

Political Violence – Disrupting Ways of ‘Doing’ Politics: An Exploration of Organisational and Political Life in Mpumalanga Township, 1970s-1980s¹

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The political violence, between supporters of the Zulu ethnic movement, Inkatha, on the one hand, and those of the African National Congress (ANC) – aligned United Democratic Front (UDF), on the other, that tore apart the province of KwaZulu-Natal during the 1980s and 1990s was firmly located in spaces that had already established ‘ways of doing’ politics, and, amongst people who knew each other. Moreover, these spaces were localised and grounded in particular places and in the relationships and histories of those places. The question that is of interest to this paper is how did these established ‘ways of doing’ politics become disrupted to the extent that the province became engulfed in a civil war between supporters of these two organisations?²

The political violence was not just about what happened at the local level. Local dynamics intersected, in complex ways, with regional and national dynamics.³ However, I argue it is impossible to understand how KwaZulu-Natal came to do politics in a new and violent way without understanding the detailed dynamics of the local.

This paper is concerned with looking at the dynamics of the local in the township of

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² See M. Kentridge, *An Unofficial War* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990); A. Minnaar “Patterns of violence’: An overview of conflict in Natal during the 1980s and 1990s” in, *Patterns of Violence. Case Studies of Conflict in Natal*, in A. Minnaar, ed. (Pretoria: HSRC, 1992a), 1-26; and A. Jeffery, *The Natal Story. 16 Years of Conflict* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1997) for more detailed accounts of the political violence during this period.

³ See D. Bonnini, “Space, Place and Identity: Political Violence in Mpumalanga Township, KwaZulu-Natal, 1987-1993”, (Ph.D. diss., University of Witwatersrand, 2007).

Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal.⁴ It will demonstrate that townships like Mpumalanga did have, prior to political violence, accepted ways of doing politics. People and organisations, both political and community-orientated, were known to each other. There were established repertoires around the tolerance of organisational diversity; the exchange of ideas; ways of disagreeing; and, respect for generational wisdom and patriarchal authority. However, these accepted ways of doing politics were disrupted over a number of years by a long series of exchanges and interventions that gradually undermined the existing repertoires and increasingly shifted the terrain of politics towards violence. This paper maps this process by looking at the period immediately prior to the violence in Mpumalanga Township and plots in detail the events that disrupted the established 'ways of doing politics'. At some point in the mid-1980s these tacit understandings of how to do politics were disrupted. The 'new' way of doing politics was characterised by violent political struggles between supporters of the UDF and Inkatha.

The paper begins by examining the culture of 'doing politics' and understandings of 'Zuluness' that came to be established in the newly built Mpumalanga Township. Clearly some layers of this culture had roots in previous decades and experiences, but some aspects were new and became entrenched as the culture of the township was 'created'. It suggests that in many respects the 'new' culture upset relations between age, generation and authority. The paper then goes on to examine the organisations that existed in Mpumalanga Township in the period prior to political violence and the contestations between those organisations. It shows how, in time these, contestations began to disrupt the established ways of 'doing' politics. The paper demonstrates how as a consequence of this disruption organisational life came to be dominated by young men, the result of which was to exclude women and older men from public communal life and set the scene for violent confrontations between supporters of the different organisations.

⁴ As a result of its history and particular circumstances Mpumalanga Township is an ideal location to investigate political violence. It was built in the late 1960s as a model township to accommodate the increasing squatter problem in the Hammarisdale area – an industrial decentralisation point. It also provided a labour force for the Hammarisdale textile factories. Political violence began in late 1986, intensified during 1987 and continued until 1991. As the records of the Unrest Monitoring Project indicated, it was one of the worst affected areas in Natal. A peace pact signed in late 1989 had little effect and large scale attacks on certain sections of the township continued well into 1990. Large areas of the township were emptied and many residents were refugees for over a year. However, by 1992 the peace pact began to have some influence, residents returned and today many outsiders regard Mpumalanga Township as a model of peace.

Mpumalanga Township

Mpumalanga Township was built between April 1967 and June 1972. During this period four units were built and by June 1972 the population was approximately 30,000 people. The township was proclaimed on 29 December 1972 in terms of Proclamation R293 of 1962.⁵ A further section of unit four and the industrial sector Unit F were later proclaimed on 29 October 1976.⁶

The first residents were from areas around the industrial town of Hammarsdale, primarily the freehold areas of Georgedale and Woody Glen.⁷ Many of them had been forcibly relocated in order to make way for the building of Mpumalanga. They were allocated houses in the first two sections built. Later residents came from further afield as the government cleared slum areas and relocated qualifying residents into formal housing in those units.⁸ With the construction of unit three 'people from far' were moved in.⁹

Creating a township was not just about the physicality of building formal houses and roads; alongside this was the State's need to create a culture that would facilitate a particular type of governance in line with Apartheid's philosophy. Embedded in the governance of Mpumalanga Township were certain rules and norms that entrenched, in opposition to what had been the norm in the places residents had lived before, a particular gendered and generational culture. Relations between age, gender and authority were disrupted as younger men acquired far more authority than Zulu traditions (even amongst the *amakholwa*) allowed, and any space that had existed for women's autonomy was soon extinguished. Township living reformed relationships of gender and generation in a number of ways that set in place the process of emasculation of older men and eventually allowed younger men to dominate politics.

The first rule that facilitated this disruption was the need for all prospective residents

⁵ *Government Gazette* No. 2394, 29 December 1972.

⁶ *Government Gazette* No. 2005, 29 October 1976.

⁷ Georgedale and Woody Glen were the original Hammarsdale farms purchased by Rev Allsopp in 1862 with the intention of establishing a mission. The intention was that the *amaKholwa* who settled there would purchase the land, acquiring freehold rights.

⁸ To qualify for a house in Mpumalanga one had to be a married, Zulu man who worked in Hammarsdale.

⁹ Interview, Reverend, Mpumalanga, interview 1, tape 1, 27, 28 April 1999.

to register at the newly established township office. To qualify for housing marriage certificates had to be produced. This sent people scurrying over the countryside to locate copies of their documents. In some cases ‘unmarried’ parents were obliged to depend on their employed son for access to housing in the new township.¹⁰ Traditionally the ‘man of the *umuzi*’ was the one given the land on which to build a house. This situation, where the head of the household became dependent upon his son for access to housing, was an enormous assault on Zulu versions of manhood. Generational order was turned upside down, through the allocation of housing based on a housing policy that favoured formal western marriage, and sons became household heads.

For women the removals represented a fundamental change in their legal status. *Amakholwa* women were exempted from the provisions of the Natal Code, which forbade women from ‘owning or inheriting property in their own right, controlling their earnings or acting as guardians of their own children’.¹¹ Mpumalanga’s female residents, many of whom had been landowners in their own right lost these ‘privileges’ and were not able to apply for business licences or acquire their own homes in the new township. Non-*kholwa* women did not lose legal rights but in effect they lost the same privileges. In particular unmarried women were disadvantaged; from being able to rent in their own right they now had to rely on sons to ensure access to township housing.

As with other townships, Mpumalanga Township public culture was masculine.¹² Community and political organisations had a majority male membership and, with few exceptions, the leadership was also dominated by men. Criminality flourished and with it a masculine-*tsotsi* sub-culture. Other dominant youth sub-cultures like the Mapantsula’s and the American Dudes were also male.¹³ Boys hung out on street corners, smoking and talking; and, in the process, creating neighbourhood and peer networks that excluded young women.

¹⁰ Interview, Reverend, Mpumalanga Township, Interview 1, tape 1, 3-4, 25 April 1999.

¹¹ S. Hassim, “Equality versus authority: Inkatha and the politics of gender in Natal”, *Politikon* 17, no. 2, 1990, 99-114, 100.

¹² See C. Campbell, “Learning to kill? Masculinity, the family and violence in Natal”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 3, 1992, 614-628 and B. Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid*, (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2004).

¹³ The Mapantsula’s “wore trousers with stovepipe legs”, they were known for stealing money from individuals. The American Dudes wore “tight-fitting Bang-bang jeans, tight-fitting muscle tops and high-heeled Watson or Barker shoes. Our hair would either be done in long bushy Afros or in gleaming curls. Our clothes were always bright – pink, orange, yellow ... Their raison d’être was fun, fun and more fun”. (see F. Khumalo, *Touch My Blood. The early years* (Roggebaai: Umuzi, 2006) 110-112.

Gender violence against women was common; a technique used to discipline women and ensure one aspect of the patriarchal order was not disturbed. Wife-beating existed in many families¹⁴ and young women were publicly disciplined by their boyfriends through the practice of streamlining.¹⁵

Establishing Patronage Politics in Mpumalanga Township

Soon after the new sections were proclaimed in 1976 it was announced that a township council would be established in Mpumalanga.¹⁶ Elections for the council were held within six months. Once the KwaZulu homeland was established, direct control of the township administration was transferred from Pretoria to Ulundi.

Apartheid policy had ensured that the residents of Mpumalanga were Zulu - by birth. Yet the *amakholwa* tradition had placed them firmly outside the Zulu Kingdom. It cannot be assumed that their understanding of ethnic identity mirrored Buthelezi's version.¹⁷ In fact we find in Mpumalanga at this time a heterogeneous interpretation of Zuluness was acceptable to the larger community. The newly-established KwaZulu homeland needed to establish its hegemony over Mpumalanga. This was to be done in two ways. Firstly, politically through the establishment of an Inkatha branch, and, secondly, through facilitating new class formations. These were not separate projects but were finely knitted together. As Hart noted with regard to Madadeni, "the dynamics of accumulation became closely intertwined with bantustan politics".¹⁸ Mpumalanga was no different.

¹⁴ See Khumalo, *Touch My Blood*.

¹⁵ According to Khumalo *Touch My Blood*, 108 "Streamlining was a common practice, a form of 'punishment'. It wasn't considered rape. Rape was associated with physical violence and force. Streamlining was about control. A man must control his woman. Girls could be streamlined for drinking, simply to teach them a lesson. And the girls never reported it. I suspect they felt no one would believe them, because being streamlined stigmatised you. 'Why did they do it to you, out of all the girls in the township? What wrong did you do? You must have asked for it!'"

¹⁶ Government Notice No. 2006 of 1976.

¹⁷ Chief Mangosutho Gatsha Buthelezi was chief of the Buthelezi clan. He claimed his family had traditionally acted in the role of prime minister to the Zulu king. Through canny political advancement, playing Zulu traditionalists, the African National Congress and the National Party government, he rose to political prominence. He was installed as chief minister of the Zululand Territorial Authority in 1970, this was the precursor to the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly (1972). In 1975 he was key in the relaunch of Inkatha yeNkululeko yeSizwe and was elected president, a post he has held ever since (see T. Waetjen, *Workers and Warriors. Masculinity and the Struggle for Nation in South Africa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006) 23.

¹⁸ G. Hart, *Disabling Globalization. Places of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg:

Inkatha and the KwaZulu Government used a number of complex strategies to expand their control, to build alliances and bring unruly elements within their project.¹⁹ In time Inkatha was able to use numerous ‘bureaucratic entry points’²⁰ afforded by its almost seamless integration with the KwaZulu Government to exercise territorial control over the people and areas under its jurisdiction. This was through systems of political and material patronage through pensions, health, education, housing and business licences and loans. Employment in the civil service was dependent on its favour.

Soon after Inkatha was relaunched in 1975, as an exclusively Zulu organisation,²¹ an Inkatha branch was launched in Mpumalanga. The launch of this branch with its links to the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly (KLA) was the start of the project to bring Mpumalanga under the control of both Ulundi and Inkatha. This was not just formal institutional control, but was crucial to the establishment of a particular kind of Zulu identity defined by loyalty to Inkatha.

Nene was the leader of Inkatha in Mpumalanga. An elected town councillor, he was also elected as a member of the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly representing Mpumalanga.²² The Nkehli family also became affiliated with Inkatha from the start.²³ The young Zakhele Nkehli was also elected a councillor and took over the KLA seat when Mr Nene passed away.²⁴

James Ngubane, Mpumalanga resident and Azanian People’s Organisation (AZAPO) member, explained that most residents viewed belonging to Inkatha as part of their cultural identity: “... most people only knew Inkatha when they were going out ... because they thought Inkatha was something to follow. And it was a cultural thing, it was not a political

University of Natal Press, 2002), 114.

¹⁹ See G. Maré & G. Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power. Buthelezi’s Inkatha and the Politics of ‘Loyal Resistance’* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), in particular see pp106-115.

²⁰ See N. Gwala [Blade Nzimande], “Political violence and the struggle for control in Pietermaritzburg”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15, no. 3, 1989, 506-524; and also G. Maré & G. Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power.* & Y. Muthien & M Khosa, “Constructing a regional political identity in South Africa”, *Social Identities* 4, no. 3, 1998, 457-472.

²¹ G. Maré & G. Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power.*

²² Focus group discussion: Connie’s Group, interview 2, tape 1, 1; Interview Mbhele, interview 1, tape 2, 4.

²³ The Nkehli family had lived in the area for many years; tracing their roots to the original *amaKholwa* landowners they had also served as *indunas* to the chief.

²⁴ Interview Mbhele, interview 1, tape 2, 4.

thing”.²⁵

Inkatha's seamless integration with the KwaZulu Government allowed them to use their position to deepen this identification and build loyalty.

... all those things that they [residents] were supposed to enjoy, the rights and other things, but they thought that it was because of Inkatha. ... [I was] trying to explain that pension had nothing to do with Inkatha. I mean to get a house from the town council had nothing to do with Inkatha...²⁶

Nevertheless, for ordinary residents access to resources and the accession of Inkatha members to positions of political power were intertwined. Alongside this went an increasing acceptance of Inkatha's particular brand of Zuluness.

The second method of creating loyalty was through facilitating the formation of a new trading class and petty bourgeoisie. Patronage politics ensured the right to accumulation was only granted to loyal KwaZulu subjects. Many of Hammarsdale's new business class had roots amongst the landowners of Georgedale. Some of the larger landowners had been given compensatory land but others received a small amount of compensation - R5000. They used this as start-up capital to acquire business rights. Others, from outside the township, used political patronage to acquire trading and business rights.

Business sites in Mpumalanga had been developed by the Bantu Investment Corporation²⁷ in the early 1970s. With the formation of the KwaZulu Development Corporation (KDC) in 1978, these business interests were brought under the control of the KwaZulu Government.²⁸ Proclamation R293 did not give the township council the right to allocate trading sites and rights. This was vested in the screening committee, which included the township manager, the magistrate and the KDC. The allocation of trading rights was a source of contention for the Mpumalanga business community. They felt they were marginalised by the decisions and that the Inkatha-controlled council was not doing enough

²⁵ Interview Ngubane, interview 1, tape 1, 5.

²⁶ Interview Mqadi, interview 1, tape 1, 5.

²⁷ The Bantu Investment Corporation promoted development in the homelands. In 1975 the central government announced it would phase out the BIC and establish separate corporations in each of the homelands. The KwaZulu Development Corporation (the economic arm of the KwaZulu Government) was established in 1978 (see Maré & Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, 111-116).

²⁸ Maré & Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, 111/2.

to secure their interests.

The Mpumalanga business community, consisting primarily of small traders, were instrumental in initiating and launching an alternative organisation to advance their interests – the Mpumalanga Residents Association (MPURA). A key figure and the organisation's chairperson was Rodger Sishi. Sishi had been born in Hammarsdale, and since qualifying as a teacher he moved to Johannesburg. In 1977, he returned to Mpumalanga when he was granted a business licence to run a petrol station in the township.²⁹

Many in the business community felt that Inkatha had never represented their interests and so had swung their support behind MPURA. As Sishi explains:

Inkatha had become very vindictive towards the business community of the township. They actually put them in very bad light in front of the people and when the business people wanted to air their views in public meetings led by Inkatha they were not allowed to. Then we decided no, the best thing for us to do is to create our own platform where we would be able to convey our point of view to the general residents of the township and that is how MPURA was formed. And it consisted mainly, the leadership of MPURA mainly of the business community [...]³⁰

In Mpumalanga, Inkatha had used the first township council elections, in 1977, as a means of creating hegemony and ensuring loyalty. The Inkatha branch used its organisational power and resources to ensure its members were elected onto the township council. Now the business community decided to use MPURA as an alternative platform from which to campaign in order to capture the township council. In the 1978 elections, MPURA only managed to win one council seat and a further one by default when the elected councillor was disqualified. Yet, by the 1981 election MPURA had garnered enough support to beat the Inkatha candidates and win the elections overwhelmingly. The support of the youth was a crucial factor in this election. According to Sishi, by this election he had already been beaten twice by the Inkatha candidate in his ward (once in 1978 and once in a by-election) and had decided not to stand again. The youth persuaded him otherwise. After the election the

²⁹ Interview Sishi, interview 1, tape 1, 3. Hart, in her discussion of Madadeni, also refers to men who had left the area and returned (usually from Johannesburg) in the mid-70s to take up business opportunities (Hart, *Disabling Globalization*, 113).

³⁰ Interview, Rodger Sishi, Tape 1, 2.

councillors elected him mayor of Mpumalanga.³¹

MPURA used the township council as a vehicle to pursue their interests. In 1979 the council requested some say in the allocation of trading rights. They appealed to the Minister for a place on the committee. Central government refused. However, by the early 1980s they had succeeded and the township council controlled the committee that allocated trading rights in Mpumalanga.³²

According to Sishi the relationship between the township council and Ulundi was always awkward. It was difficult to get Ulundi to agree to the development of Mpumalanga. It remained under-resourced in contrast to other KwaZulu administered townships where there were sports stadia, public halls and other facilities. In his opinion this was because

...they did not like the leadership of the township, of Mpumalanga. You know KwaZulu Government is very vindictive, and if they didn't like you they just didn't like you. So I think they didn't like my leadership, and they didn't like the council, and therefore they were not going to do anything. [... Madadeni, KwaMakutu, Umlazi, KwaMashu ...] those are strongholds of Inkatha. They had all the facilities. In fact Mpumalanga was the only township which was led by a non-Inkatha mayor. No other township in KwaZulu. No other.³³

Township Rivalries and Organisational Life

Public communal life in Mpumalanga in the early 1980s was characterised by a variety of organisations and associations. Some of these, like Inkatha and the AZAPO, had a clearly political agenda and they were often local branches of national political organisations. Others, like MPURA, were interested in local 'civic' issues. Residents were also members of churches, trade unions, choirs, cultural groups, student organisations and other informal associations.

As discussed, the most prominent organisation was Inkatha, which by then was the

³¹ He served in this capacity until the council was dissolved before the first local government elections in 1995.

³² In an effort to put aside the conflicts between traders and KwaZulu Khulani Holdings, a joint venture between Inkatha and Inyanda (the Natal and Zululand African Chamber of Commerce), was formed. Khulani Holdings was registered late in 1979. Its first subsidiary Khulani-Brown Wholesales was incorporated in 1980. Fifty-one percent of the shares were held by Khulani with the remainder belonging to W.G. Brown a subsidiary of Tiger Oats. In 1983 Sishi was one of the directors of Khulani (see Maré & Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, 113).

³³ Interview, Sishi, tape 1, 7.

main political organisation in the township. Many residents claimed they joined Inkatha because they saw it as part of the liberation movement aligned to the ANC.

... some exiles like Tambo, some like Mandela in prison for so many years, we knew, we heard that (unclear) ... but we were supporting Mr Buthelezi because we thought he was also on them on that line, whereas he was, we found later, that no this one is playing, some other cards he is not playing this way.³⁴

Inkatha's membership was comprised of older people, but it also had a vibrant and strong youth component.

The other prominent local organisation was MPURA. It was not affiliated with any political party. Its leadership was older and based in the Mpumalanga business community. They tried to promote a positive self-image of Mpumalanga Township. They offered business skills to their members: training in how to run a business and how to apply for a business licence. They also developed cultural activities around singing and music. They also gave a lot of attention to the youth, providing scholarships for matric students and organising activities for the youth. Many of these leaders served as role models for the youth (see Bruce Buthelezi's story below) and MPURA had support from a wide range of residents irrespective of their gender, age or class backgrounds.

Inkatha was not prepared to brook opposition to its control of the township council. Soon after the formation of MPURA there were allegations of intimidation: "[... their] names (Residents Association) have been sent to Ulundi to KwaZulu Government as people who are after overthrowing Inkatha and the KwaZulu Government".³⁵

There were occasions when the conflict took a violent form. Sishi recounted one incident

And I recall one instance where there was a very serious clash between the Inkatha and the residents association MPURA. And I happened to be the chairman of MPURA and there was quite bad blood between the organisation and Inkatha. I remember one time when we had a function, a Christmas party. Inkatha mobilised and physically attacked MPURA and my previous car, which was a Mercedes Benz, very new, was completely destroyed and I was in

³⁴ Focus group discussion: Connie's Second Group, tape 1, 3.

³⁵ CA, Letter from SE Mbambo to Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, 4 April 1977. Department of Bantu Administration and Development, Box 2/1875, File T60/5/1106/2, Part I.

that car.³⁶

Mpumalanga resident Sbu Mbhele also remembers the conflict between the two organisations.³⁷

... there were fights and RD Sishi was involved in that fight. I think he fired a shot, ja he fired a shot, he may deny it, but everybody know it. And I know the guy who had been shot. That was Mr Sangweni. He was a member of Inkatha up until his death in 1998.³⁸

As a strategy to subdue Inkatha's animosity, many MPURA members joined Inkatha.

... the leadership from that residents association came with the idea that we should all join the Inkatha so that we won't be seen as people who are against the KwaZulu government. So we joined Inkatha, ..., even after joining that Inkatha those old Inkatha members could not accept us.³⁹

... it was quite well because we went to the meetings, we (laughing) though we were against them because we had seen so many mistakes. Now we tried to mingle with them, and we pretended ... they called me *impimpi* that side, they said I was making *impimpi* here from this side to the MPURA side. When I came to the meeting, they would whisper to each other, I usually stand next to the door so as to run out (laughter) ...⁴⁰

As already discussed, relations between these two organisations were frequently hostile. Any association with another political group was interpreted as an anti-Inkatha position and by extension disloyalty to the KwaZulu government. According to MPURA member James Ngubane, after the MPURA leadership had been successful in their attempt to win control of the Mpumalanga Township council, in 1982, the 'organisation collapsed'.

A third important organisation in Mpumalanga in the late 1970s was *oQonda* (Straighten-up).⁴¹ Formed in response to the domination of criminal gangs in the township,

³⁶ Interview Sishi, tape 1, 1-2.

³⁷ In the late 70s Sbu Mbhele was an MPURA member, later he was to join AZAPO and become a staunch member of that organisation.

³⁸ Interview: Mbhele, tape 1, 3.

³⁹ Interview: Ngubane, tape 1, 4.

⁴⁰ Focus group discussion: Connie's second group, tape 1, 3.

⁴¹ From the late 1970s *oqonda* appeared in many townships in Natal. Composed of older men, they played a role between that of cultural enforcer of tradition and *hlonipha* and vigilante cleaning up the areas of petty criminals. Their almost simultaneous appearance in many townships throughout the province, and their links to township councillors led many to speculate that they had been organised by Inkatha. They were key in breaking the school boycotts of 1980 by forcing the children back to school. Their emergence indicates an anxiety about the politicisation of the youth and an attempt to restore order amongst them. I would suggest that struggles over different versions of Zuluness contain at their heart struggles over generational authority. In 1986 members of the Durban Workers' Cultural Local workshopped and performed a play called *Qonda*, written by Mi

oQonda was a community-based group active in enforcing law and order.

Before that violence there was a lot of killing ... ja, so we formed the security, a community security in society, we used to go around the whole of Mpumalanga at night watching this crime people. It came quiet after that, without no benefit, we wasn't getting paid. No, we was just helping people.⁴²

... when I came here in Mpumalanga [1971] the place was hell, ... place for criminals ... Friday, Saturday, you must find a dead body at the bus stops, at the shop. Then after that we had formed this community security. So it [the crime] came down ...⁴³

In his autobiography, in which he describes his youth in Mpumalanga, Fred Khumalo concurs.⁴⁴ He says that Mpumalanga was dominated by two gangs (amongst others) the *Amakwaitos* and the *uMsingizane*.

The threat of gangs loomed largest on Fridays, payday. People were mugged and stabbed and killed. Cries for help mingled with the merrymaking in the shebeens. Soon the gangs were a law unto themselves, terrorising the community. They demanded 'protection fees' from businessmen, and those who refused were burgled repeatedly. They even charged a toll at night at a bridge that linked two sections of the township. To this day, the bridge is called kwa-Five Rand. On Monday mornings bodies floating in the stream underneath the bridge were a common sight for children crossing to school. Nor were the police, stationed in white Hammarsdale, interested in the gang violence. They only came into the township to collect the corpses.⁴⁵

According to Khumalo the *oQonda* patrolled the streets at night armed with knobkerries, sjamboks and occasionally spears.⁴⁶ A curfew was imposed, and anyone out after eight-thirty was beaten up unless they had good reason.

Another resident, Sbu Mbhele, gave his reasons for the flourishing of criminal activity.

[Crime was] very high, you would understand that people were coming from different areas and do you know an area when it is going *skomplaas*, ... and quite a number of people were coming from those areas, like Cato Manor, squatter camp. You find that people are living a higher life [there], a good life, but in squatters, so a *skomplaas* would be something like that. There'll be crime, there'll be overnight gigs, it's funky, ja, so there are killings there, they are

Hlatshwayo, about the problems associated with *oqonda*. See A. Von Kotze, *Organise & Act. The Natal Workers Theatre Movement 1983-1987*, (Durban: Culture and Working Life Publications, 1988).

⁴² Focus group discussion: Connie's second group, tape 1, 2.

⁴³ Focus group discussion: Connie's second group, tape 1, 5.

⁴⁴ Khumalo, *Touch My Blood*, 82.

⁴⁵ Khumalo, *Touch My Blood*, 82.

⁴⁶ Khumalo, *Touch My Blood*, 82.

part of that settlement. So many people came from such areas so they brought that thinking, that mentality with them. At one stage there was a need for this whole thing to be eradicated, so this *oqonda* thing came up. I don't know it was an Inkatha or MPURA idea I don't know, but it did work.⁴⁷

At the heart of the concerns outlined by Mbhele is the need for moral and generational policing. Georgedale had represented ordered living. Everyone whether tenant or landlord, old or young, male or female 'knew their place'. The practice of *hlonipha* is fundamental to Zulu culture and to the observation of generational order. With the relocation to Mpumalanga this order was disrupted and, as described by Mbhele, it was disrupted even further when people from outside of Georgedale were allocated houses in Mpumalanga unit three. For the former Georgedale residents restoring that order and enforcing *hlonipha* amongst the male youth was a priority. *oQonda* were primarily composed of older men, their job to patrol the streets and ensure that there was no crime in Mpumalanga. Male youth and young men were seen as harbingers of crime and disorder. In an attempt to restore generational order they were targeted by *oQondo*: "They used to go in groups, when they met the young boys they search them, when they find the knives they will let them step down and beat them. So the crime was eliminated in that way".⁴⁸

Another reason for getting the youth back under control was that they often had "bad things to say about Inkatha", and for this youth were flogged in public.⁴⁹ *Oqonda* also had another function - they were the enforcers of Zulu culture and tradition as understood and interpreted by the community elders "... at that time if a girl wore pants she would be beaten. If they found a male and woman together they will be beaten. They would also guard the streets. That was my father's duty".⁵⁰

Despite initial support for *oqonda* there were increasing tensions around their activities.

The only thing with that group was they started to interfere with family matters, so the community started not to like them because of that. Otherwise they were doing a very good job. ... The only problem started when the wife and husband were quarrelling and then the

⁴⁷ Interview Mbhele, tape 2, 5-6.

⁴⁸ Interview Ngubane, tape 1, 10.

⁴⁹ Khumalo, *Touch My Blood*, 82.

⁵⁰ Hlongwane, *TRC amnesty hearing, Richard's Bay*, 21 April 1998, 59.

wife would go to *oqonda*⁵¹

Khumalo also informs us that the presence of *oqonda* was used as a threat to keep unruly neighbours in check.⁵²

Many residents saw *oQonda* as aligned with Inkatha.

The thing is, if I am not making a mistake, they were controlled by Inkatha [at] that early stage, because they came immediately after the inauguration of Inkatha. So I was already at Ladysmith, when I came back I was told about Inkatha and *oqonda* at the same time, so and many people like this person I've told you about was shot [by] Sishi, was a member of *oqondo* and a member of the Inkatha. A very strong member of *oqondo* and a very strong member of Inkatha, so I would say it was Inkatha's idea.⁵³

According to Ngubane,

...they were recruited ja, at a later stage this *qonda* people were recruited by Inkatha woman who was from, Mrs Xulu from Woody Glen. So they were used to fight these business people. There was a conflict at some stage I remember that.⁵⁴

Members of one of the focus groups recalled the conflict between them and MPURA, though no-one could clearly recall the exact cause. "There was a lot of fighting there, do you remember? Between security and MPURA. Do you remember one chap was shot but eh he was shot here on the leg?"⁵⁵

The formation of *oQondo* was not just about a community's response to crime. It was also about the policing of a generation and defending a moral order that was seen to be under threat. The notion of patriarchal order was an essential feature of Zulu society and the role of maintaining this order fell to older men.⁵⁶ Thus, they were the ones who formulated and enforced the community's response to the problem of crime. However, it should be noted that in doing so 'the other' was identified as male and younger. The youth with their criminal gangs, their carrying of knives and their cheekiness about Inkatha were perceived as a

⁵¹ Interview Ngubane, interview 1, tape 1, 10.

⁵² Khumalo, *Touch My Blood*.

⁵³ Interview Mbhele, interview 1, tape 2, 6.

⁵⁴ Interview Ngubane, interview 1, tape 1, 10.

⁵⁵ Focus group, Connie's group, no 2, tape 1, 3.

⁵⁶ See P. Mdluli, P [Blade Nzimande], "Ubuntu-botho: Inkatha's 'People's education'", *Transformation*, no. 5, 1987, 60-77.

problem – a problem that needed to be put in its place. In the late 1970s *oQondo* succeeded in doing that. To cite Khumalo, “The community sighed with relief. ... peace and order had returned to our streets.”⁵⁷

The fourth organisation was AZAPO. AZAPO was a national political organisation falling within the Black Consciousness tradition. It was founded in April 1978, the first organisation formed since the bannings of ‘Black October’ the previous year. However, within two weeks most of its national leadership had been detained and AZAPO was silent for over a year.⁵⁸ In September 1979, after the last of the detainees had been released, the organisation was relaunched and a new executive was elected.⁵⁹ According to Lodge, AZAPO differed from its Black Consciousness predecessors by presenting a sophisticated class analysis.⁶⁰ They proclaimed their intention to focus on the black working class and saw trade unions as an instrument to ‘redistribute power’.⁶¹ Secondly, they recognised that some blacks would find it within their class interests to collaborate with the authorities.⁶²

The beginnings of a local branch in Mpumalanga were initiated in late 1982. AZAPO introduced a different sort of politics into Mpumalanga Township. Richard Mqadi was the key figure.⁶³ Educated by both black and white teachers at the nearby Catholic mission school of Marianhill, he was sheltered from the harshest realities of Apartheid South Africa. The experience of work in a local Hammarsdale factory made him aware of the gross inequalities that existed in South Africa:

... the conditions at work were just appalling. And I began to question these things within myself. And it so happened that I was the youngster at that time, and I had that energy to read things. I still remember it was a *Pace* magazine, if I’m not mistaken, which was carrying a lot of political articles. And that’s when I learnt a lot about ANC, that ANC has actually attacked whatever. One day I read about AZAPO, and it reminded me during my school days because Steve Biko was actually a student at Marianhill and I remember 1977 when he was killed, the teachers were mourning ... So when the question of AZAPO came through the newspapers and

⁵⁷ Khumalo, *Touch My Blood*, 82.

⁵⁸ T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), 344.

⁵⁹ J. Seekings, *The UDF. A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983-1991* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2000), 36.

⁶⁰ Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa*, 345.

⁶¹ Mosele, cited in Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa*, 345.

⁶² AZAPO policy paper, cited in Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa*, 345.

⁶³ At the time he was known as Richard Cele.

I was reading a lot about them. Because that was the main political organisation.⁶⁴

His politicisation was heightened when he was dismissed for introducing the Chemical Workers Union to his workplace. In September 1982, Mqadi attended a Steve Biko commemoration meeting at the Umlazi Cinema. After this meeting he decided to join AZAPO. Their positive response to his written application encouraged him to begin organising a local branch. He organised a number of meetings at his house. Contact was made with Strini Moodley, a well-known black consciousness figure, in Durban for assistance in setting up the branch. In early 1983, with the requisite twenty members, the AZAPO branch in Mpumalanga was officially launched.

AZAPO's membership was primarily male and youthful. It was drawn from all sections of Mpumalanga and frequently school-based networks drew in the youngsters. The branch grew quickly; estimates of active paid-up members were around four hundred plus over a thousand supporters. It was suggested that in time their support eclipsed that of Inkatha.⁶⁵

Khumalo's autobiography provides an account of his politicisation that indicates the many ways in which young people became politically aware and the importance of the school-based networks.⁶⁶ This process was far removed from the influence of their parents and Inkatha. As a teenager, in the late 1970s, Khumalo began to frequent a neighbour's house whose son was a dagga merchant. Here a mixture of people (amongst them known criminals) would sit around listening to music, talking and smoking dagga. It was here that he met Step-Step, a young man who introduced political discussions into the laid-back dopers' conversations, introduced him to Radio Freedom and lent him copies of *Frank Talk*⁶⁷ and *Pace*.⁶⁸ At Phezulu High School Khumalo was seated next to a hardened criminal Nhlanhla who was notorious for the large knife he routinely carried, the disrespect with which he treated the teachers and his pick-pocketing activities. Khumalo's own nascent criminal networks ensured they soon became friends. In turn Khumalo lent him the books

⁶⁴ Interview Mqadi, tape 1, 1.

⁶⁵ Interview Mqadi, tape 1, 11.

⁶⁶ Khumalo, *Touch My Blood*, 113-116.

⁶⁷ *Frank Talk* was the black consciousness magazine.

⁶⁸ Khumalo, *Touch My Blood*, 93-95.

that came from Step-by-Step and they spent long hours in deep political discussion.⁶⁹ Sometime later, having disassociated himself from those criminal activities; Khumalo became part of another sub-culture: The American Dudes. Here he met Bongani Gasa who was politically astute and anxious to conscientise his friends. Gasa took him to his first AZAPO meeting and encouraged him to recruit others. Amongst others, he tried to interest his old friend Nhlanhla but, despite his beliefs, he like many others was afraid of falling foul of the security establishment and did not join the organisation.

By now Khumalo was in standard nine and was looking for other ways to 'spread the political message'.⁷⁰ With the backing of his class teacher he approached the school principal with the idea of starting a newspaper. The idea was that after morning prayers, he would read a few self-generated news stories about the school and township as well as some general news. He was given permission and soon pupils were bringing him news of youth meetings, music competitions, community meetings amongst others. Into this agenda he began to insert news about the Azanian Students Movement (AZASM) and AZAPO. This development attracted the attention of students who were members of Inkatha and he was then forced to accept an Inkatha supporter into his news team, whose stories had a strong Inkatha bias. Shortly thereafter, Bongani Gasa went missing, a year later they found out that he had left the country to join *Umkhonto we Sizwe*⁷¹ and had been killed in an ambush while returning to South Africa.⁷² He also mentions that a teacher advised him to go and see Mafika Gwala, a black consciousness activist, writer and poet, who upon accepting his credentials provided him with more political literature to read and introduced him to other cultural networks.⁷³

Bruce Buthelezi, who became a key UDF/Hammarsdale Youth Congress (HAYCO) activist, describes a similar, but slightly different, process of politicisation. He explains that he grew up under the influence of Reverend Ngidi⁷⁴ a church minister who was also a close neighbour. He also got to know Majoy Mcoyi, a member of the UDF-affiliated Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) and MPURA. She printed political t-shirts (with Biko's

⁶⁹ Khumalo, *Touch My Blood*, 100-101.

⁷⁰ Khumalo, *Touch My Blood*, 114.

⁷¹ The armed wing of the African National Congress.

⁷² Khumalo, *Touch My Blood*, 114-116.

⁷³ Khumalo, *Touch My Blood*, 130-131.

⁷⁴ Reverend Ngidi organised a memorial service for the students killed by Inkatha at the Ngoyi campus of University of Zululand (see below for a fuller account of this event).

face) in her backyard and Buthelezi sold them at school. Buthelezi's account that he managed to sell on average twelve t-shirts per day is an indicator of the large support that AZAPO had amongst the students. Buthelezi himself joined AZAPO, being elected the secretary, and later becoming a prominent member of the HAYCO.

These stories give some account of the politicisation of the youth. The networks they engaged in were different from that of their parents; spatially more extensive, they stretched beyond the township, Natal and Inkatha politics. Reading was important and books were circulated freely, despite the fears that many experienced. In essence, the modalities of politics were changing. No longer was politics the domain of the older generation. AZAPO's politics did not rest on patriarchy. The youth were finding their own role models and making political linkages that extended beyond the narrow confines of the province and Zulu ethnicity.

Many of AZAPO's activities focussed on 'education'.

What we were doing at that stage, it was education. We were educating our members because they didn't know anything about politics. So we managed to educate them such that when you meet an AZAPO member they will tell you the same thing as other people. ... every weekend we used to have meetings. Specially it was education, ...⁷⁵

AZAPO's very existence challenged the ethnic Zulu identity tendered by Inkatha. In principal AZAPO was opposed to participation in the homeland government. It viewed Indians, Coloureds and Africans as part of the oppressed black group and they sought to present an identity based on race (defined by oppression) and class, which excluded those who collaborated. Integral to their organisational culture was an emphasis on political education. They had no time for what was viewed as ethnic tribal identities or an uninformed populism.

Other organisations, while not as prominent, also contributed to the political life of Mpumalanga. The Congress of South African Students (COSAS), a national scholars' organisation aligned to the Congress movement, developed a presence at secondary schools in the township. It was formed in 1979, and according to Lodge "stood in conscious

⁷⁵ Interview Ngubane, tape 1, 5 & 6.

opposition to organisations which claim to be inspired by the precepts of Black Consciousness”.⁷⁶ This was not necessarily the case in Mpumalanga and many students were both COSAS and AZAPO members.⁷⁷ AZAPO did not have a student wing until July 1983 when the AZAM was “revived to compete with COSAS”.⁷⁸ COSAS played an important role in filtering Congress-ideas into Mpumalanga and offered an alternative political identity to that of Inkatha.

Many Mpumalanga residents worked in the Hammarsdale industrial area and were trade union members. Given the predominance of textile mills, most were members of the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) an affiliate of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). Other large employers were the Rainbow Chicken factories at Cato Ridge and these were organised by another FOSATU affiliate – the Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union. Baskin characterised FOSATU politics as one that: “envisaged an alternative working-class organisation in both the factory and the community,... their practice, particularly in the case of NUTW, often amounted to political abstentionism”.⁷⁹ Indeed, FOSATU was careful not to interject on the terrain of the political and members of all political persuasions found a comfortable home within its structures.

At the beginning of the 1980s the public space appeared to be the preserve of older people, primarily male – men had initiated and participated in *oQonda*, the Inkatha leadership and that of the MPURA was older. Within a few years this was to change. In many of the ‘new’ organisations those who were most active were male and young - students in the schools and those like Mqadi, Nkehli and Ngubane who had recently left school.

Friendship and Intimacy

While there was an active and vibrant political life in Mpumalanga Township characterised by the presence of a number of different political organisations; the relationships between these organisations were complex. They co-existed, yet they barely tolerated one another - they presented different ideologies and they clashed, sometimes violently. Despite these

⁷⁶ Lodge, *Black Politics* in South Africa, 341.

⁷⁷ Interview Mqadi, tape 1, 7.

⁷⁸ Seekings, *The UDF*, 68.

⁷⁹ J. Baskin *Striking Back. A History of COSATU*, (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1991), 103.

clashes, there was also an atmosphere of tolerance and debate at the local level. Not only did friendships cut across political affiliation but they were also accepted. AZAPO's Richard Mqadi taught at a local night school with the well-known Inkatha leader Zakhele Nkehli (a distant relation, as their mothers were both from the Cele clan). Given their common interest in politics, they discussed the political issues of the day, with Mqadi a frequent visitor at Nkehli's house. Nkehli, well aware that he had little interest in joining Inkatha, nevertheless invited him to attend Inkatha meetings and rallies.

There were other intimacies and friendships that cut across political affiliation. James Ngubane, who was to become prominent in the local AZAPO leadership, was a close school-friend of Nkehli. They had both attended Isibukosezwe High School in unit three (Nkehli living in unit four and Ngubane in unit two south).

He used to be my friend and class-mate. We were sitting on one desk, we were four friends, and we were called the *viemanskap*. There was a book that we were reading, it was an Afrikaans book *Viemanskap*. It was myself, Zakhele Nkehli, another guy Patrick Hlongwane and the fourth one was Petrus. And then, this thing of politics separated us.⁸⁰

Nkehli joined Inkatha while he was still at school. He respected his friend's church orientation:

I was not interested in politics because at that time I was a church-goer, and did not try to persuade him to join Inkatha. It was only once he left school and began working at South African Nylon Spinners in Hammarsdale that Ngubane became politically active. He joined the NUTW, became involved in the Mpumalanga Residents' Association and through that joined Inkatha, and finally AZAPO.⁸¹

The reason I joined Inkatha is not that I like Inkatha. It's because I was involved in the community organisation called the Mpumalanga Residents Association. ... I moved out of Inkatha because I like this idea of Black Consciousness ideology. I like this. So that is why I joined AZAPO.⁸²

Sbu Mbele an active member of AZAPO and AZASM was best friends with the son of a local councillor and prominent Inkatha member, Simon Cele: "We used to talk about

⁸⁰ Interview Ngubane, tape 1, 7.

⁸¹ Interview Ngubane, tape 1, 8.

⁸² Interview Ngubane, tape 1, 4.

issues; I used buy magazines and specifically looking into the political side of things”.⁸³

These stories alert us to the situation that existed prior to political violence. Youth who were interested in politics were drawn to each other. They exchanged literature and enjoyed the cut and thrust of debate. Conflict and tolerance coexisted, debate was free-flowing, friendships and even membership cut across political boundaries. As in many other parts of the country the youth, during the 1980s, were becoming political actors.⁸⁴

Tensions rise between political organisations

Relations that exist in one place are never untouched by relationships between and across spaces. Mpumalanga Township could not remain isolated from the political tensions in the rest of the country. The coexistence of conflict and tolerance, always a volatile balance, was stretched tighter and tighter as the 1980s progressed. Shifts in local politics articulated with national political dynamics, to raise the stakes at the local level.

Firstly, Inkatha was losing its youth membership; initially to AZAPO and then to the HAYCO. Inkatha tolerated the coexistence of other organisations as long as they dominated. In 1981 Inkatha lost the Township Council elections to MPURA-backed candidates. This had demonstrated that they did not have overwhelming support amongst the adults and now it appeared they were now losing support amongst the youth. Much of the jockeying for membership happened amongst the youth. Secondly, all parties were facing the pressures ‘from outside’. Regional Inkatha leadership was not comfortable with AZAPO’s presence and growing support in Mpumalanga. They were even less happy with personal friendships across parties. AZAPO’s own national policy was against collaboration with homeland leaders. Both the charterists and AZAPO national leadership were publicly attacking each other’s positions.⁸⁵ Local leaders would have been under pressure to demonstrate that their branches were not out of line with organisational policies:

⁸³ Interview Mbhele, tape 1, 2.

⁸⁴ M. Marks, *Young Warriors. Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001); C. Carter, “‘We are the progressives’: Alexandra Youth Congress activists and the Freedom Charter, 1983-1985”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17, no. 2 1991, 197-220; K. Naidoo, “The politics of youth resistance in the 1980s: the dilemmas of a differentiated Durban”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 1 1991, 143-165; Seekings, *The UDF*; Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle*.

⁸⁵ Seekings, *The UDF*.

... and also the word went to Ulundi that they were allowing AZAPO to operate there, and I think he [Nkehli] was facing some difficulties. ... I use to visit him at home, at his home,... but as time went on I also got increasing pressure from my colleagues who were saying that this guy is actually urging their people to attack them...⁸⁶

The increasing tensions and the potential for violence were publicly signalled at a series of public meetings organised by both Inkatha and AZAPO. The result of each of these meetings was a shift in membership away from Inkatha towards AZAPO (and later from AZAPO to the UDF), frequently accompanied by either threats of or actual violence.

AZAPO's first public event in Mpumalanga was a Sharpville Commemoration Meeting on 21 March 1983. The commemoration was attended by AZAPO members from other branches, as well as, the national leadership including the president. It was also attended by a large number of Inkatha members who, according to Mqadi, intended to disrupt the meeting. However, this backfired and Inkatha began to lose membership to AZAPO. Mqadi recalled this meeting as a turning point in terms of the popularity of both organisations.

We outnumbered them and most of the people they had organised, it was mainly kids, you know, I mean very young compared to us. So in terms of force, they could not use force in terms of disrupting the meeting... they confronted us with a number of questions... the more question they were putting forward the more it was easy for us to clarify our position... after that meeting a number of people who had come to disrupt the meeting actually got interested... Some of them wanted to join the organisation. And in fact it just opened gates from Inkatha of people who flocking from Inkatha to AZAPO."⁸⁷

This meeting also illustrated the generational revolt that was taking place in Inkatha politics. Previously Inkatha had always been seen as an organisation of the parents but now the Inkatha Youth Brigade dominated Inkatha politics⁸⁸ and became the public face of Inkatha. Given that AZAPO also had a predominately youthful membership, more generally politics in Mpumalanga now became the domain of the youth. These internal shifts in generational power were reinforced by the national campaigns linked to the United Nations International Youth Year in 1985. While these campaigns might not have been successful, they did emphasis youth leadership and political agency.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Interview Mqadi, tape 1, 4.

⁸⁷ Interview Mqadi, tape 1, 3.

⁸⁸ Interview, Buthelezi.

⁸⁹ Seekings, *The UDF*.

As AZAPO's Mpumalanga membership increased, so strategies employed elsewhere in the province were used to exert pressure. Throughout the province, all employees of the KwaZulu Government – teachers, civil servants and officials – were expected to express their loyalty through membership of Inkatha. Failure to comply led to censure, unemployment and even physical injury.⁹⁰ These threats had personal significance for Richard Mqadi.

We had started the branch around March, in June 1983 I was employed by the KwaZulu Government, the Department of the Interior, when I was employed of course people who employed me didn't know about my political affiliation. I was the chairman of AZAPO when I was employed. I was employed as a clerk. And immediately when I had been employed the news broke because of the activities of AZAPO that I was actually a member of AZAPO. Apparently there was a pressure to the township management who had employed me.⁹¹

Later that year, he, together with Ngubane, accepted an invitation from Nkehli to attend an Inkatha youth meeting at the Mpumalanga College of Education. Despite having invited them, Nkehli used the meeting as a platform to attack AZAPO and, in particular, Mqadi's employment by the KwaZulu Government.

... while we were still inside that meeting, [he] stood up and said 'I'm glad that AZAPO members are here I want to introduce them to you, ... Mr Richard Cele, he's working for our government but he's opposed to our government. We are feeding him.' And they people started shouting they wanted to attack him...⁹²

1984 and 1985 saw a jostling for membership and increasing hostility between AZAPO and Inkatha. Some, like James Ngubane, left Inkatha to join AZAPO without problems, others were subjected to violence.

Romeo Khumalo, he was among those people who attended the [Sharpsville] commemoration, and after that commemoration he approached me, he wanted to join. He ... went to attend an Inkatha meeting, and at that Inkatha meeting they felt that Romeo didn't speak well at that commemoration, he was being in support of AZAPO instead of being supporting of Inkatha. So he was beaten at that meeting... so Romeo ran away from that meeting where he was beaten and came straight to our meeting ... So we received Romeo.⁹³

In August 1983 the UDF was launched nationally. At first there were no formal structures in Mpumalanga Township, though COSAS provided a congress presence. Political

⁹⁰ See N. Gwala, *Political violence and the struggle for control in Pietermaritzburg*.

⁹¹ Interview Mqadi, tape 1, 5.

⁹² Interview Ngubane, tape 1, 9.

⁹³ Interview Mqadi, tape 1, 9.

tensions increased after the Ngoya massacre of 23 October 1983.⁹⁴ According to Ngubane, Inkatha people from Mpumalanga were involved – “there were people bussed from Mpumalanga to Ngoya. ... Inkatha people they were bussed to Ngoya”.⁹⁵ A commemoration service for those who had died in the massacre was organised by Reverend Ben Ngidi from the Apostolic Church in unit one. The meeting was addressed by Archie Gumede, regional chairperson of the UDF in Natal.⁹⁶ This meeting introduced the UDF into the township in a very public way. Many younger AZAPO members attended this meeting and joined the UDF structures thereafter.⁹⁷

The First Attacks

ANC-aligned political activist Victoria Mxenge was murdered on 5 August 1985 outside her home in Umlazi Township, south of Durban.⁹⁸ The response to her death was almost immediate; youths took to the street protesting and attacking government buildings.⁹⁹ Within a few days the street protests, burning and looting had spread to most townships around Durban. Inkatha marshalled its *amabutho* in order to restore law and order. In Mpumalanga Nkehli managed to convince the council and business people (the same MPURA members) that the violence and the looting being experienced in Durban’s townships could reach Mpumalanga.

He managed to get funds from them, some, one of the men Mr Mkhize, he’s got a lot of butcheries there. He used to offer meat for youth, because what they did they put up a tent in the road, in the road that enters Mpumalanga. So they put up a tent searching all the cars that were coming to Mpumalanga. So they were backed by those business people.¹⁰⁰

AZAPO members from outside of Mpumalanga, Strini Moodley and Selby Baqwa were caught in the road block. They were held and questioned by Nkehli for seven hours before

⁹⁴ Inkatha supporters killed five students and injured over a hundred at the University of Zululand at Ngoye. see Seekings, *The UDF*.

⁹⁵ Interview, Ngubane, tape 1, 2.

⁹⁶ Archie Gumede was an ex-Robben islander. He lived in Clermont Township, a staunchly UDF-supporting area, near Pinetown. Gumede was to establish close contact with the UDF-youth from Mpumalanga Township.

⁹⁷ Interview Mqadi, tape 1, 8.

⁹⁸ This has been marked as a significant event in the politics of Natal. It is seen as a turning point in the periodisation of violent conflict in the province (see A. Minnaar, “An overview of conflict in Natal during the 1980s and 1990s”, in *Patterns of Violence. Case Studies of Conflict in Natal*, ed. A. Minnar (Pretoria: HSRC, 1992), 1-26.) and in the relationship between the UDF and Inkatha.

⁹⁹ A. Sitas, “Inanda, August 1985: ‘Where wealth and power and blood reign worshipped Gods’”, *South African Labour Bulletin*, 11, no. 4, 1986, 85-121.

¹⁰⁰ Interview Ngubane, tape 1, 9.

being released on instruction from the Pietermaritzburg security branch.¹⁰¹

Eight days later Mandla Mthembu, a member of the AZAPO executive in Mpumalanga was attacked. An attempt was made to abduct him from his home in unit one south and he was stabbed in the back with an assagai.¹⁰² As there had been open conflict between the UDF and AZAPO in other areas of Natal,¹⁰³ at first they thought the UDF was responsible for the attack: "... Mandla said no I think it was Inkatha. There were people, in fact they were singing around the house, you know the same guy, Nkehli guy, came there was speaking all sort of things".¹⁰⁴

The following night Richard Mqadi's house was attacked.

...I said Mandla can't you leave this spear with me because they are coming for me and I don't have anything. So Mandla left the spear so that if they come to me I would actually try and defend myself. So early hours of Sunday they actually came. And they busted the roof and we had to try and mop the place because it was burning. They threw petrol bombs and the sofas inside were burning. ...¹⁰⁵

In response Mqadi left Mpumalanga briefly, returning within two weeks. In mid-September Inkatha attacked again, they assaulted and stabbed James Ngubane outside the shops at KwaMcoyi.¹⁰⁶

AZAPO claimed that the names of their members appeared on a hit-list and they were being targeted by vigilantes.¹⁰⁷ Rumour had it that Nkehli was behind the attacks. James Ngubane who had a close friendship with Nkehli explained why he was targeted; these attacks changed their relationship causing him to hate his former friend.

... he [Nkehli] organised people to go and kill me when I was going to work. ... I heard that the meeting was at his place, it was organised that I should be killed because I'm too dangerous because I used to be Inkatha member, though at that time Inkatha was not violent,

¹⁰¹ Interview Moodley

¹⁰² Interview Mthembu, tape 1, 10.

¹⁰³ In 1985 conflict broke out between UDF and black consciousness youth in Imbali (a black township outside Pietermaritzburg). This was resolved through negotiations (see J. Aitchison, "The civil war in Natal", in *South African Review* 5, ed. G Moss & I Obery (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1989), 457-473.)

¹⁰⁴ Interview Mqadi, tape 1, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Interview Mqadi, tape 1, 2.

¹⁰⁶ Mcoyi is a prominent Mpumalanga family. Some of them like Rejoice Mcoyi were business people, others are in education. KwaMcoyi is the name by which a cluster of shops and a transport hub, in unit two, is known.

¹⁰⁷ *The Natal Witness*, 11 and 13 September 1985.

because they said no people are going to listen to this person because he used to be Inkatha member. Ja. So I started to hate him.¹⁰⁸

This attack threw the organisation into crisis. By attacking James Ngubane, Inkatha had irrevocably stepped closer to the boundaries of ‘acceptable conflict’. The issue facing AZAPO was how they should respond. The students within AZAPO, members of AZASM, wanted to attack back. Mqadi explained that it took all the leadership’s powers to hold them back.¹⁰⁹ As the leadership, they felt that it would be suicidal to shift the terrain unless they had access to weapons.

And then, we finally took a resolution, that if anyone of us got killed by Inkatha then that would be a strong reason for us to go all out and kill Inkatha with whatever we had in our hands. ... We had a meeting the whole night at James’ place and that was the resolution.¹¹⁰

They also decided to retreat from the public life of the community.

The other resolution we took was that we had to go underground. We must be seen as an organisation that is no longer operating. So, our meetings were not going to be in the open. But we had to meet at all hours. Because it would seem that Inkatha just wanted to see AZAPO not all in operation.¹¹¹

According to Mqadi, relations between Inkatha and AZAPO continued to deteriorate.¹¹² Inkatha member’s threatened and intimidated their members at every opportunity, beating them if they found them walking through the streets of Mpumalanga. Mqadi would phone his comrades to escort him home from work: “... they came to the office where I was working at unit two, they used to come there and show assagai through the windows where I was working, that they were going to get me”.¹¹³

In an attempt to stop the attacks and ease the tension, AZAPO initiated, in late 1985, the formation of a common organisation – the Black Unity Youth Association (BUYA). Inkatha, through Nkehli, agreed to participate. To ensure a charterist presence, in the absence of a formal structure, AZAPO co-opted the sons of a well-known Robben Islander.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Interview Ngubane, tape 1, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Interview, Mqadi, tape 2, 3.

¹¹⁰ Interview Mqadi, tape 2, 3.

¹¹¹ Interview Mqadi, tape 2, 3.

¹¹² Interview, Mqadi, tape 1, 8.

¹¹³ Interview Mqadi, tape 1, 10.

¹¹⁴ Interview Mqadi, tape 1, 10.

However, in the face of continued attacks, BUYA disintegrated.

So he was so happy when the whole thing was started. But when the attacks happened, we felt that, I mean he was actually saying that this BUYA thing should be done away with. So he was regretting to be involved in the whole thing.¹¹⁵

Against the background of this rising tension, Mpumalanga residents working in the Hammarsdale textile factories challenged their union NUTW to respond to the issue of Inkatha. At Provincial level, accusations of being anti-COSATU were levelled at the NUTW leadership. A split resulted, the splinter union, Textile and Allied Workers Union (TAWU), had a strong support base in the Hammarsdale and Pinetown factories.¹¹⁶ James Ngubane, a shop steward at South African Nylon Spinners in Hammarsdale took the whole of his factory over to TAWU.¹¹⁷ Consequently, TAWU attracted support from both AZAPO and AZASM in Mpumalanga.¹¹⁸ In early 1986, Inkatha attacked a joint TAWU / AZASM meeting in Mpumalanga, those attending were badly beaten.¹¹⁹ AZAPO leadership interpreted this to signify that Inkatha was now openly attacking them.

Early 1986 was a time of ferment for AZAPO as it attempted to strategise and find solutions. The debate centred on whether they should retaliate. It was felt that without access to weapons AZAPO was very vulnerable and would not be able to take on Inkatha. One response was an attempt to form alliances with charterists in the township.

... Now UDF was there but they didn't have a structure. Now we had some meetings behind closed doors, trying to find out what we can do. ... So we made a deal with these guys, so look guys is there anything that you could help us. So they said no they were going to go to Archie Gumede and to Lamontville and to Chesterville to try and get some [weapons]. It went on and on ... So we realised we were not going to get anything out of these guys. We realised they were willing to help us but their leadership knew that they cannot give any arms to AZAPO. But at least there was no hostility between us and them.¹²⁰

In March 1986 a mob attacked the M. Glazier Hall in Mpumalanga, after the staging of the play *Asinamali*.¹²¹ The play's promoter was killed. *Asinamali* provided a critical

¹¹⁵ Interview Mqadi, tape 3, 2.

¹¹⁶ See Baskin, *Striking Back*, 113.

¹¹⁷ James Ngubane was elected vice-president of Textile and Allied Workers Union.

¹¹⁸ Interview Mqadi, tape 1, 8.

¹¹⁹ AZASM had organised this meeting without consulting or informing the AZAPO leadership. Perhaps an indication of their unhappiness with the previous decisions not to openly confront Inkatha.

¹²⁰ Interview Mqadi, tape 1, 10.

¹²¹ *The Natal Witness*, 22 March 1986.

account of the township rent system and was workshopped in the wake of the rent boycott in Lamontville Township, Durban.¹²² It had been suggested that this play was responsible for “fermenting discontent among Durban audiences and was not needed by the people of KwaZulu”.¹²³ Those associated with the play claimed that Inkatha was behind the attack.

The formation of a branch of the NOW in 1986 was a further indication of the growing congress presence in the township.¹²⁴ NOW, a regional affiliate of the UDF, had branches in most of the Durban townships. It was frequently perceived as an organisation for the *gogos* - older women. Not only did the formation of the branch in Mpumalanga provide a platform for women to become involved in community life and politics, it also counter-balanced the dominance of public life by the youth and their organisations.

In the following months there was a second attack on AZAPO. Approximately six houses were attacked with petrol-bombs.¹²⁵ The AZAPO leadership met, but were still not prepared to authorise revenge attacks on Inkatha. They had not been able to access weapons and it was clear that Inkatha was not prepared to co-exist with them. Instead Mqadi decided to leave Mpumalanga, hoping this would satisfy Inkatha. He explained the mood: “... we were very much confused, and we were beginning to lose confidence in ourselves because it was at a stage when there was no help”.¹²⁶

The leadership’s decision alienated many of the student-members, and they began to look for an alternative organisation. Mqadi applied for a transfer to Umlazi. He left Mpumalanga in May 1986, commuting into work from Umlazi until the transfer came through.

By early 1986 Inkatha was beginning to dominate public space in Mpumalanga. AZAPO had decided not to confront their increasingly violent tactics and had withdrawn from the organisational terrain. The ex-MPURA dominated Township Council had acquiesced to Inkatha controlling the streets in the aftermath of Mxenge’s assassination. All

¹²² Lamontville was also associated with the Joint Rent Association (an UDF affiliate) which, along with Clermont, Hambanati and Chesterville, was opposing incorporation into KwaZulu.

¹²³ *The Natal Witness*, 22 March 1986.

¹²⁴ Interview Zondo, tape 1, 1.

¹²⁵ Interview Mqadi, tape 2, 4.

¹²⁶ Interview Mqadi, tape 2, 3.

these happenings signified the beginning of the reconstruction and redefinition of space in Mpumalanga. Furthermore, this reconstruction was being driven by male youth. Both the Inkatha-of-Nkehli, in effect the Inkatha Youth Brigade, and AZAPO were organisations of male youth. The formation of the UDF-aligned HAYCO was a response to this situation.

The Formation of the Hammarsdale Youth Congress

Other youth activists associated with Congress politics had also fled Mpumalanga. Many were living in Umlazi Township but travelling daily, by train, to school in Mpumalanga. These train trips became the site of heated political debate where the launch of a new youth organisation was discussed.

It was more UDF youth, myself, and some of BC guys who had left there in the township. So we discussed about the formation of Hayco. And they were actually asking advice from me. And I was saying that look guys, we have decided as AZAPO to go underground. But if you guys think you can actually take on Inkatha then you can, but we think it would be dangerous for anyone to come and challenge Inkatha at this stage. ... We just don't think you are going to make it.¹²⁷

Deciding that they would not let Inkatha go unchallenged, the youth formed the HAYCO in mid-1986. The decision of the AZAPO leadership not to fight back had angered and alienated many of the younger student members. They looked towards the UDF and many joined HAYCO, including the articulate and ambitious AZASM secretary Vusi Maduna,¹²⁸ who went on to become HAYCO president. Tensions between youth aligned to the UDF and those belonging to Inkatha were increasing. This was exacerbated by the rapid growth of HAYCO which drew not only disaffected AZAPO members but also Inkatha Youth Brigade members.¹²⁹ One of HAYCO's first activities was to organise a school boycott demanding free stationery and books. The boycott lasted three months and at least one school was petrol-bombed.¹³⁰

HAYCO had been formed by young militant youth who, unlike the AZAPO

¹²⁷ Interview Mqadi, tape 2, 4.

¹²⁸ Newspaper reports at the time of his death suggest that Vusi Maduna was the Inkatha Youth Brigade treasurer. I have not been able to confirm his membership of Inkatha, but all my oral sources indicate that he was a well-known AZAPO member and the personal friend of many of the AZAPO leadership in the period immediately prior to his membership of HAYCO.

¹²⁹ *The Weekly Mail*, 27 February - 5 March 1987.

¹³⁰ *Pace*, November 1988:63.

leadership, were not prepared to strategise a third-way with Inkatha. It is uncertain if their *raison d'être* was to fly the UDF flag or to take on Inkatha. Tensions escalated and positions hardened on both sides. Israel Hlongwane described how he was accosted by prominent HAYCO members – including his neighbour.¹³¹ They wished to know why Inkatha members were frequenting his home. According to Hlongwane, houses had already been attacked and in the light of his neighbour's response, "I would see what he would do to me", he feared his home would be next. His cousin alerted him to a rumour that his home was to be attacked. He joined Inkatha to obtain protection.

From that day on I associated myself with the youths who supported Inkatha. I started attending Inkatha meetings. I also took part in the fighting between the UDF and Inkatha. This fighting included assaulting and stabbing anybody who was a UDF supporter, the burning down of their homes and stopping the UDF youths from going to schools that were predominantly Inkatha schools. At that time there was intense fighting between the youth of the different political parties but very little between the adults.¹³²

Conclusion

The primary question this paper is interested in is how established 'ways of doing politics' became disrupted. The paper shows that in the late 1970s, Mpumalanga Township had a busy and energetic political and cultural life, with many different kinds of organisations flourishing. However, the period of the early to mid-1980s demonstrates the transition to a different form of politics. The tacit understandings of the 'ways of doing politics' that were so obvious in the earlier period (i.e. non-violent, using legitimate channels of governance, respect for patriarchal authority) were implicitly challenged by the events in this half-decade. During this period the youth come to dominate politics with the significant organisations being those of young people. Older men and women, young and old, became marginalised from politics as from the mid-80s violence became the accepted 'way of doing politics'.

¹³¹ Hlongwane, TRC Affidavit, S6.

¹³² Hlongwane, TRC Affidavit, S8.