the debate over the nature and role of the ANC in the *Natal Witness* pages of May to June 1978. The argument was over the ANC use of force and its linkage to communist activity. However, this was grounded in the view that both violence and communism were morally wrong.

The discourse by the *Natal Witness* on black opposition gives impetus to Ruth Tomaselli’s view on the English press in South Africa, which she viewed as ambivalent towards the apartheid system and reform and as only favouring that which would suit their own social class. Despite this, the paper nonetheless presented an ideology radically different to the South African government discourse. This correlates with Elaine Potter’s view that the English language press did offer an independent voice to South African politics.

Building on what is seen in the development of the *Natal Witness* discourse on black opposition and the views of Paul Rich, the 1987 Natal Indaba was an extremely important event. The Indaba was a proposal by prominent businesspersons and Inkatha to adopt a power sharing agreement in Natal. There was a hope among its participants that apartheid in Natal would end. This was a liberal response to the situation of escalating violence in South Africa, in which liberals foresaw the need for power sharing. Rich commented on liberals’ views on violence by giving the example of the multi-racial South African Liberal Party’s formation in 1953, as a reaction to growing racial conflict. “The move indicated a more general state of political despair to which liberals had been driven in the mid 1950s, as the portent of

⁶³⁰ Paul Rich *Hope and despair: English-speaking intellectuals and South African politics, 1896-1976*. London: Academic Press, 1993, p 209.

racial disaster loomed over the horizon.”⁶³¹ He documented the thinking behind the move by liberals. “Both sides were ultimately seen as barbaric and seemingly limitless in their capacity to inflict violence, and no positive alternative society could be seen to emerge out of this. It was also the type of race violence that was not seen to have any implicitly revolutionary implications.”⁶³² We can see, through my sample of *Witness* coverage, the forging and transforming response to different kinds of violence and the shifting and debating of a liberal position in Natal.

Related to the militarization of South African society was the issue of conscription. In 1987 and 1988, the *Natal Witness*’s position illustrates its solid opposition against South African society’s militarization. In this period, the paper took a firm stance against military conscription making suggestions of alternative community service for conscientious objectors. In its opinion pages, it demonstrated support for the ECC and its objectives. This opposition showed the antipathy towards the South African government’s political policies, no doubt because of the impact on liberal middle class Natal homes. On this issue, it brings into question the view of Kader Asmal that liberalism was lukewarm in its opposition, in which he cited a *lack* of support for the ECC as an example. The South African government tried dirty tactics against the ECC and the *Natal Witness* took a stand against it, condemning the authorities’ excesses.

Another important issue was the *Natal Witness*’s hostility towards the police force – most particularly seen, in my sample, in 1976 and 1987. In 1976, the *Natal Witness* discourse was critical towards the police action in Soweto and attributed the escalation of violence to the police. This hostility continued in 1987 where the *Natal Witness* blamed police action for interfering with the Inkatha–UDF peace talks. Its editorials and opinion pages also hinted at the time that the police were siding with Inkatha, when overt accusations would have been illegal under censorship laws. Reasons for this animosity include police hardline tactics against protestors – which was contrary to the liberal values of the *Natal Witness* – as well as SAP’s deliberate siding with Inkatha.

⁶³¹ Paul Rich. *White Power and the liberal conscience: racial segregation and South African liberalism*, p 129.

⁶³² Ibid.

Possible ethnic prejudice by English speakers is highlighted in reporting on the 1976 Soweto uprisings where the issue of the compulsory use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction was at issue. In the editorials and columns of the *Natal Witness* Afrikaner nationalism was explicitly attacked. Some arguments from the letters even suggested, however, that the Afrikaans led government were oppressing the English people in South Africa. This issue was not seen explicitly; however, it is nonetheless an interesting commentary on the nature of liberalism on this matter. It could also be speculated that the *Natal Witness's* opposition to government was connected to English hostility to Afrikaners and any government that was not English-language dominated. However, based on the articles there is not enough evidence for a conclusion on this question. In possible relation was the issue of conscription where white English men were forced into an Afrikaner dominated army by an Afrikaner nationalist government.

The issue of censorship was significant in my overall research and weighed heavily on what the *Natal Witness* could publish. This affected its reporting of police and SADF activities as well as political violence in South Africa. The *Natal Witness* was able to skirt these restrictions on the media by extracting articles from foreign media as well as statements from the heads of states, particularly from the UN and OAU, which reported on SADF activities and accused them of many atrocities in the Southern African region. In 1976, the *Natal Witness* featured these foreign reports on the police and government conduct in the Soweto uprisings. In 1978 and 1981, the paper published statements from the Angolan president Dos Santos on the SADF activities in his country. This was seen in reports on Operation Reindeer where a view was that the alleged military camp attacked was in fact a refugee base. This was followed in 1987 when accusations of SADF atrocities were frequently displayed in the pages of the *Natal Witness*. In addition to this, it published viewpoints from SWAPO as well as reporting on allegations of atrocities by its key ally in Angola, UNITA. This leads to another issue of the *Natal Witness* discourse on UNITA. Although it did report atrocities by UNITA, it did not provide much comment on the matter. However, these reports do lead me to conclude that it adopted a hostile line towards UNITA.

Liberal idealism is another issue to discuss in my research of the *Natal Witness*. This sort of idealism stood for individual rights and human dignity; however, the newspaper's ideals were also tightly attached to its social class. This is seen in 1976, 1978 and 1981 where the *Natal Witness* petitioned the government to get rid of harmful racial laws that undermined human dignity. However, this was limited, as it did not address the economic aspects of the capitalist system at hand. Connected to this would be how much in touch the *Natal Witness* was with the working classes in South Africa. In Chapter 2, I have shown how the *Natal Witness* pointed to economic causes of the Soweto uprisings. Its discussion on the social conditions for the black population suggests that the *Natal Witness* was in tune with the country's majority despite its social class. This was not the case in 1978 and 1981 where anxiety around the communist threat in South Africa meant that the paper was mainly representative of ideological leanings around capitalism. In 1987, this discourse was not dissimilar and seemed to express more worry for its social class. It could be speculated that the *Natal Witness* mirrored the views of its readers, as expressed in the variety of letters. Thus, based on my findings, liberalism was largely out of touch with the black majority despite its exposure to their social and environmental conditions.

Finally, the *Natal Witness* demonstrated an Anglophone cultural nationalism, which is implicit throughout these chapters. Opposition to the government is articulated with the sense that like-mindedness is to be found overseas, in the West, the source of liberal civic values and humanitarian decency. There is little evidence of a questioning of class or racial privilege, or of a sense of complicity with an economy founded upon a white supremacist order. Writers like Gerald Shaw, Antony Delius and Donald Woods, as well as strong defenders of liberal values, such as the editor of the *Natal Witness* from 1976 to 1990 Richard Steyn, are voices of impassioned, but always reasoned, opposition. Paul Rich described Natal as historically a power-base for liberalism. The *Natal Witness* gives us a view of how a liberal English language newspaper was a medium for generating liberal discourses and for the presentation of a particular notion of political change and social order. It constructed a moderate path particularly in moments when it reported on clearly defined and militarized sides, but over time and with the militarisation in its own province, this gave way to more out rightly activist voices. The issue demonstrated in this text is the evolution of the nature of liberalism, which as Rich describes, has had an adaptable and shifting nature.

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