

# The eye of a violent storm: Inanda, 1985

Ashwin Desai

*Sociology Department, Kingsway Campus*

*University of Johannesburg*

agdesai@uj.ac.za

## ***Abstract***

In 1985 the United Democratic Front (UDF) was at the centre of country wide protests against the apartheid state. In Durban community protests were sparked by the assassination of UDF leader Victoria Mxenge. Across the African townships from Umlazi to KwaMashu the symbols and agents of apartheid were confronted. In Inanda these protests took a different turn when Indian residents and traders were turned on which led to a large exodus of Indians into the neighbouring township of Phoenix. Inanda then became a battleground between Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) aligned warlords and those associated with the UDF. This article looks at those events by seeking to discern the different phases of the violence in Inanda, the participants in the violence and the differing objectives. Through this analysis the article seeks to offer both fresh insights as well as more directly addressing whether the violence in Inanda was anti-apartheid or anti-Indian. The conclusion uses this analysis to consider the present state of Indo-African relations.

**Keywords:** Inanda; Indian/African riots; Violence; Anti-apartheid protests; Anti-Indianism.

## **Introduction**

Throughout 1985, there were mass protests across South Africa. Student and consumer boycotts of white-owned shops and joint worker/community protests spread from major urban centres, deep into the small rural towns of the Eastern Cape. Durban was relatively quiet. But in early August, this was to change.<sup>1</sup>

The spark for the upsurge was the assassination on 1 August 1985, of a prominent United Democratic Front (UDF) leader, Victoria Mxenge, outside her house in Umlazi. Protesting the assassination, a school strike and boycott

---

<sup>1</sup> J Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991* (Claremont, SA and Oxford, David Phillip Publishers and James Currey Publishers, 2000), pp. 280-290.

spread out of Umlazi and engulfed KwaMashu, Clermont, Lamontville and Inanda in quick succession.

While the spark that set off the spiral of violence was the assassination, the form that the violence took displayed a significant degree of specificity in different areas. In Inanda, gangs of youths began threatening Indian shopkeepers, landlords and residents. The threats gave rise to mass panic. When on 6 August, two Indian-owned shops and houses were looted and burned; hundreds of Indians left Inanda and sought refuge in the adjoining Indian township of Phoenix. By the end of the week, 42 Indian owned shops and businesses and many houses were destroyed, while 2,000 Indian refugees pondered their future in Phoenix.

While there are a few studies on the violence,<sup>2</sup> they were written in the immediate aftermath of the riots and in a context when it was politically correct to underplay racial tensions, or at least to blame it on the apartheid state, and rather focus on points of cooperation. The violence came as a shock to political activists who had invested considerable time and energy in improving Afro-Indian relations in the years following the racial riots of 1949.<sup>3</sup>

The formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1984 was seen as the culmination of several decades of striving for non-racialism since the heady days of the Congress Alliance in the 1950s. For Fatima Meer, it was during these years that Indians acquired a Black identity and for Julie Frederickse, it represented “the unbreakable thread” of non-racialism that flowed through the Congress movement.<sup>4</sup>

It is not surprising then that for Meer, the hand of the white government was behind the 1985 Inanda violence:<sup>5</sup>

Inanda has been earmarked for “release” to Africans in terms of the 1936 Land Act, but... the Government (has not) enough money to buy off privately owned land. How better to short-circuit the whole process than... through a racial attack?

---

2 A Sitas, “Inanda, August 1985: Where wealth and power and blood reign worshipped gods”, *South African Labour Bulletin*, 11(4), 1987, pp. 85-119; H Hughes, “Violence in Inanda, August 1985”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13(3), pp. 331-354.

3 A Desai & G Vahed, *Monty Naicker. Between reason and treason* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter, 2010), pp. 173-205, for a discussion of the causes, course and consequences of the riots.

4 F Meer, “Indentured labour and group formation in apartheid society”, *Race & Class*, XXVI(4), 1985, pp. 45-60; J Frederickse, *The unbreakable thread: Non-racialism in South Africa* (Bloomington, Indiana Press, 1990).

5 F Meer, *Resistance in the townships* (Durban, Madiba Publications, 1989), p. 36.

In trying to avoid directing attention to Indian/African tension, Meer considered that a theory of conspiracy existed. In critiquing conspiracy theories of urban violence, Lupsha argues that even if the theory contains a seed of truth:<sup>6</sup>

one still has difficulty explaining the obvious mass support given riots without admitting that some more fundamental basis of unrest exists. For if people were content, the best organised conspiracy should fail for lack of support.

It is noteworthy that in her study of the 1949 Indian/African riots, Meer had reached similar conclusions, holding that it was part of a white vendetta against Indians, manipulating African frustrations for this purpose.<sup>7</sup> Meer does not explore why the 1949 and 1985 riots received such widespread support from the African populace, and concludes by characterising the African participants in the 1949 riots as basically “disembodied abstract things” and the 1985 participants as mobs of criminals and opportunists.<sup>8</sup>

In her study of the violence in Inanda, Hughes painstakingly sets out the deteriorating socio-economic conditions in the 1980s under which the African people in Inanda had to labour, but largely neglects the non-material factors such as culture, ethnicity, ideology, and individual or group psychologies which acted to reinforce and reinterpret particular aspects of this material environment. These non-material elements act as windows through which the actors concerned view the world and their place within it. As Byerley reminds us:<sup>9</sup>

While an analysis of the prevailing material and political conditions should form the basis for any serious analysis of contemporary violence in South Africa this precondition should not be substituted for the analysis itself. Central to such an analysis is the question of how identities and alliances are constructed in particular localities and the role of ethnicity (and indeed other lines of social differentiation) in this construction.

Hughes argues that the reason Africans singled out Indians should be seen as a result of the way in which apartheid state policies manipulated racial divisions over a long period, but more thoroughly so in the five years preceding the

---

6 P Lupsha, “On theories of urban violence”, *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, 4(3), 1969, pp. 273-296.

7 F Meer, *Resistance in the townships...*, p. 36.

8 E Webster, “The 1949 Durban riots: A case study in race and class”, P Bonner (ed.), *Working papers in Southern African studies* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978), p. 22.

9 M Byerley, “Ethnicity, violence and social differentiation: A case study of conflict in number 5 – A squatter settlement south of Durban”, (Unpublished paper, University of Durban-Westville, 1992), p. 3.

violence.<sup>10</sup> Ethnic mobilisation cannot simply be seen as something foisted upon people by the state. The possible impulses from below emanating from the lived reality also need to be researched and cannot simply be discounted.

Hughes was writing at a time when there was great emphasis on class in South African historiography. This was in response to the dominant pluralist school of the 1960s and early 70s, which was critiqued by Marxists as being race reductionist.<sup>11</sup> However, the Marxists tended to assume that economic relations immediately and directly defined the interests of class entities. No space is allowed for the contribution of non-economic conditions to the formation of class interests.<sup>12</sup> When sections of the working class coalesce around ethnic labels and turn on each other, for example, Indian and African workers, this approach has limited explanatory value. The state is blamed for fomenting division, or divisions are blamed on treacherous leadership (usually the villainous petit-bourgeoisie) or are said to be an example of false consciousness.

In attempting to bend the stick from race to class, there was often an underplaying of race and ethnicity in analyses of South African society. This partly explains why Hughes' study does not recognise that the riots were a complex and differentiated phenomena. Hughes tells us that Meer's account of events in Inanda should be treated as a useful "source book rather than a sustained analysis".<sup>13</sup> Her own neglect of an engagement with theories of civil violence means that Hughes' analysis also falls short. In fact, despite protestations to the contrary, Hughes, like Meer, sees the state as a manipulator of the Africans' attack on Indians.

A more meaningful approach to issues of class and ethnicity is provided by Ekekwe who argues that one has to appreciate its dialectical interconnectedness rather than emphasising one or the other.<sup>14</sup>

It is against this background of existing work that this paper revisits the Inanda violence three decades after its occurrence with the benefit of hindsight, and twenty years of living in a post-apartheid democracy. It asks the following questions in a systematic way: Who were the participants in the riot?; Were the riots spontaneous or planned, and if spontaneous, did certain

---

10 H Hughes, "Violence in Inanda", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13(3), 1987, p. 353.

11 H Wolpe, *Race, class and the apartheid state* (London, James Currey, 1988), pp. 14-15.

12 H Wolpe, *Race, class and the apartheid state...*, pp.14-15.

13 H Hughes, "Violence in Inanda", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13(3), 1987, p. 332.

14 E Ekekwe, H Om, *Burning issues in Jammu and Kashmir politics* (Michigan, Jay Kay Book House, 1999), p. 9.

groups subsequently provide the riots with leadership and organisation?; Was the violence anti-Indian, or were Indians conveniently available targets symbolising privilege?; Was the riot an irrational outburst directed against all authority or a purposeful anti-apartheid struggle?

This article seeks to use existing literature on the crowd in history to explore the violence in Inanda. It also uses middleman minority theory to attempt to explain why Indians were attacked.

### ***The crowd in History***

There have been two broad perspectives to literature on the crowd. On the one hand, there are those who see the crowd as irrational, impulsive and barbaric<sup>15</sup> and, on the other, those who see the crowd as essentially normal people responding in a violent way against those they see as responsible in some way for their grievances.<sup>16</sup>

The approach adopted in this article avoids seeing crowds as rational or irrational. Rather, it follows the approach of Dunning et al. who suggest that the terms “rational” and “irrational” are misleading and argue that:<sup>17</sup>

... it might be more fruitful to see crowds not as ‘rational’ or ‘irrational’, but rather to explore the changing balance over time between what one may call the ‘expressive’ and the ‘instrumental’ aspects of different types of disorders...

... “expressive” violence being the cathartic release of aggression, and “instrumental” violence being protest to redress grievances.

By focusing on collective violence, it also allows us to focus on the composition of those participating in the riots, giving us deeper insights into the possible different phases of collective violence and motivations for participation.

In this context, this article takes the notion of locale seriously, because it is held that the actual form that violence takes is largely influenced by issues specific to the locale in which the violence occurs. Gaskell and Bennewick, amongst others, argue that when one looks for the flashpoints of violence,

---

15 G Le Bon, *The crowd: A study of the popular mind* (London, Fisher Unwin, 1895/1960), p. 12.

16 EJ Hobsbawm, *Primitive rebels: Studies in archaic forms of social movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1971), pp. 11-18.

17 E Dunning et.al, “Violent disorders in twentieth century Britain”, G Gaskell & R Bennewick (eds.), *The crowd in contemporary Britain* (London, Sage, 1987), p. 24.

locale is a critical element in the search for explanation.<sup>18</sup> They argue that the local context in which the events occur needs to be examined along with amongst other things the national context-political change, economic recession and the material deprivation experienced by subjugated communities. This is usefully elaborated by Parry, Moyser and Wagstaff:<sup>19</sup>

Locality may be a crucially important factor in crowd mobilization and in understanding the aftermath of disturbances. National trends in unemployment and economic recession are refracted through the prism of locality into conditions in which the individual functions. However mobile our society, the local spatial dimension is a necessary and major part of our experience.

### ***The middleman minority***

In trying to analyse the relationship between African and Indian, the idea of middleman minority is useful. As Blalock points out, that which distinguished these “middlemen” groups is the economic role they play. Unlike most ethnic minorities, they occupy an intermediate rather than a low-status position. They are generally found in certain occupations, mainly trade and commerce, but also as labour contractor, rent collector, money lender, and broker. They play the role of middleman between producer and consumer, employer and employee, owner and renter, elite and masses.<sup>20</sup>

Rinder argues that middleman minorities arise in societies where there is a “status gap”, defining this as “the discontinuity, the yawning social void which occurs when superior and subordinate positions are not bridged by continuous, immediate degrees of status.” The “status gap” produces an economic gap because elites fear that through direct trade relationships “their prestige, their ‘face’, their aura of superiority could be reduced”.<sup>21</sup>

Rinder points out that the middleman minorities or people in the status gap are scapegoats “par excellence”. Scapegoats, according to Rinder, often deflect hostility away from the superior status group.

---

18 G Gaskell & R Bennewick, “The crowd in context”, G Gaskell & R Bennewick (eds.), *The crowd in contemporary Britain...*, p. 17.

19 G Parry, G Moyser & M Wagstaff, “The crowd and the community: Context, content and aftermath”, G Gaskell & R Bennewick (eds.), *The crowd in contemporary Britain...*, p. 213.

20 H Blalock, *Toward a theory of minority group relations* (New York, John Wiley, 1967), pp. 79-84.

21 I Rinder, “Strangers in the land: Social relations in the status gap”, *Social Problems*, 6, 1958-1959, pp. 253-260.

“This is the classic function of the scapegoat, to attract and drain off in lightning-rod fashion, the hostility which might otherwise be more accurately directed toward different targets”.<sup>22</sup>

This deflection of hostility onto the people in the gap is facilitated by the fact that they are more accessible. These people, unlike those of superior status, live in close proximity to their clientele.

### ***Inanda - August 1985***

On the night of the 5th August, a group of youths besieged the house of a policeman in Ntuzuma, a township adjacent to Inanda and the policeman fatally shot one of the youths. “The following day, the ‘rolling strike’ now enraged, reached Inanda”.<sup>23</sup> That afternoon, the looting of Indian-owned shops began, the pattern of which was to continue through Wednesday and Thursday.

As over a thousand refugees made their way into the apartheid created Indian township of Phoenix, tensions and anger heightened. On Friday 9th August, armed groups massed on both sides of the Inanda/Phoenix divide, spoiling for a fight. It was during this stand-off that the Gandhi Phoenix settlement, a shrine of peace, was ransacked and destroyed.

While the drama unfolded at the Gandhi settlement, a new factor had entered the fray. A resident in Ntuzuma reported on Friday 9th August that Inkatha supporters armed with sticks were going from house to house, trying to persuade people to join them. “They are taking anybody. They say there are people they want to kill”.<sup>24</sup> Inkatha impis armed with spears began to engage UDF-aligned youth in KwaMashu and Umlazi. By Saturday, they had seized control of both townships.

The Lindelani impi which had tamed KwaMashu now turned their attention to Inanda. However, they met with sustained resistance. A series of attacks were beaten off by Inanda residents and many residents in Inanda turned against Inkatha since the attacks were carried out in its name.

---

22 I Rinder, “Strangers in the...”, *Social Problems*, 6, 1958-9, pp. 253-260.

23 H Hughes, “Violence in Inanda...”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13(3), 1987, p. 348.

24 *Daily News*, 9 August 1985.

On Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August, Inkatha called a meeting to try and establish peace in the Phoenix and Inanda areas. About 5000 Inkatha supporters and approximately 100 Indians attended the meeting. Oscar Dhlomo, General Secretary of Inkatha, told the meeting that Inkatha had taken control of the township in order to put an end to the violence, and to protect property, public buildings and businesses.<sup>25</sup> The last incident of violence in Inanda, identifiable as part of the August upsurge, occurred exactly a week after it had all begun. On Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> August, the burnt bodies of three Indian men were found on the Phoenix/Inanda border. They were all from the same family: a father, his son, and his brother-in-law.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Analysis of the 1985 violence***

South Africa's black townships were engulfed in mass action and political violence throughout 1985. Durban's townships were relatively quiet, seemingly "out of sync" with the patterns of conflict in the rest of the country. The singular explanation touted by the media for this situation was the moderating influence of the Inkatha movement.<sup>27</sup> In August, all this changed. Durban's townships exploded, leaving some 70 dead and over 1000 people injured. The violence in Inanda needs to be understood in the context of the general conflict in Durban's townships.

There were two broad phases to the violence. The first phase, involving mainly students, was a direct response to Victoria Mxenge's assassination. The second was a violent response to the protests from within Inkatha ranks.

In the first phase, beginning on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> August, schoolchildren, mainly in KwaMashu, Umlazi, Clermont and Lamontville, began moving from school to school recruiting pupils to join the protest. This initial phase displayed both anger and euphoria. Sections of these vast processions were visibly angry about the assassination and were defiant towards the police presence; sections were also chanting and in good humour and were inviting everyone to join them.<sup>28</sup>

---

25 A Sitas, "Inanda, August 1985...", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 11(4), 1986, pp. 85-119.

26 H Hughes, "Violence in Inanda...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13(3), 1987, p. 351; S Jacobs, *Durban unrest* (Durban, Memorandum South African Council of Churches, 1985), p. 6.

27 A Sitas, "Inanda, August 1985...", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 11(4), 1986, p. 86.

28 A Sitas, "Inanda, August 1985...", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 11(4), 1986, p. 105.

The focus of the protests was homeland government or other quasi-political targets. In Umlazi, the Administration Building of the KwaZulu government was burnt. Numerous attempts were made to burn down policemen's homes and many of the dominant trader/councillor businesses were also attacked. Leading Inkatha member, Wellington Sabelo's shop was attacked in Umlazi and the local post office was also destroyed.

In KwaMashu, a crowd of between 2000 and 3000 tried to attack the KwaMashu shopping complex, where many of the major township interests (and big business chain stores) resided, but were dispersed by police. A shopping centre in Ntuzuma was razed to the ground. Schools and school principals were attacked; cars that were too posh and vehicles with business logos were hijacked and often burnt.

By Thursday afternoon, Inkatha began to mobilize to gain control of the townships. Students, already in some disarray from the vicious response of the police, were no match for Inkatha's impis. In the larger townships of KwaMashu and Umlazi, Inkatha was quickly able to assume control.

In Inanda, events were somewhat different. Protesting pupils were joined by gangs of youths who began threatening Indian shopkeepers and residents that they would burn their property and houses. Some 1000 Indians, out of fear, left their homes and sought refuge in the Indian township of Phoenix. Many of the shops and houses, after their abandonment, were looted and burnt. Inkatha found Inanda very difficult to subdue. Numerous attacks were repulsed through Thursday, Friday and Saturday. It was only on Sunday that Inkatha impis were able to march into Inanda.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Composition of the rioters***

Central to the 1985 violence were the youth (later known as the comrades' movement) and the impis, led by warlords, who attempted to return law and order to the townships.

Sociologist Ari Sitas points out that through the influence of the media, the picture was one of hungry, unemployed black youth with no future, no hope,

---

<sup>29</sup> H Hughes, "Violence in Inanda...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13(3), 1987.

busy destroying everything in their way.<sup>30</sup> Ranged against this according to the media was Inkatha based on more traditional precepts, seeking to return order and stability to the townships.

Sitas argues that one cannot equate comrades with unemployed black youth. His interviews with more than 200 members of the comrades' movement in Natal revealed a more complex picture. While most were young (under 35 years of age) and came from struggling working-class households, comrades consisted of wage-earners, hawkers, university graduates, political activists, schoolchildren, shop stewards, petty criminals, and lumpen proletarians.

As Sitas points out the comrades' movement possessed a diversity of constituents that ranged from a 14 year old who grew up in difficult circumstances and survived as a petty criminal to a union shop steward and a Fort Hare Fine Arts graduate.

The 1985 violence saw the comrades' movement pitted against Chief Buthelezi's Inkatha, the KwaZulu homeland structure, and the central state.

### *Warlords and impis*

Impis allied to Inkatha were central to the attempt to turn back the comrades' movement sweeping across the townships. The most conspicuous of the impis were from Lindelani, led by Thomas Shabalala who was typical of the warlords who controlled the informal squatter areas around Durban.

Warlords arose in the absence of any formal structure in the squatter camps, organising their own vigilantes to curb crime in their area. To pay their vigilantes, they created a tax base from rents or a household levy. Minnaar points out that, eventually, such an urban warlord needed either to protect himself from rivals or keep the KwaZulu government from interfering in his activities, so he opted for some sort of recognition by formally joining Inkatha.<sup>31</sup> The various warlords tended to join Inkatha mainly because in KwaZulu, this relationship was based on a quid pro quo – as a reward for being left alone, they undertook to deliver a certain number of men for Inkatha rallies and also provide soldiers for any fighting that needed to be

---

30 A Sitas, "The making of the Comrades' Movement in Natal" (Unpublished manuscript, University of Natal, Durban, 1991), p. 1.

31 A Minnaar, "The political economy of the 'warlords' in the informal settlements around Durban" (Paper, The Biennial Conference of the Economic History Society of Southern Africa, Durban, March 1992), p. 3.

carried out. They sometimes bussed vigilantes to other warlords who might need assistance or for vigilante attacks on UDF/ANC strongholds.

Shabalala was elected spokesman for the people of Lindelani in 1984. He also became Chairman of the local Inkatha branch and later KwaZulu Legislative Assembly (KLA) MP for Lindelani, and eventually, an Inkatha Central Committee member. When, in 1983, he moved into the area that later became known as Lindelani, he formed what he called his “community guard force” since there were no street lights or police stations in the area. Residents of Lindelani claimed they had to pay R20 a month for living under the protection of Shabalala’s private army. Young people were “asked” to attend meetings on a regular basis for the purpose of securing the “correct social and moral behaviour of the children”.<sup>32</sup>

It was Shabalala’s impis who led the counter-reaction to the comrades, taming KwaMashu and attacking Inanda.

Both sides of the political spectrum had similar ideas on the composition of the rioters. The NIC/UDF, which invested much in non-racial political alliances, blamed the violence on “thugs and hooligans”.<sup>33</sup> Oscar Dhlomo, then General Secretary of Inanda, saw the violence as the work of “faceless criminal agents and as examples of hooliganism and lawlessness”.<sup>34</sup>

While it is true that criminal elements had their day in the violence, the core of the protestors was the youth who were later to coalesce into the comrades’ movement. Their targets were specific: homeland government buildings and its leadership, business interests, agents of the system such as policemen, and rich people made conspicuous by their consumption patterns in areas of widespread poverty and squalor. One sees the parallels between Dhlomo’s characterisation of the protestors as “faceless criminal agents” and the media picture of young, hungry men with the irrational position of seeing the crowds as being criminal by nature, and as an “evil force, a terrible serpent whose segments are composed of subjugated beaten-down men”.<sup>35</sup>

Sitas, in his research, found that comrades were bound together by a levelling idea of belonging to the “have-nots” and the militarised culture of resistance.

---

32 A Minnaar, “The political economy...” (Paper, Biennial Conference Economic History Society, 1992), p. 12.

33 *Sunday Tribune Herald*, 18 August 1985.

34 *Natal Post*, 14-17 August 1985.

35 E Applebaum & GR McGuire, “Models of suggestion, influence and the disqualification of the crowd”, CF Graumann & S Moscovici (eds.), *Changing conceptions of crowd mind and behavior* (New York, Springer-Verlag, 1986), p. 32.

Among the comrades were not only fighters - there were also strategists and resource people. Leaders ranged from worker leaders to ex-Robben Island prisoners, student militants, university graduates, and hundreds of unemployed youth. Resource people included church workers and criminals. While the protestors of 1985 had many faces, it is incorrect to categorize them as “faceless criminals”.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, one cannot simply label the impis as “thugs and hooligans” or another example of the “smouldering passion inhabiting the Zulu soul which the veneer of civilization has barely dampened”.<sup>37</sup> The impis were acting at the behest of the warlords. Warlord intervention in the 1985 violence was driven by two objectives: putting down the challenge to Inkatha and extending its sphere of influence.

In Inanda, it was only after most of the Indians had left that the burning and looting took place and in the initial violence, only Indians were targeted. There were powerful interests that would have liked the Indians evicted from Inanda – the central government and the KLA. African landowners and shacklords were also keen to buy out Indian property. However, there is no evidence that the initial threats made by youth were done at the behest of any organised interests. Indian shop owners were probably seen as the most vulnerable sector in the community. Once they responded to the threats by fleeing, the looting and burning took on a momentum of its own. Unguarded shops in a context where the forces of law and order were non-existent were difficult to resist.

Many commentators have argued against seeing the violence as being anti-Indian. Sutcliffe and Wellings argued that:<sup>38</sup>

Prior to the unrest, no deep-seated racist or anti-landlord sentiments existed in the Inanda area. Thus, we believe one cannot build a model of the unrest which paints it as an African-Indian confrontation. Such simplistic analysis only lends credence to the racist explanations provided by the South African government and its mouthpiece, the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

However, many factors do point in the direction of anti-Indian sentiment. These include the simple observation that Indian property was largely targeted

---

36 A Sitas, “The making of the Comrades Movement in Natal” (Unpublished manuscript, University of Natal, Durban, 1991), pp. 6-8.

37 *The Natal Witness*, 20 January 1949.

38 M Sutcliffe & S Wellings, “Attitudes and living conditions in Inanda: The context for unrest?” (Unpublished manuscript, University of Natal, Durban, 1985), p. 40.

in Inanda while that of African businessmen was not; this compares to the situation in the rest of Durban's settlements at the time where African-owned businesses bore the brunt of the attacks; the attack on the Gandhi settlement; the battle lines which formed between Phoenix and Inanda, with Indian vigilantes arming themselves in preparation for an attack on Phoenix; and the fact that African warlords rapidly moved in to take control of Indian-owned land, and that there was never any attempt to reinstate Indian landowners.

However, one cannot argue that the rioters were similarly imbued with an anti-Indian consciousness. In Inanda, while there were Indian and African landlords, Indians dominated the commercial enterprises. These were the immediate symbols of privilege that were attacked. When the students were routed by the police, they lost control of the situation. It was then that the lumpen youth from Inanda moved in.

Prior to the violence, levels of crime were very high. Most shops were heavily encased in iron grilles at night, and a few of the larger Indian homes enclosed by high barbed wire fencing and, after dark, in glaring spotlight. Gangs had moved into the area and cornered areas of influence for themselves.<sup>39</sup> The abandoned Indian shops and homes became easy targets of opportunity. Unexpected opportunities also arose for ordinary residents. Meer describes one such event:

We spoke to Beatrice, who has taken over the Govender house - six very dark rooms with a veranda. She had rented from them for the last fifteen years. That she had been close to them was evident in her distinctly Indian-accented English. She said she was a member of Inkatha. "When they came to attack, I hid the Indians and I told them that this was my house. After the mob left, the Indians took what they could carry and went away. She says she will buy the house now because the Govenders will not come back".<sup>40</sup>

Many unemployed adults, old people and workers joined in the looting.

The Inkatha counter attack was planned and Buthelezi made his intentions clear: "There was no way in which they would accept being terrorised by other blacks aided and abetted by misguided children and their thugs".<sup>41</sup> The real organised violence came from Inkatha impis. On Thursday 8th August, Inkatha began to mobilize and hundreds of impis began scattering groups of youth and conducting house-to-house searches for stolen goods. KwaMashu,

---

39 H Hughes, "Violence in Inanda...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13(3), 1987, p. 343.

40 F Meer, *Resistance in the townships...*, p. 50.

41 A Sitas, "Inanda, August 1985...", *South African Labour Bulletin*, 11(4), 1986, p. 109.

Ntuzuma and Umlazi were brought under control. In Inanda, Inkatha warlords subdued the youth and criminal elements and began to replace absent Indian landlords.

The interests of the warlords and Inkatha coalesced. The warlords were attracted by the possibility of pecuniary gain and personal power. Inkatha was keen to extend its influence into Inanda and see off Indian landlords as this would facilitate the consolidation of Inanda into KwaZulu.

While African merchants/landlords clearly had a stake in the removal of their Indian counterparts, they did not take an active part in the violence. The African landlords were, of course, in an invidious position. They had not wholeheartedly supported incorporation into KwaZulu because they were worried that their own land would be threatened in a consolidation programme.

Once warlords had settled in, they began to move against those interests that were opposed to incorporation. African landlords were forced to flee or support Inkatha. Youth, civic and church organisations were violently repressed. According to Makhatini:<sup>42</sup>

Warlords present themselves as Inkatha representatives to people. They recruited and collected Inkatha subscriptions. They were said to be lobbying the KwaZulu government to negotiate with the central government for the incorporation of those areas into KwaZulu, which would ensure permanence of the squatters and their own perpetual power. They travelled to Ulundi and returned with promises of aid from KwaZulu if enough people joined the Inkatha organization.

In spite of the existence of criminal gangs who looted, the behaviour of the majority of looters lends itself to sociological explanation in terms of theories of collective behaviour in riot situations. It has been suggested by Quarantelli and Dynes that looting can be seen as a rather violent beginning to a process of collective bargaining concerning rights and responsibilities of certain communities. Looting, they argue, is an index of social change. It is also an instrument of societal change. They suggest that the pattern of looting passes through approximately three stages in a rioting situation. Firstly, there is a primarily symbolic looting stage where destruction rather than plunder appears to be the intention. Then a stage of conscious and deliberate looting

---

<sup>42</sup> M Makhatini, "The fate of the African landowner: A case study of Inanda, 1991" (Unpublished manuscript, University of Durban-Westville, 1991), p. 8.

begins. Finally, there is a stage when plundering becomes the normal socially supportive thing to do, and property rights are redefined to achieve some kind of transfer of material goods.<sup>43</sup>

If we consider the violence in Inanda, we can see a similar pattern revealed, especially if we see stages one and two as merging. The most widespread form of looting was during stage three, when it became the normal supportive thing to do. It can also be argued that the riots were the rather violent beginning to a process of collective bargaining concerning rights and responsibilities of certain communities. The warlords took advantage of the absence of Indian landlords and traders to initiate a process of “collective bargaining” via the KLA with the central state for incorporation into KwaZulu.

The African community was not homogenous, but it was united in fighting off any outside authority that would jeopardize its already precarious existence close to central Durban. This is seen by Inanda’s determined resistance to attempts to Inkatha’s impis to control the area. On Thursday, a heavily armed impi from the Lindelani squatter camp arrived at the Inanda settlements of Bambayi and Amaouti, attacking everyone in sight.<sup>44</sup>

They had seriously miscalculated the situation because the crowds set upon them and sent them off with a few killed and many injured... The impi returned at 2am for a surprise attack, and again, the community was ready and they repulsed the impi. It returned twice more the next evening and was again repulsed. In the process everybody turned against Inkatha, because the attacks were carried out in its name. The second largest concentration of deaths occurred in this conflict.

However, as the collusion with Inkatha hastened Inanda’s incorporation into KwaZulu, the community led by the youth began to confront the warlords. By early 1989, violent confrontation had become more organised:<sup>45</sup>

... and the first warlord areas to fall were used as springboards for attack on further areas. Inkatha came under seige. Some warlords fled their areas. Others and their followers were killed. By the end of the year most of Inanda had been liberated and youth and civic organizations were gaining support... This situation saw the landlords gain control of their land and new relationships formed with them.

---

43 L Quarantelli & R Dynes, “Looting in civil disorders: An index of social change”, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 11(4), 1968, pp. 7-10.

44 A Sitas, “Inanda, August 1985...”, *South African Labour Bulletin*, 11(4), 1986, p. 111.

45 M Makhatini, “The fate of the African landowner: A case study of Inanda, 1991” (Unpublished manuscript, University of Durban-Westville, 1991), p. 4.

Inkatha's determination to restore order in 1985 reveals the upsurge as developing into a broader people's revolt. In the 1940s, when the Cato Manor riots took place, the struggles were of a more limited nature. For one, the number of Africans in the urban areas was limited and communication at local and national levels was limited which meant that resistance was often isolated and easily contained.

By the 1970s, much of this had changed. South Africa's transition to monopoly capitalism created the objective conditions for a broad based union movement with national linkages. The expansion of secondary schooling and tertiary education created the conditions for student organisations. The youth, many of whom had lived all their lives in the urban areas, began to be organised. Localized struggles were replaced by struggles that spread countrywide and resistance was much more intense and prolonged. A broad spectrum of black intellectuals began to play a pronounced role in the extra-parliamentary movement and a number of white academics lent their skills and resources to the union movement. The shop stewards of the 1970s emerged as highly experienced working class leaders with significant constituencies in the early 1980s. After a few false starts, workers and youth organisations began to synchronize their struggles.<sup>46</sup>

When the struggle for Durban's township began in August 1985, most of the African townships in the other major urban centres were in turmoil. Many townships of the Eastern Cape resembled liberated zones, with street committees performing civic functions. The 1985 Durban upsurge cannot be seen in isolation from those national developments. It was part of a broad-based, people's revolt by people who had no political rights in the urban areas and in different regions the struggle took different forms. In most cases, those regarded as "aliens" within the communities were expelled. In the Eastern Cape, these were identified as community councillors and black policemen however in Durban, these aliens were identified as the rich and wealthy.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Racial tensions as an explanatory factor***

During the early 1980s, significant divisions had emerged between Indian/landlords/traders and their African counterparts. African landlords/traders

---

<sup>46</sup> M Murray, *South Africa; Time of agony, time of destiny* (London, Verso, 1987), pp. 195-238.

<sup>47</sup> M Murray, *South Africa; Time of agony, time of destiny...*, pp. 307-352.

wanted to make Inanda their exclusive preserve. Because Indians were their immediate competitors, this struggle often translated into anti-Indianism. In juxtaposition to this, the absence of administrative or legal mechanisms for the extraction of rent often produced a particularly volatile relationship between landlord and tenant. This was exacerbated by the policies of the local and national state.

The local state argued that Inanda was an illegal settlement and therefore it was not prepared to allocate resources to the area. The central state presented Indian landlords with a choice: evict the tenants or provide essential services. Uncertain about their future in Inanda, some landlords opted for eviction, adding to the already volatile relationship with African tenants. The fact that the state did not make similar demands on African landlords meant that eviction was seen in racial terms.

For the state, the removal of Indians would allow incorporation of Inanda into KwaZulu, facilitating the objective of balkanizing South Africa into different homelands. Inkatha had similar objectives since this would have led to an extension of their influence in the region. What was clear by the 1980s is that significant players both within and outside Inanda were opposed to Indian presence in the area, albeit for diverse reasons.

Can the 1985 violence in Inanda be seen as simply an outbreak of racially motivated anti-Indian rioting? It had its anti-Indian dimensions as Indian shops and houses were targeted and no attempt was made to reinstate Indian landowners. Warlords justified their occupation of Indian-owned land on the basis that Indians were aliens. This aspect to the violence is crucial and must be understood.

However, to simply see the violence as anti-Indian is not to see the full story. The youth challenged the authority of Inkatha in all African townships, an organisation perceived by them to be a surrogate of the South African state. This gelled with resistance struggles in townships across South Africa. In Inanda, the violence went beyond the looting and burning of shops and houses as the community rose up to defend Inanda against the incursions of Inkatha-aligned warlords. To see the riots as simply anti-Indian would be to render invisible the anti-apartheid dimensions and vice-versa.

This understanding was facilitated by breaking the violence into different phases, allowing for the perception that the riots had both spontaneous and

planned aspects. For example, in Inanda, the violence transcended the looting and burning of shops and houses to an uprising against attempts by Inkatha-aligned warlords to move into the area. Contrary to statements by some social scientists and political organisations, the rioters did not simply consist of young, hungry men, but rather represented a broad spectrum of people who resided in the shack settlements.

Why would an indigenous majority strike out at a disenfranchised minority rather than at a white ruling class which, after all, set the rules of the game?

This has much to do with the structural location of the middleman minority, with an immediate relation to the indigenous population as buyer and seller, renter and landlord, client and professional. In the struggle for scarce resources of land and housing, jobs, and opportunities for capital accumulation, it is the middleman minority that the indigenous majority faces, the former are visible, accessible, and vulnerable because of the immediacy of their spatial location and the lack of a security force to protect their interests.

Contemporary surveys pointed to social distance between Indians and Africans. A mid-1980s survey of African townships in Durban found that the social distance of Africans was greatest from Indians.<sup>48</sup> An April 1987 study by Markinor found that 53 per cent of Indians worried “really often” or “quite often” while 27 per cent worried sometimes that Africans would again riot against Indians while 53 per cent “strongly disagreed” that Indians would be safe under African rule.<sup>49</sup> These findings are understandable.<sup>50</sup>

Caught between the economically and then politically dominant whites and numerically powerful Africans, many Indians felt that they were more vulnerable than those of whites. Working class Indians also feared that just as apartheid had denied them opportunities they would be side-lined by affirmative action in a non-racial democracy.

On the other hand, Whites, unlike the middleman Indians, were one step removed. They lived and traded apart from the indigenous population and were protected by a repressive apparatus. However, this does not mean that white power remained unchallenged. Rule points out how militant success in one setting “may succeed in getting people to think about what was previously

---

48 DL Horowitz, *Ethnic groups in conflict* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985), p. 82.

49 A Jeffrey, “Survey evidence”, *Durban functional regions - Planning for the 21st century. Report 1: The current situation: Appendices, Appendix 26* (Durban, Tongaat-Hulett Properties Limited, 1989), p. 6.

50 DL Horowitz, *Ethnic groups in conflict...*, p. 82.

unthinkable about possibilities for social change”.<sup>51</sup> In this context, we see how 1985 broadened into a challenge to the white power structure.

As the deeper study of Inanda indicates, by considering both the broader upsurge in Durban townships while paying close attention to the particular social relations in one specific locale, allows us to dig deeper into non-material factors such as culture, ethnicity, ideology, and individual or group psychologies which act to reinforce and reinterpret particular aspects of this material environment.

### ***The present as History***

Through the long twentieth century, there were two major conflagrations between Africans and Indians. The first was in 1949<sup>52</sup> where the epicentre was Cato Manor. Here too, Indian landlords and traders came under attack, as Africans felt that Indians were a threat both to their economic well-being as well as to their foothold on the edge of central Durban. Many lives were lost on both sides of these riots, and for Indians, it became an abiding memory of fear and sense of vulnerability. The 1985 riots, while not leading to the same violence, immediately raised the spectre of 1949.

The 1949 and 1985 riots occurred in conditions that displayed many similarities. In both cases, society was experiencing a phase of economic crisis. The African working class was particularly hard hit. The gains made during the boom years of the Second World War and the 1960s started to be clawed back. The African middle classes felt that their upward mobility was curbed by Indian dominance.

In present day KwaZulu-Natal, one sees the re-emergence of anti-Indianism.

The stereotype of the exploitative trader remains strong. In a Sunday Times column, Fred Khumalo portrayed Indians as dishonest cheats. In response to allegations that President Zuma’s son, Duduzane, had cut a shady deal with Indian businessmen, Khumalo wrote:<sup>53</sup>

The media should be commending poor Duduzane for being a fast learner: he realised that his good father became quite a comfortable man thanks to

---

51 J Rule, *Theories of civil violence* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988), p. 242.

52 E Webster, “The 1949 Durban riots...”, P Bonner (ed.), *Working papers in Southern African studies...*, p. 22.

53 *Sunday Times*, 24 October 2010.

his friendship with Schabir Shaik, who just so happens to be an Indian and a businessman. So Duduzane figured: ah, let me get myself my own Indian as well. This was nothing new, an Indian businessman finding a politically powerful darkie or vice versa. Nelson Mandela had his own Indians. You remember those chaps who started selling some pieces of paper with doodles on them to the art galleries under the pretext that the Old Man was the original artist? If such a powerful, reputable darkie-with-political-power could have his Indians, why couldn't a Zuma have his own Indian?

Duma Pewa in his column "Pewa to the People" in the *Natal Witness*, wrote:<sup>54</sup>

Like the issue of land redistribution and the redistribution of wealth, it irks me that the issues and tensions between Africans and Indians have been ignored. When renowned playwright and producer Mbongeni Ngema wrote the song *AmaNdiya*, he was crucified in the court of public opinion and his case was one of the people "shooting the messenger", instead of decoding the message and dealing with its truths, however bitter they may be. Ngema was called a racist while his only fault was being an artist who merely reflected the society within which he lives. Former president Nelson Mandela was the architect of the plan to make sure that Ngema was gagged.... It's now many years since Ngema's "AmaNdiya" saga and 150 years since Indians first sailed into this country, yet the issues that Ngema raised remain...

South Africa has much baggage to deal with and the failure to do so has resulted in a ticking time bomb in a context of high unemployment and poor service delivery levels.

Pewa's parallel with genocide was particularly disconcerting to many Indians and relations between Indians and Africans remain delicately balanced. Interaction between Indians and Africans in the post-apartheid moment remains largely restricted to parent bodies at private schools and some coalescing around economic and political issues, but is largely superficial at the levels of day-to-day interaction and socialisation.<sup>55</sup>

More recently, anti-Indianism emerged in 2013 in a more organised form in the name of the Mazibuye Forum. Here, once more the Indian role of taking tenders from government and dominating small business in KwaZulu-Natal, as well as exploitative practices were highlighted. As in 1949 and 1985, it is a time in which the great expectations of democracy in 1994 have not materialised for the vast majority of South Africans. An insular Indian

---

<sup>54</sup> *Natal Witness*, 20 November 2010.

<sup>55</sup> For a deeper exploration of these issues see A Desai & G Vahed, "Identity and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa: The case of Indian South Africans", S Patel & T Uys (eds.), *Exclusion, social capital and citizenship. Contested transitions in South Africa and India* (New Delhi, Routledge, 2012), pp. 488-508.

community meets a resurgent racial nationalism with tribal overtones. It is in this context that the middleman thesis of scapegoating and vulnerability has great resonance.

Much has been made of South Africa fracturing along class lines 20 years into the democratic transition.<sup>56</sup> This analysis should not be at the expense of understanding the power of ethnicity. As Bell contends, ethnicity can be more salient than class “because it can combine an interest with an affective tie”.<sup>57</sup>

Apartheid has cast a long shadow. Most South Africans still live in racially segregated areas, with social mixing confined to elites and mixed marriages uncommon. In a context where African aspirations have not been met, there are some amongst the majority indigenous population who are prone to venting their frustrations on Indians, especially in Durban where Indians and Africans are juxtaposed.

We might do well to remember Mbongeni Ngema’s 2002 song in Zulu, “AmaNdiya” (“Indian”), attacked Indians for their alleged unwillingness to accept Africans as equals, for resisting change, being interested only in making money, and being exploitative. He protested the presence of post-1994 migrants from India and Pakistan and urged the “strong men” of the Zulu nation to stand up to Indians. Lyrics such as “we are faced with hardship and poverty because everything was taken by the Indians, but they turn around and exploit us” and “Indians are abusive to Black people, being more racist than Whites”, sounded a clear warning to Indians.

---

56 P Bond, *Elite transition: From apartheid to neoliberalism* (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), pp. 47-56.

57 D Bell, cited in C Young, *The rising tide of cultural pluralism: The nation-state at bay?* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 22.