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1995-08-28
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/9081

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED SOCIAL RESEARCH

SEMINAR PAPER
TO BE PRESENTED IN RICHARD WARD BUILDING
SEVENTH FLOOR, SEMINAR ROOM 7003
AT 4 PM ON THE 28 AUGUST 1995

TITLE: *"We are Fighting for the Liberation of our People": Justifications of Violence by Activist Youth in Diepkloof, Soweto.*

BY: MONIQUE MARKS

NO: 385

"WE ARE FIGHTING FOR THE LIBERATION OF OUR PEOPLE": JUSTIFICATIONS OF VIOLENCE BY ACTIVIST YOUTH IN DIEPKLOOF, SOWETO.

Paper presented by Monique Marks, currently a researcher at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

INTRODUCTION

a. Methodological Concerns

This paper, which seeks to understand youths' own justifications for engaging in acts of collective violence, is based on a case study of activist youth and their organisations in Diepkloof, Soweto.[1] The research was conducted during the period 1991 - 1993. While the specificities and peculiarities of any particular area make generalisations difficult, many of the conditions under which Diepkloof youth live, as well as their experiences, are probably very similar to those of youth in other townships in Soweto, the Gauteng province, and indeed, South Africa. Consequently, while the research claims to give insight into the consciousness of activist youth in Diepkloof, some of these findings may be applicable to youth in other townships.

The objective of this work informed its methodological motivations. The underlying premise was that collective and violent action, as well as the emergence of social movements, cannot be read off from the structural context, nor from assumed psychological states of "relative deprivation". As a result, a phenomenological approach was pursued. Youth were thereby able to articulate for themselves their life experiences; their understanding of the world around them; and how these subjectivities give rise to a set of ideas about appropriate strategies for dealing with conflict and effecting change in their society. To gain insight into these youths "point of view" and understand the day-to-day experiences that inform this view, two key qualitative research methods were chosen: participant observation and intensive

interviews.

Since the youth who are the focus of this study were essentially part of political youth organisations, it was important to try to understand how these organisations operated as part of a broader social movement; who participated n these organisations; and how and in what way they served to facilitate the creation of particular identities of the participants. As a result, I became a participant in the ANC Youth League in Diepkloof; this was done with the encouragement and approval of the executive of this organisation. Essentially, this involved attending general meetings which took place every fortnight on a Tuesday evening.[2]

A second arena of participation was in the family lives of these young people. This was necessary since much of their lives were spent at home with their families; many of the interviews took place in their homes, and it was important to meet with other family members. Furthermore, the youth were keen for me to become acquainted with their families, and this participation was hence part of developing trusting relationships with the youth and members of the community generally. This entailed having tea and meals with family members, and attending such occasions such as weddings. Thirdly, it was important to participate in township life more broadly. This involved spending time walking around the township, going to shops, participating in group discussions, and attending funerals and memorial services. This was necessary not only from an academic point of view, but it also became a way of ensuring my personal safety in the township.

While it is true that such a research method raises many questions as to the objectivity of the researcher, the use of participant observation was invaluable to this research. This was particularly the case since without gaining trust through being a friend and "comrade", it would have been unlikely that responses to politically sensitive and personally painful issues would have been given.

Thirty intensive interviews, each averaging about three hours, were carried out with youth from both the Congress of South African Students (Cosas) and the ANC Youth League[3] in the area. The youth interviewed reflected the make-up of the organisations concerned. The majority were unemployed and school-going youth; about twenty percent were female; there

were youth representatives from each zone in Diepkloof; and finally, there were "seasoned" activists while others were new to these organisations. These youth came from working class, broken families. Only two of these youth interviewed had obtained matric certification; the majority had only some form of secondary education. Three of the youth interviewed were employed in the formal sector; most spent their time either carrying out activities related to these political organisations, or "hanging around" the township with friends and comrades. Their ages ranged between fourteen and twenty eight years.[4]

b. **Backdrop to the paper**

Youth in Diepkloof who aligned themselves with the Charterist Movement[5] in South Africa, were engaged in a number of acts of "collective" or "political" violence[6] during the period from 1984-1993. They participated in acts of collective violence against what they perceived to be "agents of the state" such as the police; local government councillors; and even teachers and principals of schools in some instances. They also engaged in collective violence against groups and individuals who were perceived as a threat to the communities in which they lived. These included, for example, Inkatha, and individuals who were identified as "spies" by these youth. In some instances, violence was also used against members within their own organisations who were perceived as "undisciplined", or acting outside of a code of conduct developed by the organisations of which these youth were members. Collective violence in Diepkloof during the period 1984-1993 took a variety of forms. In some instances, people were killed by these youth. For the most part, however, these youth made use of less severe forms of violence such as beating, and other forms of physical punishment.

While, many may argue that violence of any sort is reprehensible, this paper, following the work of Charles Tilly, has an underlying premise that collective violence is generally a form of collective action. It is used as a last resort by actors of social movements who believe their grievances have not, or cannot, be dealt with through other methods of collective action. Collective violence, this paper contends, cannot be seen as separate from other forms of collective action; it often arose when more peaceful forms of protest failed, and intensified in response to the repressive actions of the state. Township youth have been the key recipients of violent acts of the repressive state. However, they were not merely victims, but also agents in struggle. The activist youth studied her, in their struggle against repression,

engaged in political violence as a perceived means of bringing about greater social justice. Consequently, collective violence is not only purposive, but also rational.[7]

In order to understand the purposive nature of collective or political violence, some sense of the actors own point of view is crucial. It is through examining the discourses used by the youth, that this paper attempts to provide some insight into the various justifications that these youth ascribed to their involvement in political violence. This paper examines the discourses[8] surrounding "political violence"; it probes how youth represent political violence, with special reference to its perceived "morality", and at how the construction of this discourse cannot be separated from their self-conception of what it meant to be a "comrade". The actual wording, expressions and assumptions that the comrade youth of Diepkloof make use of in speaking about political violence will be central in this paper. This language is embedded in a broader discourse which legitimates violent acts; it has several aspects to it and varying degrees of adherence by the different strata of youth.

Language itself is an important tool for understanding consciousness. Through an examination of language, insight can be developed as to how participants interpret, and symbolise violence in their own minds. Therefore, an understanding of discourse or language helps the understanding of legitimation[9] which is the focus of this paper. Language not only presents our feelings, but articulates our perceptions as well[10]; "language is the most distinctive human activity, whereby, persons become conscious of their feelings".[11]

Additionally, experiences of and actual engagement in violent acts, tends to generate their own discourse. Hence, the discourses that youth develop in relation to violence needs to be contextaulised in their daily experiences of violence.[12] This discourse, as we shall see, is a combination of the "derived" ideas from official literature of the liberation movement, both legal and illegal; statements of leaders and literature about liberation struggles in other countries; and "inherent" ideas which emerge from the youth's own experiences and understandings of the world, are shaped by their involvement as participants in struggle. This discourse is both "political" and "moral" in content; it coincides with and contradicts the ideology, and identity of the broader Charterist social movement during the period under discussion.

The youth interviewed, in justifying and understanding political violence, make use of a number of key words and phrases. The word "target" refers to people and objects "deserving" of physical attack. Other prevalent terms are those of "people's war" and "ungovernability" which first became popular in the eighties during popular struggles against the apartheid state. The interviewees also referred to "the community" which usually denoted the residents of Diepkloof itself, but was sometimes as broad as African people in South Africa. In speaking about their involvement in acts of political violence, the youth made reference to themselves as "comrades", which for these youth signifies "moral defenders of the community". Closely linked to the idea of being a "comrade" is that of being a "youth"; youth in their terms (derived largely from Sayco's definition of youth in its official documentation) were "energetic", and "vigourous" and hence able to engage in a variety of activities. Finally the notion of "correct" was used frequently; it referred to behaviour and beliefs which were seen to be of high "moral" standing and was inextricably linked to the "comrade" identity.

There were six main justifications given by the youth interviewed for their involvement in political violence. Firstly, the youth perceived themselves as having responded in the mid-eighties to the call of the ANC in taking up armed struggle as a strategy for change; this was seen by many as still relevant in 1993 despite the changed political terrain of the early nineties. Secondly, they believed that the root of the violence lay in the direct and structural violence of the South African state, particularly the activities of the police. Thirdly, it was believed that "real liberation" is not possible without bloodshed - within this perspective is a very real mistrust of the negotiations process, and involves the continuation of repertoires of speech carried over from the eighties into the nineties. Fourthly, it was viewed as logical that youth, given their role as defenders of the community, and their prime position in the liberation struggle, will and should be involved in acts of political violence. Fifthly, and related to the second justification, it was believed that violence will speed up the process of change.

Finally, the youth perceived themselves as holding the moral high-ground and maintaining unity, or political hegemony, through the use of violence against those who were seen as being outside of the morality of organised youth, or the liberation movement more broadly.

All of these perceived justifications cannot easily be separated, but form part of a coherent discourse that can be threaded together from the language of the Diepkloof youth. This paper does not claim to provide a comprehensive analysis as to the causes of youth participation in collective violence, rather it aims to explore these young peoples' own justifications through their own language and discourses. The paper will also briefly examine some tentative consequences of this discourse for the present and near future in South Africa.

A. RESPONDING TO THE CALL OF THE ANC

In the eighties the prime goal of the Diepkloof youth organisations (in particular Cosas and the youth congress), along with UDF more broadly, was to end apartheid. It was understood by the Charterist social movement that this was not going to occur simply by politicising activists and the community. Organisations had to develop mass bases and take up action that would challenge the very legitimacy and functional capacity of the state. While, this meant the taking up of campaigns such as rent, school, and consumer boycotts, and calls for the resignation of corrupt councillors, even more serious acts of civil disobedience were seen as necessary to effect change, and to bring home to the government the immensity of the force they were confronting. Cosas and the Youth Congress both identified strongly with the ANC. According to Phillips[13] this meant identification with the four pillars of struggle of the ANC at the time. These included:

1. Building up and consolidating of internal structures;
2. Mobilising the masses around issues in order to increase political awareness and build support;
3. International isolation and;
4. Stepping up military activities around MK.

Acts of violence against both property, and persons associated with the state became a logical extension of these "pillars", reinforced by the call from the ANC in 1985 in exile to "make the country ungovernable". The youth responded to this call willingly. Youth were confronted with violence on a daily basis; had poor chances for educational advancement as the schooling crisis deepened; and minimal chances of employment. Furthermore, township

youth had to deal wit the constant and violent presence of the security forces and, even more disturbingly for most youth, in the school grounds as well. "Smashing the apartheid state" through whatever means available in the hope of greater democracy, equality, and opportunities was welcomed as a potential path to freedom.

Diepkloof youth believed they were justified in taking up the ANC's call for ungovernability in the mid-eighties. In the eighties, and even into the nineties, a tape with Tambo's opening speech at Kabwe calling for "ungovernability" was circulated amongst activist youth in Diepkloof.[14] While Sayco and Cosas claimed to be "non-violent", they posited that the youth were the "young lions" who "form the core of the 'political' and 'military' armies of the revolution. Their youthful energy enables them to perform great feats in the theatre of battles...".[15] Youth in Diepkloof took up the role of "young lions":

> We carried out violence against the state, not as Cosas members, but as the youth of South Africa supporting the call of the ANC (Thabo).

According to Thabo, many youth (obviously black) responded as "South Africans" to the call of the ANC; these youth were not only those who were members of Charterist youth organisations such as Cosas, but rather, according to Thabo, included the majority of township youth.

However, the cultural repertoire of armed struggle outlived strategic reality. The ANC called for a suspension of the armed struggle in 1990 when it entered into negotiations with the state. In the early nineties, while there were many youth who believed that armed struggle was still necessary, even the key pillar of struggle, there were those who believed that the strategies, and tactics of the youth needed to be revised. A small proportion of these youth (generally seasoned activists who had remained in organisations) believed that there had been political changes and that political violence against the "regime" - "revolutionary violence" - was no longer appropriate, and that other means towards political change needed to be given priority. These differing views were reflected in a dialogue between two Diepkloof youth:

> The youth have the same role today as in the 1980's. At that time the ANC told us that we should make the country ungovernable. So today I don't think that thing it is still the same precisely because the government tyrants are ungovernable themselves. It is the same problems as before (Sello).
>
> You see this is a problem when we still have our own comrades saying there is no change. But there are changes and because of these changes we need to adapt a new style of working and develop new targets and strategies...In the past we had to render the state ungovernable...Now we need to start to think objectively because of the changed conditions (Namedi).

The ideological divisions which emerged amongst organised youth in Diepkloof as a result of the negotiations process in the nineties, gave rise to similar divisions in attitudes toward political violence, particularly, "revolutionary violence". Youth such as Namedi (a seasoned activist in the area) who were disciplined supporters of the ANC and were trying to carry out the decisions made by the ANC, were generally the youth who were more prepared to redefine the strategies and tactics of the youth in the "new era". It was these youth who, while weary of the negotiations process, were trying to "think objectively because of the changed conditions". Youth such as Namedi were at great pains to explain to others that while social and economic change was not visible, the changes in the political arena were significant, and should be accompanied by changed tactics and strategies in local political organisations. However, as we shall see below, the majority of youth interviewed were angry and frustrated with the negotiations process. Like Sello, they believed the state remained a "tyrant" which was "ungovernable"; it was unable to govern the country and despite the negotiations process, remained illegitimate. For Sello and others then, the ANC's strategy of "ungovernability" remained as applicable in the early nineties as it was in the eighties.

B. THE OPPRESSIVE STATE

More than anything else, it was the violent nature of the security forces, and these youths' direct experience of this violence that led them to seriously question non-violence as a viable strategy:

> I can say the police contributed more to our youth being violent. It's just like the handling of unrest situations, you see. I remember there was a time in '86 there was a stayaway organised by Bishop Tutu. So there we organised a march here in Diepkloof. So without provocation our youth were shot, people were arrested and people were brutally assaulted. So now the culture of violence started there (Lumkile).

Lumkile asserts that it was not until the police began to use violence against township residents who were protesting their conditions of life that violence came to be used as a tactic by residents themselves. Peaceful marches, for example, became violent when police began to shoot at youth. Police violence was compounded by the arrests of youth and other "people". Furthermore, "people" (the youth in particular) were brutalised in the hands of police - they were "assaulted", beaten, even killed. For Lumkile, it was this violence of the police, in particular the "detention" of "comrades", that precipitated what he refers to as the "culture of violence" amongst the youth. This understanding of why collective violence emerged as a strategy for bringing about change, is in line with other research into South Africa's resistance movement such as the work of Jeremy Seekings.[16]

There was also a sense amongst the youth interviewed that the police not only acted in directly violent ways towards people; they also took from people what was perceived by these youth as rightfully theirs. The notion of "rights" is common in youths' consciousness:

> Violence comes from maybe the police themselves depriving people of maybe their rights. At times they even harass people like going to a funeral and all that (Chris).

Here the violent activities of the security forces, used to ensure the continued deprivation of black South Africans, caused the violent response of black youth. The police, in particular, once more were identified as the key perpetrators of violence. Through their actions of physical violence, they denied township residents of their "rights" - their liberty to engage in everyday life activities. The harassing of people going to a funeral (a "sacred" event) was given as an example of a denial of basic human rights. The security forces were involved in both direct violence, and in ensuring the continuation of more indirect, structural violence.

While the violent actions of the security forces may have been the presenting problem, the broader state itself, not surprisingly, was perceived negatively. The state was defined as the "apartheid" or "racist" state - not, particularly, as a capitalist entity. It was seen as having caused inequalities between the various racial groupings in South Africa - "this racist government of apartheid has caused separation; racially, tribal and all that, and lack of equalness between these groups" (Musi); as acting in a coercive manner - "things are happening in South Africa that are not correct, but because of the sternness of the government, and the ruling party, you know, they are prevailing" (Lumkile); as depriving black people of their basic rights - "the worst thing about this government is that our people have no right, having no vote, in fact have no say in whatever" (Nika); and finally, as limiting the "African community" from developing socially, and economically - "this apartheid government has disrupted most of my plans, especially for my future because maybe today I must be something; like I could finish university or college. But due to apartheid, most of my plans haven't hatched" (Thabo).

The inequalities of apartheid society, together with the coercion used by the security forces to uphold the vast disparities amongst communities within South Africa, were at the root of most of youths' understanding of the etiology of political violence:

> There is violence in our society, especially toward the fascists because the people are hungry for liberation (Lumko).

This respondent was reflecting on the sense of urgency which he felt existed in the community. The underlying belief was that the community had been "starved" and needed to be "replenished". It was the authoritarian, and prejudiced state which had led to the current "starvation" and was, therefore, the rightful target of political violence.

The state was violent because it was illegitimate; it had not been chosen by the people which it governed, and it used criminal means to maintain power:

> This government is not our government. So the killing will never stop. Why? Because this government is a thug...So if the place is ruled by thugs, the killing will never stop. In Russia there is no crime. Why? Because the government was appointed by the people (Zola).

Despite the obvious ideological naivety of this statement, what lies at the root of this quote was an assumption that state representivity is a prerequisite for peace. The South African state was seen as a "thug" - a bully who took from people what was rightfully theirs. The criminal nature of the state gave rise to the need for it to be eliminated and replaced with one which is morally defensible due to its representative nature. The state in Russia, by comparison, was seen as "good" since for "Zola" it represented a "peoples' government".

Further justification for violence carried out by the youth was that they perceived themselves as relatively deprived in comparison with others, obviously white South Africans, who were at an advantage owing to their economic wealth:

> South Africa is a violent society because you see there are people who are enjoying privileges and there are people who are not enjoying privileges, you see. So in fact at this present time of course South Africa is a violent society due to what I have stated...Others have not got their rights and culture. They have been destroyed...So there can be no peace you see (Musi).

Musi indicates an understanding of class inequality in the society. This unequal "enjoyment" of "privileges" was for Musi the basis of a violent society - the society was at base structurally violent. The rights of poor, black people had been "destroyed" - they had been demolished and no longer existed in any form. However, not only had "rights" been destroyed, but poor people had also been deprived of their "culture" - their way of life and all that was meaningful to them in their most everyday existence.

As a result of the violence of the security forces, non-violence came to be seen as an inappropriate strategy for change:

> Comrades say now we are peaceful and those people [the police] are fighting. So what's the use of being peaceful (Lumkile).

The assumption here was that when confronting an intensely violent state and its security forces, violence as a retaliatory strategy was the only one which would lead to serious attention by the state to the grievances, and demands of the oppressed. The "people" had to "retaliate":

> Then peoples retaliate because they just can't take the police harassing them. So people themselves got fed up, then they decided to retaliate...How they retaliate I can't exactly say, but they will do any form of retaliation they can think of. They might throw the police with stones and all that (Chris).

Political violence emerges when tolerance toward oppression and repression could no longer be sustained; it was an act of "striking back" on the behalf of the community. Violence carried out by the youth was an act of retribution and revenge and was hence seen to be defensive rather than as offensive, and as justifiable in the face of the morally indefensible actions of others.

Consequently, for Musi, quoted below, "peace" was not possible in South Africa until inequality was eradicated through "fighting":

> Violence will always be the order of the day because you see, we Africans always fight to make sure we retain our right and our culture (Musi).

"Africans" - those who are poor and have no "rights" and "culture" - had to "fight" or wage a struggle to achieve rights which had been granted to others and denied the African community. Acts of violence were also seen as important so as to regain dignity.

While political violence was seen to be a rational and purposive response of the youth, the responsibility for political violence perpetrated by these youth was seen as lying with the state. In so saying, the youth absolved themselves from responsibility since they were merely responding to an "evil" that confronted them as township residents. The unintended

consequence of this was that through their discourse, the youth deny themselves as actors consciously acting to change structural inequality. This "denial" of responsibility and agency was weaved throughout the youths' discourse and accounts of political violence.
Although it may appear that these youth are abdicating their own responsibility as agents in the "cycle of violence" it is interesting to note that this understanding resonates with an Althuserian approach which contends that the security forces in modern society are the repressive agents of the state, and even a Weberian approach which argues that the state has the monopoly over violence in modern societies.

C. BLOODSHED IS NECESSARY FOR LIBERATION

Straker, in attempting to find a psychological explanation for the involvement of youth in political violence, concludes that "there was no evidence that participation in violence had a healing or transforming effect at the individual level"[17] as the work of Fanon suggests. While, this may be so, a number of the Diepkloof youth interviewed clearly believed that there could be no real liberation without violence and bloodshed:

> Violence is needed in our country so that we can remove all the bad things that are there. This present regime is like a sickness that must be destroyed violently so that better things can exist and the society can be more healthy. So violence is necessary..." (Musi).

Violence has a "cleansing" effect since it represented the complete elimination of what was perceived as evil and unsanitary. The apartheid state was likened to a "sickness" which if not "destroyed" or annihilated, it was believed, would contaminate a new society which was supposed to be "better" and "more healthy".

This need for violence, they asserted, was common to all "liberation struggles": the youth were well aware of the histories of liberation in such places as Cuba, Nicaragua, Mozambique, Namibia, and Angola:[18]

> There is no easy road to freedom.[19] What we are experiencing right now is what Namibia also experienced before it was liberated and all that. And then I will never be surprised if there is a civil war maybe next year in South Africa (Chris).

The youth mentioned countries geographically close to home, or those emphasised by the liberation struggle at large as "exemplary", particularly during the period of peoples war:

> Then I will know that liberation is characterised by many things. Bloodshed must be there so that the people must be liberated (Chris).

For "Chris", "bloodshed" and liberation were inextricably linked.

While this may be frightening to conceive, the perception that violence or war was a necessary part of transition, gave rise to a glorification of casualties on both sides. The loss of life of someone associated with apartheid was seen as one step closer to liberation:

> To kill a policeman is to mean we are closer to our freedom because we are getting rid of some of the obstacles of our struggle (Zola).

The loss of life of a "comrade", on the other hand, was an example of an exemplary soldier or "freedom fighter" prepared to give up his/her life for the betterment of their country:

> Many comrades, like Vuyani [a key youth activist in the area] have died in our struggle for liberation. But these comrades are true heroes and freedom fighters who have died because they loved their country so much (Thandi).

"Death and sacrifice" indeed became a part of both the discourse and practice of political violence.[20]

D. VIOLENCE AS NECESSARY FOR "REAL CHANGE"

A strong belief existed amongst the Diepkloof youth interviewed that without violence, change would be incremental, and incomplete. While, these beliefs were rooted in the strategy of "people's war" in the 1980's, they persisted in the early nineties, partly, as a result of a lack of faith on behalf of youth in the negotiations process. The majority of youth interviewed were sceptical of this process since they doubted the sincerity of the apartheid government:

> I think we are wasting our time in negotiations. Many times we talk to De Klerk and he promise he will do this and this. Then when the deadline comes, he doesn't do this thing (Thandeka).

The youth interviewed were particularly disconcerted by the ANC's decision to suspend the armed struggle while people continued to be killed in the townships:

> It was a blunder for the ANC to suspend the armed struggle because of violence, the killing of our people (Thabo).

Even youth in Cosas and the Youth League who supported the process of negotiations, felt frustrated and did not have faith in its capacity to remove apartheid:

> ...comrades have been patient trying to solve things through negotiations...the comrades they try to compromise. But practically we see there is a problem, practically (Sipho).

Furthermore, the state was still seen by the early nineties to be in control of the security forces. As was the case in the eighties they continued to carry out acts of violence against township residents. At the same time, the "masses" had no real defense against this "large" repressive force. They had only "stones":

> The state is still having its machinery which it uses against the people. This state machinery is large and we still find the masses fighting with stones (Sipho).

Since the state "machinery" remained intact, it appeared to this respondent that while the "comrades" had compromised, the state remained in tact. Moreover, youth stated that "no change has taken place within the location" (Xolile). While national negotiations were taking place, this change was "not real because people are still suffering with poverty under this government" (Thami). Indeed, during the early nineties, and arguably even after the national elections in April 1994, there was no material improvement of the lives of township residents.

Most of these youth believed the only way to bring about "real change" (where the National Party no longer has power and control, and people's material conditions are addressed) in the

shortest time possible, was to violently "overthrow" the existing government. The lack of any real experience of change since the negotiations process (aside from increased structural unemployment) left the youth feeling their patience was running out and with a sense of urgency:

> The thing that will ultimately bring change is the overthrowment of the regime. This is feasible since it is directly proportional to our efforts...The structures do not yet exist for this, but we are working toward this (Sello).

Sello is implying that while other forms of struggle existed (such as negotiations, and international pressure), these were unimportant in their impact as compared with the potential that armed struggle had for bringing about some sort of transition. The "apartheid" state was in no way perceived as a negotiating partner, but as an institution which needed to be vanquished. Furthermore, despite the fact that Sello admitted that organisational structures were very weak in the early nineties, he believed that with more "exertion" and greater organisation on behalf of the youth organisations, insurrection in South Africa was possible. The assumption behind this is that there had been no "real change" in the nature of politics from the eighties to the nineties.

The need to violently remove the state in order for change to be immediate and, before the liberation movement completely compromised itself to its own detriment, was directly linked to the perception that political violence was necessary to "cleanse" the society of all that was bad, and evil. Straker similarly found that most youth "expressed themselves in favour of violent change. This view was informed not only by their belief that real change was impossible without violence, but also by more personal desires for revenge".[21] There was a definite desire amongst the Diepkloof youth interviewed for a more fundamental form of change than seemed would be the outcome of negotiations.

E. YOUTH AS DEFENDERS OF THE COMMUNITY

What became clear through interacting with the youth concerned in Diepkloof was the cardinal role that the identity of being a "comrade" played in respondents' understanding of the role of political organisations and their motivations for becoming involved in "struggle".

This self-identity was often created in their actual engagement in struggle. Another key component of their identity was that they were "youth"; as the "bearers of the future", youth believed themselves to be in the rightful position to lead the struggle toward a new and better society:

> We as the youth know that the future is in our hands because the old men, Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, will disappear because they are old. Therefore the people who are going to be responsible for the future South Africa will be the youth (Xolile).

Youth were aware that the older leadership were going to "disappear" i.e. get sick and die, and the future would then lie in the hands of the younger generation. They had many hopes for a "new and better" society. Firstly, they wanted peace - "Mostly, we want peace to be there in a new South Africa" (Xolile). They hoped for democracy and economic wealth - "I want a democratic South Africa with a high economy" (Thami). They wanted "a good education with proper teachers and textbooks" (Zola). Finally, they wanted a "non racial" South Africa - "We want to have a future based on the Freedom Charter where the most important thing is to have non-racialism"(Thabo).

Secondly, because youth saw themselves as "energetic", "flexible", "agile", and "adaptable", they were positioned to "defend" the "community" against perceived outside dangers.[22] These "dangers" or threats included more than the actions of "the state". They also included, for example, the activities of gangsters, and Inkatha. Activist youth in Diepkloof were in fact the key agents responsible for hunting down well known gangsters in the area such as the Kabasas who plagued Diepkloof in the late eighties, and the Jackrollers who were active in Diepkloof in the early nineties. These gangsters were seen as dividing the community and consequently reducing the capacity for a united struggle against a common enemy - the apartheid state. Activist youth in Diepkloof were active in bringing about the demise of these two major gangster formations. Police seem to have been very slow in responding to these attacks, leading to suspicions of their collusion with such formations. Activist youths' role in fighting these gang formations was applauded by residents of Diepkloof. In fact, these youth were seen as being very different from gang formations which were causing havoc in the community. As a Nicro social worker put it:

> The older people in the community appreciate youth in organisation. They feel these youth make things change. This is different from gang youth who they see as destroying the community. The political youth try to avoid chaos because they say this is tarnishing their image.[23]

These youths prime role in the "liberation struggle" which came to the fore in the eighties, together with their perceived need to protect their families led to an almost functional necessity for them to be engaged in political violence of a variety of forms:

> You know a youth, if you tell a youth about violence like you say, 'hey there's Inkatha coming in this direction', hey they never going to stop to go there. Hey, they are leaving the school...they saying they want to fight...they say they are going to defend our masses (Bheki).

From the above quote, it seems that it was almost a spontaneous response for youth to move towards sites of perceived danger. The youth played a role in shielding the "community", and "our masses" from outside threat of any kind. As was stated earlier, the "community" was used interchangeably with "our masses" and referred to the African community at large in its more generalised sense, but could at times refer more specifically to the residents of Diepkloof who the youth felt were their immediate "community".

Diepkloof was their geographical territory which they needed to protect. The "community" was "good" - they were not part of Inkatha or gangster formations. Bheki implies that "Inkatha" was seen as "outsiders", a threat - not part of the "community" that needed to be protected. Their role as warriors was seen as far more important than that of their role as school-goers. Youth stated that they found it difficult to remain in a classroom while there were inauspicious activities happening on the streets outside. Straker accurately describes the dissonance in the day-to-day lives of youth in the township which led conflictual response by township youth. She states of the youth she interviewed that:

> They were not conscripted soldiers within a conventional army

> fighting battles in a combat zone. Yet they were engaged in what they saw as a civil war...At the same time, the youth were meant to attend school as usual and to carry on their daily affairs.[24]

Despite the high rate of unemployment in Diepkloof, youth still perceived "adults" as parents who had jobs, and were, therefore, outside of the township for a large percentage of the time:

> The people who are experiencing the violence are the youth because the youth are the ones who are in the location full time. They can see everything that is happening, but their parents are not there, they work. The youth must defend their properties (Xolile).

The youth, who were by and large students or unemployed, perceived themselves as bounded by the township. It became their role to hold the fort while "the parents" were away. The youth were the "eyes" of "the community" - "they can see everything that is happening". Without the vigilance and activities of the youth, the township would be without protection against gangsters, or potential "enemies" such as Inkatha:

> Youth is the one who is involved in political violence. While I have just stated that youth is militant then I mean if you remain as a resident of Diepkloof, then you can't just be doing nothing. I can't accept that maybe Inkatha do attack us. Instead of attacking us, then we will also avenge ourselves. Then the parents they used to be sleeping, then the youth go and fight (Chris).

Despite the high levels of unemployment at the time which affected both youth and their parents, these young people believed that since their "parents worked during the day", the youth worked at night. Adults were "passive"; youth were "militant" - they were combative, and warlike. In the face of attack, from Inkatha or any other external threat, the youth could not remain inactive. Political violence on behalf of the community was perceived to be retaliatory, and provoked - the youth "avenge" themselves. Political violence was hence necessary and reasoned.

F. COMRADES ARE THE ENSURERS OF DISCIPLINE, MORALITY

AND DISCIPLINE

Youth who were engaged in the liberation struggle saw themselves not only as defending the community in a physical sense. More broadly, they perceived themselves as defending the "morality" of the township, and in so doing building unity or homogeneity. The youth tried to preserve what was "good" in the township. By being "moral", one was expected not to commit crimes against other members of the "community". Crimes such as theft, murder, and rape caused suspicion, and fear and led to "disunity". Disunity was problematic in "struggle" since in order to achieve a common "good", people had to work together with a common goal of what was being fought for. Hence, the "community" needed to be "cleansed" internally. This was necessary for the "liberationary project" of the youth to achieve a democratic society free of oppression, and exploitation.[25] Sayco defined the goal of the "liberation movement" as a "struggle for...peoples freedom, social progress, and peace".[26]

Members of organisations, and even more broadly, those who identified with the liberation movement, were expected to act in a "disciplined" manner both within the organisation and outside. "The comrades know what is the wrong and the right thing" (Themba). It was therefore the role of the comrade youth to "show people the right way" (Senatso). More than often, behaving in an "undisciplined" manner involved harming either an organisation or the community in some way. This type of behaviour, they believed, would lead to loss of unity, so needed during times of mass mobilisation. Consequently, in order for mass struggle to be effective, communities needed to be consolidated against a common enemy. Moreover, the oppositional force needed to be seen to be morally superior so as to be worth supporting. "Showing the right way" could be done through a number of means - from simple chastisement to physical punishment. This was dependant on the perceived level of "immorality" of a person's behaviour:

> When people do a wrong thing, sometimes they give him discipline. Maybe they sit down and talk to them. Maybe they take him and whip him. It's good because he knows the thing is bad like to shoot a person or to rape a person...Sometimes I don't feel bad because they do a wrong thing (Themba).

Once the "comrades" had identified someone who "has done a wrong thing", discipline was

meted out. This ranged from talking to the person, to "whipping" them. "Themba" did "not feel bad" about engaging in "disciplinary" activities because they were "showing" the offender that their activities were "bad", and consequently unacceptable. Murder and rape were seen to be particularly serious "crimes" against the community:

However, it was not only "talking" and "whipping" that constituted "discipline". Serious crimes could be punishable by death. This was usually the case if the offender was perceived as "irredeemable":

> The comrades solve a problem. Other boys they don't understand, they need help. But other boys they didn't understand when the comrades talk, so that's why the comrades have killed them. If a comrade tell a person what is bad and they don't understand, she must kill them because she is going to do bad things like killing my grandmother and stealing money from my sisters (Thandi).

For Thandi, immoral people in the community were seen to be in need of assistance from the "comrades" to get back on the "right path". If "wrong doers" did not learn from the words of the comrades, violence was seen, as Zola expressed it, "another language which people understand". The horrifying consequence that Thandi claimed was necessary for those who "don't understand what is bad", was to kill that person. This emerged from a belief that those who "don't understand" were likely to commit terrible crimes in the future such as killing one's "grandmother".

Like Durkheim's repressive punishment, this "mechanical discipline" as it was termed by these youth, was seen as pre-emptive. By killing someone, they would not be able to harm others again. Violence was also a warning to others in the community as to what to expect from the comrades for "wrong doings". All this needs to be seen in the light of the inadequate and biased activities of the police and justice system historically in South Africa.[27]

Despite these many justifications for violence implicit in youths' discourse, this in no way means that they relished being involved in acts of violence nor that they desired to do so. Political violence was seen as a "necessary evil" toward a political end - essentially, bringing

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an end to apartheid or unjust rule:

> I don't think the youth want to be involved in violence. Really, it is bad and no-one mentally fit can support violence. So I don't think youth in this country maybe enjoys or wants to be involved in violence, but they are prepared maybe to make sure that this violence comes to an end because it makes most of the things they enjoy to be impossible. So this is why I'm saying that no human being who is mentally alright can support violence. Only those who are perpetrating it can want to see it prevailing every day (Nika).

Political violence was seen as instrumental - it was a means for achieving political gains. The respondent quoted above believed that violence by the state and other agents could only be ended with oppositional political violence. Violence carried out either by the state, or by gangsters, or "undisciplined" members of the community, prevented youth from "enjoying" life. The above respondent believed that an enjoyment of violence indicated "mental illness" and the enjoyment of violence was, therefore, absurd:

> No one likes to fight. To fight is not to play. To fight is to fight and maybe if you are watching, you see it is hard. So you know that you can die. So then it is a lie if the press say that the youth are getting happy if they can be involved in those violence. You can only be happy if you have peace. We want peace and peace you must fight for it (Zola).

For Zola, violence was not a game that youth "play". Not only was fighting "hard" i.e. strenuous, but there was also a real chance of the loss of life of those close to you, your comrades, or even to yourself. While, violence may have been accepted as an indispensable aspect of struggle to achieve "peace", it did not make them "happy". While these young people were engaged in a number of acts of collective violence, their engagement was part of a broader social action aimed at a dispensation that would benefit a collective. Consequently, collective violence in this context needs to be seen as a tactic employed by participants in social movement organisations, and not as a broadly defined "culture of violence" as many have chosen as an explanation.

CONCLUSION

Collective or political was perceived by the youth concerned essentially to be reactive - "the culture of violence amongst youth" (Lumkile) began when the security forces responded violently to peaceful protest. But, violence was used against all who were seen to be preventing "unity" in the townships - gangsters, Inkatha and perceived representatives of capital.

The legitimacy that these youth gave to political violence cannot be understood without examining the discourses they made use of which forms part of, and which illuminates, their self-identities. Key to understanding the willingness of Diepkloof organised youth participation in political violence is their prime identity as "comrade youth" whose role was to protect the community from physical and moral threat. Being a comrade meant doing anything in one's power to end apartheid and divisions in the community; this demanded the creation of a hegemonic and united movement of opposition. These youths' discourses around political violence are a combination of "derived ideas" advocated centrally by the ANC in the mid-eighties in its attempt to create "ungovernability", and "people's war" and in turn by the Charterist social movement inside the country; and the "inherent ideas" of the youth themselves which materialised from their own experiences of the state's repressive actions, their engagement in resistance politics, and local conditions in Diepkloof.

This discourse is complex, and became increasingly fragmented in the early nineties as the self-identity and role of the Charterist youth movement became more and more unclear, as did that of the Charterist movement at large. (The ANC itself was in a complicated position of being engaged in party politics and a mass social movement simultaneously.) However, what seems clear is that the "moral" discourse embedded in what it meant to be a "comrade", moral defenders of the community, remained in tact while the "political" discourse was less unified and directed in the early nineties. This needs to be seen in the context of the changed nature of politics in South Africa in the early nineties and the consequent decline of the organisations of the Charterist youth movement which we have witnessed since the negotiations process, but even more so since the elections in 1994.

It may appear that the focus of this paper is historical and has little relevance for

contemporary South Africa and the problems our society confronts. However, the examination of the discourse used by the youth concerned provides an insight into a mode of thought and identity which continues to prevail and, if grappled with adequately, could assist in developing programmes that allow for real conciliation and reintegration. Township youth in our country continue to be involved in acts of collective violence. This takes place in a number of different forms and can be identified as a major threat to safety and security and reconstruction and development. In many townships in South Africa, youth are organised into defense structures such as the Self Defense Units (generally associated with the ANC) or Self Protection Units (generally associated with Inkatha). These structures have a historical basis and prevail as a result of youth's continued identity as "defenders of the community".

While, the apartheid state which existed prior to the Government of National Unity has ceased to exist, a number of legitimations provided by the youth interviewed for their engagement in acts of collective violence are likely to prevail in the consciousness of these young people. Firstly, inequality and deprivation are still the primary experiences of youth at the local level. The Reconstruction and Development Programme, while facing a mammoth task of redistribution, has moved relatively slowly in addressing the problems confronted by the majority of black South Africans. Township residents continue to exist in conditions of extreme poverty, and the provision of proper education, and job creation is going to be a slow and painful process. Consequently, for many young people, the only way of achieving any "real changes", or receiving attention from the state is through their engagement in acts of collective violence.

The sad reality we are confronted with is that the South African state has limited resources. It is in fact when violence breaks out in local areas that attention is given, and if possible, programmes of development constructed. The East Rand, in particular, Katorus, is a case in point. When violence broke out in this area after the elections, it was deemed National disaster area, and a large number of state resources were pumped into this locality in an attempt to limit acts of collective violence (generally carried out by the youth). A special reservists programme was established for militarised youth in this area by the Ministry of Safety and Security. Special training colleges have also been developed by the Ministry of Education in this area. This reaction on behalf of the state, while effective in the short term,

has had a number of unintended consequences. Youth in other areas such as Soweto and the Vaal are resentful of the special treatment given to Katorus and believe the only method of receiving state attention is to engage in acts of collective violence. Political organisations and the state need to acknowledge their own historical role in creating such consciousness in the minds of youth in our country. Violence, however perceived, does bring recognition!

Furthermore, while the South African Police Service is attempting to engage in more accountable and community defined activities, this process of change is far from complete. In a number of areas in South Africa, for example Nyanga in the Western Cape, the Police Service is perceived as inefficient and inadequate. In general, however, the police service are still regarded with suspicion by township residents. This is a result of their historical repressive and partisan activities, as well as their current inefficiency in dealing with crime and other threats to local communities. In Orange Farm, an informal settlement in Gauteng, for example, there is no police station and no police persons present in the area after 4pm. The consequence of these realities is that youth who do see themselves as "defenders of the community" are forced to play the role of an alternative police service. This in itself is problematic since these youth are not formally trained as police personnel; in some instances, they themselves are the perpetrators of crime and part of gang formations. Their legitimacy, therefore, as defenders of the community, differs from one area to the next. None-the-less, these youth derive a sense of identity and purpose through their engagement in "policing activities", largely as a result of the fact that they have historically been marginalised from key social activities such as employment, and education.

In conclusion, there are no easy answers to ending the problem of collective violence carried out by youth at a local level. What is clear, however, is that whatever decisions are made regarding programmes of development and reconstruction involving youth need to take account of their self-perceptions and identities since these are often what shape the activities in which they participate, as this paper has attempted to show. In the case of the youth who align themselves to the Charterist social movement, their identities as "youth" and "comrade" are central to their discourse and practise. Political parties, and the newly created government were partly responsible in creating these identities. Leaders of parties concerned and of government need to publicly state their historic role in the creation of these identities,

and acknowledge an understanding for their continued existence. These youths conceptions of themselves as energetic bearers of the future who need to defend the community, can be reconstituted in positive and constructive ways in tandem with the political and social goals of the new government. At the same time, of course, youth and local communities in general need to be aware of the real constraints that government is confronted with in terms of resources and competing interest groups. In the final analysis, however, young township residents have real grievances that should be considered as a challenge, and not as a problem.

Endnotes

1. This paper is based on a Masters Thesis entitled "Organisation, Identity and Violence Amongst Activist Diepkloof Youth, 1985-1993".

2. As a result of the high level of violence in this area where key leaders of this organisation were assassinated in late 1991, I was advised by members of the organisation I that my attendance could be both dangerous to myself, and could bring further attention to the organisations concerned. Consequently, in late 1991, I stopped attending these meetings. This, however, did not mean that I was unable to participate broadly in the political lives of these young people.

3. Cosas was a student organisation launched in 1979 in response to the crisis in the schools. It took the place of the Black Consciousness student organisations, which were banned after the June 1976 uprisings. However, Cosas differed significantly from the student organisations of the seventies. It adopted the then banned Freedom Charter as its guiding document; signifying a move away from the ideology of Black Consciousness, to that of the ANC's ideology of non-racialism. Cosas was in fact the first organisation in South Africa to adopt the Freedom Charter since the banning of political organisations in 1960. In 1983, Cosas was the largest affiliate of the newly formed United Democratic Front. It was banned in 1985, and "unbanned " by its membership in 1989.

   Sayco was launched in 1987 as a national federal umbrella structure of the local youth congresses. Sayco targeted youth who were not schooling and hence could not be organised by Cosas. In reality, however, most youth who could have been members of Cosas were organised by Sayco. Sayco subsequently became the largest affiliate of the UDF, and was viewed by many as forwarding the liberation movement inside South Africa. Sayco identified openly with the ANC throughout its existence, even though it was banned.

4. All names used in the paper are fictional.

5. These youth were members of two main youth organisations in South Africa in the eighties and early nineties, that is, the Congress of South African Students (Cosas) and the South African Youth Congress (Sayco). Both these organisations are part of what can more broadly be defined as the Charterist Social Movement.

   According to Jeremy Seekings, "These organisations often indicated their allegiances through embracing the Freedom Charter, which the ANC adopted in 1955. The ANC-linked movement thus became known as Charterist. The emergent youth [from the late 1970's] comprised an important factor propelling the growing power of the Charterist movement, which in turn shaped processes of organisation, mobilisation and definition of the youth." Seekings, J. Heroes or Villains? Youth Politics in the 1980's. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993, P. 21.

6. This paper, following the work of Tilly, makes use of the terms "collective violence" and "political violence" interchangeably. According to Tilly, collective or political violence constitute acts of violence carried out by members of or participants in social movements with the aim of bringing about some form of social or political change. Collective or political violence, then, for Tilly is purposive and rational, and forms a part of broader acts of collective action.

   See C. Tilly, R. Tilly, and L. Tilly. The Rebellious Century: 1830 - 1930. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.

   See Tilly, C. From Mobilisation to Revolution. New York: Random House, 1978.

   See Tilly, C. "Modules and Realities of Popular Collective Action." Social Research 52, no 4 (1985).

7. Although collective violence is viewed as rational, this does not automatically render this plausible, nor does it mean that such collective activities are well conceived, or organised. The space is always created in collective action for a actors with different goals to participate. This may result in a fine line being drawn between collective violence and forms of criminal violence.

8. For the purpose of this chapter the term "discourse" will be used to mean a "fairly comprehensive and systematically articulated ensemble of specific ways and modes of talking about particular areas of social life either with general institutions, professions and disciplines or with certain general ideological and political positions. They are at once discourse and social practice". This Definition is taken from A. Du Toit. "Discourses on Political Violence." In Violence and the Struggle in South Africa ,eds. M. Manganyi and A. Du Toit. London: MacMillan Press, (1990), p 95.

9. See A. Du Toit, ibid.

10. See S. Stanage. "Violatives: Modes and Themes of Violence." In Reason and Violence in Philosophical Investigations, ed. S. Stanage. London: Basil Blackwell, 1974.

11. ibid., p 222.

12. The attempt to understand the relationship between the Diepkloof organised youth and political violence, follows the premise of the work of D. Apter. "Towards a Critical Discourse on Political Violence." In Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa, eds. M. Manganyi and A. Du Toit. London: MacMillan Press, 1990. Apter believes that in order to understand political violence, one needs to understand discourses on violence and that the very involvement of participants in acts of violence generates discourses around violence itself.

13. Phillips, I. "The Opposition: After Kabwe and the Emergency: Lessons from the 1980's. In Political Conflict in South Africa -Data Trends. Natal: Indicator Project South Africa, December 1988.

14. In Oliver Tambo's opening speech at the Kabwe Conference in 1985, youth were encouraged to disarm police and steal guns from white homes. Below is an extract of his speech:

> Pretoria has carried out its murderous plans to extremes. We must now respond to the reactionary violence of the enemy with our own revolutionary violence. The weapons are hidden there in white houses. Each white house has a gun or two hidden inside to use against us. Our mothers work in their kitchens. We work in their gardens. We must deliberately go out to look for these weapons in these houses. It is a matter of life and death to find these weapons to use against the enemy... The lone policeman must be made a target. He must be destroyed so that we can get his weapon... We must learn to lay ambushes for the armoured personnel carriers and police cars that patrol the locations.

I was given a copy of this tape in 1992 by one of the young activists in Diepkloof. He informed me that this tape had been widely distributed in youth organisations. He added that this tape had become his "gospel" as it was given to him by one of the key youth leaders from Diepkloof who was killed in late 1991 by the South African Police Force.

15. South African Youth Congress draft policy document, 1987.

16. See J. Seekings. "Quiescence and the Transformation to Confrontation: South African Townships, 1978-1984." Ph.D thesis, Oxford University, 1990.

See also C. Tilly, L. Tilly and R. Tilly. The Rebellious Century: 1830-1930. Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1975. These works propose that state repression often leads to resistance and more confrontational forms of conflict.

It should also be kept in mind that the ANC itself for many decades believed in non-violent collective

action as a strategy for change. This only changed with the event of Sharpeville in 1960 where 69 people were killed when peacefully protesting against the inhumane pass system, and the consequent banning of the ANC and other liberatory organisations.

17. Straker, G. Faces in the Revolution: The Psychological Effects of Violence on Township Youth in South Africa. Cape Town: David Phillip, 1992, p 132.

18. In a sense they had an almost Sorelian approach to violence in that for Sorel "it was not a question of justifying violence but of understanding its role in history. For Sorel, great historic action was inevitably marked by violence... " Cited in J. Roth. The Cult of Violence: Sorel and the Sorelians. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990, p 50. Roth continues that for Sorel, violence clearly delineated the dichotomy of the "good" and the "bad", it "boosted revolutionary morale and removed what was seen in society as the 'mark of weakness'". p 50.

19. This sentence in itself is a direct quote from Nelson Mandela at the famous treason trial of 1964.

20. This is in accordance with the writings of D. Apter. "A View from the Bogside." In The Elusive Search for Peace: South Africa, Israel and Northern Ireland. eds. H. Gilomee and J. Gagliano. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. Apter posits that acts of violence themselves create their own discourses in which actual death and sacrifice are a part.

21. Straker, G. Faces in the Revolution: The Psychological Effects of Violence on Township Youth in South Africa. p 98.

22. These "attributes" of youth outlined in the eighties by Sayco. In its draft policy document (1887) four "characteristics and qualities" of youth were identified: 1) "the young and rising generation constitutes a representative of the future in the broadest sense"; 2) "the stage of youth is one of learning and assimilating"; 3) "the youth is enthusiastic...determined, impatient and displays great zeal and verve in fighting for what it conceives as just"; 4) "young people can be easily swayed into positions".

23. Interview with Mr Tloteng in 1992. Tloteng was a senior social worker with Nicro in Soweto.

24. ibid., p 111.

25. According to W. Scharf and B. Ngcokoto. "Images of Punishment in the People's Courts of Cape Town, 1985-87: From Prefigurative Justice to Populist Violence." In Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa, eds. N. Manganyi and A. Du Toit. London: MacMillan Press, 1990. "the aim of peoples' structures in the eighties was to "enforce a new morality, a peoples' morality that conformed to the political ideals of their liberatory projects". p 341.

26. Draft Policy Document of the South African Youth Congress, 1987.

27. See W. Scharf and B. Ngcokoto. "Images of Punishment in the People's Courts of Cape Town, 1985-1987: From Prefigurative Justice to Populist Violence." In Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa, ed. N. Manganyi and A. du Toit. London: Macmillan Press, 1990. This piece explores the roots of popular or alternative forms of justice in African townships in South Africa.

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