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"Local truths in Kathorus"

Phil Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien

From the time the idea of a truth commission was first mooted prior to the 1994 elections, to the public and parliamentary debates about its character and mandate, and finally during the course of TRC and amnesty hearings, the need for such a body to deal with the past has been regarded as absolutely central and undisputed. Indeed, it may be argued that a crucial measure of the success and efficacy of the TRC process should be the extent to which it has delivered on its promise to reveal South Africa's hidden and tortuous past. The truth, it has regularly been declared, should be uncovered in order to heal the wounds of the past. This exercise is of course profoundly political in so far as its stated goal is to effect or contribute to national reconciliation, but it was also always much more than that. Notwithstanding a limited horizon that confined the TRC to investigating only gross human rights violations between 1960 and 1994, the enterprise has undoubtedly been the most ambitious historical project ever undertaken in this country. The commission's final report confirms its central aim to achieve national reconciliation by

> establishing as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights which were committed during the period from 1 March 1960 to the cut-off date, including the antecedents, circumstances, factors and context of such violations, as well as the perspectives of the victims and the motives and perspectives of the

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persons responsible for the commission of the violations, by conducting investigations and holding hearings.[1]

There has also been a popular demand for the truth to be uncovered. The prevailing view has been that the country could only properly proceed on the road to transformation and national reconciliation once the previously oppressed and oppressor collectively confronted their past. In particular, the call has been for the oppressors to admit to their deeds. Ernest Thusini, a religious leader and ANC activist from Durban, in 1987 lost five of his children in an IFP attack on his KwaMakhuta home. He echoed the feeling of victims and many black people in 1995 when he insisted that "Without truth, there can be no reconciliation... There has to be truth and it has to be the real truth... you cannot escape letting the country know what it needs to know."[2] During the TRC hearings the victims and survivors of violence like Ernest were able to confront the perpetrators of atrocities who so violently destroyed their lives. And when these perpetrators decided to disclose the truth, as often happened, the victims and survivors were able to discover why and how atrocities were committed against family and comrades. Therefore the TRC did to a certain extent provide a public platform for admissions and revelations of the truth. The very act of getting the perpetrators of gross human rights violations to admit to their crimes and sometimes even acknowledge the devastating consequences of their deeds has arguably been the outstanding success of the TRC.

However, as the TRC's final report declares, the aim was always to expose more than just the actual perpetrators of gross human rights violations. By committing itself to lifting the

veil on the past, it became incumbent on the TRC to provide explanations of the causes, circumstances and context within which violations occurred – a responsibility the TRC endorsed from the outset. It was therefore widely expected that in the course of its investigations, accumulation of records and documents, collection of oral testimonies as well as through the evidence provided at hearings, the TRC would be able to make a substantial contribution to uncovering the past. In fact the pursuit of the truth about the past became integrally associated with this project of historical rewriting. Ordinary citizens were therefore not unreasonable in their expectation that the TRC had the moral authority and obligation to shine a bright light on the past to expose those parts of our history deliberately hidden and distorted by the apartheid government. The final report does in fact give an historical account of the period 1960 to 1994 that is substantially different from the official history constructed by the Nationalist government. Merely by allowing ordinary people publicly to express their views and give personal accounts of events that were important in their lives, albeit mainly tragic, the TRC has made an invaluable contribution to uncovering the history of that period. During the three years of its operation the TRC accumulated mountains of material that now constitute probably one of the most important and comprehensive archives in the country. The voluminous final report according to Archbishop Tutu "offers a road map to those who wish to travel into our past. It is not and cannot be the whole story, but it provides a perspective on the truth about a past that is more extensive and more complex than any one commission could ... have captured."[3] It is, of course, a particular version of the truth and the past. Notwithstanding disclaimers, the report is in fact perceived as an authoritative account of the past, not least of all because its main brief was to uncover *the* truth about the past.

How useful will the road map bequeathed to us by the TRC be in assisting researchers and other interested people to navigate the complexities of the past? Unfortunately, the TRC's final report disappoints in its synthesis of the rich historical material that was at its disposal. In the main the report lacks a critical and substantive engagement with the myriad complexities that constituted the 'context' within which violations occurred, as well as the varied and cumulative causal processes. It opts for sweeping generalisations and its findings are invariably constructed to fit into the pre-determined categories of victim and perpetrator. Too often these generalisations are imposed onto local conditions and consequently tend to ignore the local peculiarities that shaped the form and determined the content of the various struggles that were waged. Although it could of course not be expected of the TRC to give a definitive historical account, it nevertheless falls short of providing a comprehensive treatment of many events and of important processes.

The TRC's report on the violence that pervaded Kathorus between 1990 – 1994 provides an example of these shortcomings. As an exercise in truth revelation, the TRC failed in bringing to light much that was new. The hearings on specific massacres provided graphic details of atrocities but they said little that was not already known by township residents, especially the protagonists in the war. Furthermore, the Goldstone Commission and the Human Rights Commission (HRC) had previously investigated the violence on the East Rand and had already compiled relatively extensive accounts of some of the most important massacres. The media had also reported fairly extensively on the massacres such as the attack on Phola Park, the taxi violence and the train violence in

Katlehong.There was therefore already a certain degree of public knowledge about many of the most notorious instances of violence. However human rights violations in Kathorus were more extensive and pervasive than either the TRC's hearings or report revealed. On a daily basis individuals were being abducted, raped, evicted from their homes and killed. These are the stories that have yet to be disclosed. An investigation into the causes and effects of these violations would also reveal a far more complex picture of causation than has been sketched by the TRC. As a project/process of recording history it thereofore failed to live up to its promises. In fact, the final report of the TRC presents only an attenuated historical account of events in Kathorus and thus does not contribute substantially to a new history of the township.

In making these criticisms of the TRC's endeavour to uncover the past, it is necessary also to acknowledge the many difficulties that it confronted, some of which were beyond its control while others were self-imposed. The hearings and investigations of the violence on the East Rand were hamstrung by the refusal of the IFP to participate in the TRC, which it spuriously claimed was nothing more than an ANC project of revenge against its political opponents. As a result a crucial voice – that of hostel-dwellers – was absent from the hearings. Zulu-speaking hostel dwellers were central figures in the conflict, as perpetrators and victims, and the fact that their stories were not heard has left a gaping hole in the TRC's report.[4] It may be argued that one of the consequences of this has been to contribute to the TRC's uncritical characterisation of the violence perpetrated by hostel dwellers almost exclusively as an IFP-inspired power struggle. The IFP's non-participation also meant that the involvement of the security forces, especially their

collusion with the IFP against township residents, could not be dealt with comprehensively. The deliberate fabrications and lies often presented by security officers at hearings and the destruction of tons of records undermined any attempt to find out the truth about the past, especially in relation to the covert strategies used by the previous government against the liberation movements. The Commission report on the violence on the East Rand also criticised the ANC's submission for not being sufficiently forthcoming about its own activities. However, the ANC was far more candid about its role in the violence than any other party, and was also willing to accept overall responsibility for the activities of its members. The Commission was aware of and concerned about the difficulties it confronted in uncovering the atrocities committed since 1990. Whereas it "had considerable success in uncovering violations that took place before 1990. This was not true of the 1990s period. Information before the Commission shows that the nature and pattern of political conflict in this later period changed considerably, particularly in its apparent anonymity. A comparatively smaller number of amnesty applications were received for this period."[5]

This particular problem was directly related to the difficulties the Commission experienced "in dealing with the events of the more recent past". The report states that, "Of 9 043 statements received on killings, over half of these (5 695) occurred during the 1990 to 1994 period. These figures give an indication of violations recorded by the Commission during the negotiations process. They represent a pattern of violation, rather than an accurate reflection of levels of violence and human rights abuses. Sources other than the Commission have reported that, from the start of the negotiations in mid-1990 to

the election in April 1994, some 14 000 South Africans died in politically related incidents. While Commission figures for reported violations in the earlier part of its mandate period are under-represented in part because of the passage of time, they are under-reported in this later period because the abuses are still fresh in people's memories and closely linked into current distribution of power."[6] Clearly people were concerned about the possible effects revelations about atrocities committed in the more recent past would have on the current situation. Some township residents were especially worried that revelations of atrocities could unsettle the fragile peace that had been created in the post-1994 period.

A further problem faced by the TRC was the heightening tension between uncovering the truth and achieving reconciliation. Throughout the period of its operation the TRC insisted on the inseparability of truth and reconciliation. However, while the pursuit for truth was formally never abandoned, it was often sacrificed at the altar of national reconciliation as political expediency demanded more circumspect approaches to the recovery of the past and the truth. This has particularly been the case in relation to the IFP with whom reconciliation has in fact become more important than revealing the truth about its pivotal role in atrocities. Thabo Mbeki's suggestion of a blanket amnesty especially in KwaZulu/Natal therefore seriously jeopardises the fundamental aims and tenets of the TRC. Similarly, the TRC's awkward handling of spies and informers has been problematic. The case of Sicelo Dhlomo, the alleged double role of leading ANC figures and the infiltration of SDUs by police informers suggest that our complex past was replete with conspiracy, complicity and betrayals. To expose the networks of spies

and informers would of course have opened a veritable can of worms. But it would have been worthwhile and could have answered many questions that now remain unresolved. Revealing precisely who was on which side would certainly have shed more light on a variety of issues, including causes and motives, and would also have illuminated more clearly who were perpetrators and victims. As a result of the TRC not properly dealing with this issue, another dark shadow remains cast over our past. Finally it could be argued that the TRC imposed restrictions on itself by primarily operating within a framework defined by the dichotomy of perpetrator and victim. It is of course self-evident that in the execution of atrocities these categories are vitally important and cannot possibly be excluded. However, as this paper hopes to demonstrate, by according an overarching centrality to this dichotomy, the TRC report has tended to eschew historical complexities – of causes and processes – in favour of mono-causality and simplicity. As a result the contribution that the TRC could potentially have made to the rewriting of the country's history has not been fulfilled. Instead, the final report has left us with an attenuated version of the past. This also has important consequences for one of the central concerns of the TRC, namely, how does one attribute responsibility?

Kathorus Violence

The TRC's report and analysis of the violence on the East Rand is especially deficient when one considers that the conflict there, and particularly in Kathorus, threatened to derail the negotiations process. The township complex was at the centre of the Reef war, which saw approximately 15 000 being killed. The residents of Kathorus (township

residents, squatters and hostel dwellers) throughout the period 1990-94 experienced extreme disruption. People's lives were dominated by fear of death, many parts of the townships became no-go areas, schooling was disrupted and very few dared to venture out at night. So worried were the government and other parties about the potential threat to the negotiations process posed by the violence in Kathorus that they agreed to declare the township an unrest area in April 1991. Yet, during the following three years as the country precariously proceeded to the first democratic elections, Kathorus continuously teetered on the brink of destruction. In July and August 1993 the war in the Reef townships was at its worst ever. In those two bloody months 1159 people were killed in political violence, an average of more than 18 a day. The East Rand was the worst affected with 310 deaths in August alone.[7] In May 1993 hostel inmates from Thokoza killed 14 ANC supporters who were part of a march to Alberton to present a memorandum to the authorities. That was on a Saturday. The Monday Inkatha launched a pre-dawn attack on Katlehong residents, which turned the area into a war zone in which scores were killed and more 1000 families were forced to seek refuge outside the townships. A high school student recounted her ordeal:

> "I was sleeping in a shack with my brother when all of a sudden we heard gunshots ringing outside. I realised that something bad must be happening when I heard a woman screaming and people running past our shack. When I looked out of the window I saw a group of people wearing red headbands setting houses on fire and indiscriminately shooting at people. There were big clouds of smoke outside. I told my brother that it's bad

> outside, we are going to be burned inside the shack unless we try to run away. I can't even remember how I managed to dress. I can only remember when an AK-47 shot hit me in the stomach. I never turned back. I kept on running... The next thing, I was here in hospital. I don't know how I came here and I don't know if my brother is still alive."[8]

A special investigation into the unrest in the area by the Transitional Executive Council (TEC) in 1993 concluded that Schoeman and Khumalo streets were among the most dangerous places in the country, "where only the insane will venture".[9] The TEC, ANC and government were so concerned that the unrest in the East Rand, especially Kathorus, would threaten the first democratic elections that they agreed to deploy 2500 troops in the region to enforce peace.[10] Death and destruction were so common that very few families remained unscathed. Journalists often compared the situation in Kathorus to the war in Bosnia. In short, community life was being brutally torn asunder and any hope of peace seemed very remote. For nearly fours years Kathorus was in the spotlight, resulting in the accumulation of a huge amount of written material on the conflict. Besides the media coverage, there were investigations by the HRC, the Goldstone Commission, the TEC and various NGOs. In our own research on Kathorus we have also found that residents have been willing to tell their stories. As far as the history of Kathorus between 1990 and 1994 is concerned, therefore, the evidence clearly exists for a more nuanced history to have been written.

Context and causes

The TRC's introduction to the report on the violence on the Reef between 1990 and 1994 suggests an awareness of the complexities involved in the conflict. It explains that, "Although the violence was precipitated and fundamentally shaped by the contest for political power which took place in the wake of the unbanning of political organisations, there were a variety of other divisions, including generational, economic, territorial and personal, that impacted on the form that violence took and motivated people's participation in it. These conflicts were intensified by the context of poverty and disempowerment within which they occurred."[11] After these preliminary remarks however the report pursues these issues no further. Instead the report tends to reduce the conflict to the power struggle between the ANC and IFP, and their respective allies. Of course that power struggle was central. The report correctly explains that the eruption of violence on the Reef should be viewed in the context of the unbanning of the ANC and following from that the start of negotiations, which opened the way for the introduction of black majority rule, led by the ANC. Furthermore, "the escalation of violence coincided with the establishment of Inkatha as a national political party, the Inkatha Freedom Party, in July 1990, and its attempts to develop a political base in the Transvaal."[12] Various sectors of society that were linked to the Nationalist government feared the prospect of the ANC assuming power and were determined to undermine, by whatever means at its disposal, the mass support enjoyed by the ANC.

However, part of the problem is that by fusing the complexities of the violence under the mono-causal rubric of a power struggle between political parties, the important variations and permutations of that struggle as manifested in the different townships are not adequately accounted for. For example, how did the fear of ANC dominance express itself in Kathorus? One the one hand, the 'ANC *gevaar*" syndrome was deliberately invoked by the IFP and rightwing organisations to pre-empt the transition to democracy. On the other hand, it resonated at multiple levels with the actual experiences of hostel dwellers in the townships. Moreover the conditions under which this occurred were not created only in the 1990s but were also crucially consequences of accumulated processes over a period of decades. Trying to make sense of those processes would allow one to explain why the IFP succeeded in mobilising hostel dwellers so quickly. Why were many hostel dwellers determined to wage a virtual war against township residents and squatters for a protracted period? It must be remembered that most Kathorus residents, including seasoned political activists, were completely surprised by the war that erupted in 1990. According to township residents the relationship between them and the hostel-dwellers had been mostly harmonious.[13] However, such a description is probably more a comparison with the extreme violence of the 1990s. It certainly does not provide any insight into the intricate relationship between the hostels and townships. Again, the TRC report alludes to some understanding of this dynamic when it explains that "Many hostels in the Transvaal were inhabited largely by migrant Zulus from rural KwaZulu who had sought employment in the mines and industries in the Transvaal. Township residents viewed them as outsiders. The hostel residents used their common ethnic identity as a means of uniting in a hostile urban environment. These Zulu migrants became a

springboard for Inkatha's attempt to penetrate the urban Transvaal and launch itself as a national political force."[14] The report the goes on to accuse the IFP of 'direct physical coercion' and comments that "The large dilapidated buildings built to house single males in large concentrations created the ideal context for coercion and forced recruitment. This environment also facilitated rapid mobilisation, instant meetings and preparation for armed attacks."[15] It is in this respect that the absence of hostel dwellers from the hearings is particularly problematic because our knowledge of what happened in the hostels at the time is very limited. Many questions remain unanswered: How did the coercion happen? How did hostel residents feel about being forced to join armed gangs? Was there any resistance? And, very importantly, why did so many hostel dwellers voluntarily join the fight against squatters and township residents?

Hostel dwellers perceive or imply a complex pattern of causation behind the violence. Up until the mid 1980s relations between hostel dwellers and township youth are generally depicted as being cordial. Township residents visited the hostels on weekends for hot showers, to hawk food and to watch ingomas and other dances. Hostel residents visited the township for drinks and recreation. A significant number of migrant workers bought houses in the township, mainly because this permitted easier access to jobs, and constituted another important bridge between the two communities. In the late seventies and early eighties many migrant workers from the East Rand metal industries, among whom Zulu speakers were prominent, joined the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) and its successor Numsa. They joined hands in a sequence of industrial actions alongside fellow union members from the township. They express a universally

favourable opinion of the union as it protected them from a scourge which affected migrant workers in particular – unfair or arbitrary dismissal. This bore down on migrants especially severely as the loss of a job meant repatriation to a rural homeland and often long-term unemployment.

In the mid 1980s this harmonious pattern of relationships was disturbed. Numsa shop stewards began 'to fight for people who did not want to work and were dismissed for valid reasons such as absenteeism and drunkenness.' A new generation of shop stewards in the factories were also perceived as organising frivolous strikes, venting a near universal view among Zulu migrants that this and Cosatu's disinvestment campaigns were causing East Rand factories to close down. This growing disenchantment among Zulu migrants in particular was compounded by repeated stay-aways. The sole reason for migrant workers travelling to the Rand was to work and earn money. Stay-aways called in the late eighties about which Zulu migrants were not consulted produced a growing estrangement between migrants and their unions, migrants and township residents and migrants and township youth. The fact that the youth were mainly responsible for mobilising support, often through coercion, for stayaways exacerbated the perception that township youth were undisciplined, lazy and did not respect their elders. Increasingly hostel migrants believed their interests diverged substantially from that of township residents. As one Vosloorus migrant put it, "The Zulu said they had come to the Rand for the sole purpose of working. They left their families behind them. They [now] had to down tools to stay in the hostel, while the township people downed tools to stay with their families."[16] From the mid-eighties therefore a growing estrangement and even

antagonism developed between hostel-dwellers and township residents, that was largely independent of political mobilisation by the IFP, but which contributed significantly to its ability to do so in the early 1990s.

It is important also to understand how the violence started in the townships because the differences that emerge in this respect point to varying local causes. In the case of the former the first major attack by hostel-dwellers was against Phola Park squatter camp. In Katlehong the first conflict first reared its head as a struggle between opposing taxi associations. Further investigation of these issues in fact reveal a more complex set of causes that involve struggles over resources, deteriorating conditions in hostels, antagonism between hostel-dwellers and township youth, fears of domination and the often insidious role of the security forces and officials from the township and town councils. The TRC description of the violence also tends to suggest a significant degree of commonality between the townships, without attempting to prove it. In fact, it rarely attempts to explain the peculiarities of the conflict in each of the townships. Some analysis of these differences would further highlight the myriad influences on the conflict. All three townships were racked by the violence, but Thokoza and Katlehong were particularly badly affected. The Kwesine and Mshayazafe IFP-controlled hostels in Katlehong and Thokoza respectively, were centres of the conflict. So too were the large ANC-dominated squatter camps such as Mandela camp and Phola Park. The conflict between the hostels and squatter camps was the most violent. Often the conflict originated between these communities and then spread to the townships. The violence in Vosloorus was less protracted, but equally brutal. The violence in Vosloorus reached a bloody peak in November 1990 when 54 people were killed in just one hour of fighting

that occurred when the township's power was cut by the Boksburg council suggesting also complicity by the white local authority, on which the Conservative Party was prominently represented.[17] It seems that a combination of diplomacy by the Vosloorus Civic Association[18] and early military defeats inflicted on the hostels by township residents[19] prevented the conflict from spiraling out of control in that township. Interestingly, the resolution of the taxi conflict in Vosloorus contributed hugely to the ending of the broader struggle in that township.

Squatters vs hostels

An important feature of the conflict that is underplayed by the TRC report is the antagonism between squatter settlements and hostel dwellers. In Thokoza and Katlehong this particular struggle was always central, whereas in Vosloorus the absence of squatter settlements contributed to a less protracted struggle. An important area of tension between the authorities and community in Kathorus was over the future of squatter settlements. The inability of the councils to provide housing and the continued influx of people from the rural areas resulted by the end of the eighties in the emergence of huge squatter populations in Katlehong and Thokoza, which were among the highest in the PWV, whereas Vosloorus did not experience any major squatter development.[20] Katlehong was especially affected because its close proximity to the industrial areas of Germiston and Johannesburg made it the preferred destination for thousands of impoverished rural dwellers in search of work. The continued forced removals from Dukatole further added to the township's population growth, and finally, hostel dwellers

were increasingly also encouraging their families to move to the urban areas. However, the vast majority of squatters came from impoverished rural areas, especially from the Ciskei and Transkei. This fed into the perception that the urban townships were being dominated by Xhosa-speakers. Between 1980 and 1982 the number of backyard shacks in Katlehong grew fourfold from eight to thirty four thousand.[21] The Council in 1981 estimated that there were 21 000 shacks compared to only 17 000 houses in the township. This occurred despite the Council's determination to prevent the erection of shacks. In Thokoza in 1982 there were twice the number of shacks than houses, namely, 35 000 compared to 17650. By 1991 the number of shacks in Katlehong and Thokoza was 81 000 and 65 000 respectively.[22] From the late seventies, therefore, the proportion of hostel-dwellers in the townships had dwindled very substantially. Furthermore, squatter settlements sometimes developed very close to the hostels. Residents from the squatter camps and township often provide as evidence of the harmonious relationship between themselves and hostel dwellers the fact that they were permitted regularly to utilise the bathing facilities in the hostel.[23] However, hostel dwellers did not always see this in the same light. For example, the Thokoza Hostel Dwellers Association complained to the Council that squatters were entering the hostel at all hours to use these facilities and alleged that they were stealing the belongings of hostel dwellers.[24]

The Mandela and Holomisa camps in Katlehong and Phola Park in Thokoza were constantly threatened by forced removals and were regularly subjected to raids by security forces, resulting in open clashes and the destruction of people's shacks. Besides having to live under the most abject conditions, squatters therefore also had to deal with

the threat of removal. As a result these camps became highly politicised and were strongholds of the anti-apartheid struggle. The intensifying conflict between squatters and the authorities became an important factor in the violence in Kathorus, as is revealed in the example of Phola Park. The mayhem in Thokoza started in August 1990 when hostel dwellers launched an offensive against Phola Park squatters. By all accounts the attack was planned and executed with almost military precision as scores of heavily armed hostel-dwellers descended without warning on Phola Park. The attack was brutal, indiscriminate and aimed to wreak maximum havoc in the squatter camp. Phola Park's residents were caught completely by surprise and were unable effectively to defend themselves. Although groups of residents quickly mobilised rudimentary defences and retaliated with an assortment of make-shift weapons, they were unable to prevent the massacre. Besides numerous deaths and injuries, many people also fled the area and sought refuge in the township. The attack on Phola Park has often been explained as a revenge attack by hostel dwellers after one of their colleagues was killed during a gambling game in the squatter camp.[25] According to this account a Xhosa-speaking squatter killed a Zulu-speaking hostel inmate after an argument either over gambling or a woman. The attack by hostel dwellers was thus seen as a revenge attack. A series of retaliatory attacks from both sides over the next few days resulted in the death of more than 140 people, one of the highest death tolls for any period anywhere in the country.[26] The fighting between squatters and hostel dwellers almost immediately was politicised. Squatters viewed the hostel dwellers and the IFP as allies of the authorities, anti-ANC and anti-Xhosa. They saw the attacks on the settlement as part of a strategy forcibly to remove them from the areas. From the time Phola Park was established in 1987 the

Thokoza Council tried desperately to remove the squatters to Zonkezizwe, a camp much further away from the township. In 1989 Council used the police to destroy shacks and evict people from the camp. However, the squatters resisted, fought with the police and eventually won a Supreme Court case preventing the council from removing them. The struggle by the squatters was also seen as integral to the defiance campaign of the Mass Democratic Movement. They therefore received strong support from the Congress organisations in Thokoza. The political antagonism between the squatters and the authorities explains why Phola Park became a key target of the assault against ANC-aligned residents.

Taxis, migrants and youth

The spatial segmentation of community and working life imposed by apartheid was also instrumental in generating other frictions and conflicts. The huge distances separating migrant workers from their homelands, and the lesser but still substantial ones separating African townships from their sources of employment made transport a prime site of contestation. Once mini-buses became a common feature in South Africa, it is not surprising that taxi routes between the cities and the homelands were among the first established, and that taxi associations based on these routes were among the first formed, and the most formidable. In Katlehong the first major taxi association to come in to being was GMB, organised by Zulu migrants from Nqutu. Two years afterwards there emerged a township based taxi association entitled Kato which began to compete increasingly fiercely with GMB over the main taxi routes. Zulu migrants saw this competition

between GMB and Kato as the first trigger of violence. They claim that taxi owners within Kato incited their children to attack GMB taxis. The conflict came to a head when Zulu migrants refused to observe a stayaway in 1989. At that point the interests of the Katlehong taxi owners and the politicised youth coalesced. Youth attacked and burnt a taxi owned by a Mr. Ngobese of GMB after it had left the Kwesine hostel. Migrants claim a number of people were killed, including a pregnant woman and a child. Migrants from the hostel then retaliated by attacking the township killing a large number of people. Thereafter negotiations took place and peace was restored.

The second phase of the conflict in the now universal opinion of Zulu migrants was an ethnic was war between Zulus and Xhosas. The backdrop to this war, at least partly, was the spatial disassembling of apartheid. Following the abolition of influx control, huge numbers of people, hitherto penned into the reserves, flooded into the Witwatersrand in search of employment. Xhosa workers and their families figured especially prominently in this influx. This created new sources of competition, new tensions and new frictions between groups that had not been closely juxtaposed before. A new flashpoint of conflict emerged some time in 1990. Up until that point migrants from all ethnic groups occupied hostels, and in the taxi violence of mid-1989 they are supposed to have presented a united front. After the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 a new spirit of ethnic chauvinism was born, which greatly exacerbated existing tensions. A meeting at Kwesine hostel was called quite possibly by the IFP and at which inflammatory speeches were made asserting that the Zulus were not going to be ruled by the Xhosa. In the aftermath of this the Xhosa

residents of the hostel were told to leave, who then evacuated themselves and their possessions to the squatter camp.

At some stage in the same period a rumour came into circulation that the Zulu staying in Lindela hostel were about to be attacked by Xhosa and Bhaca from Khutlala hostel. Some Zulu migrants took note of the warning and left –others did not, and were killed. Henceforth a process of ethnic cleansing developed both in hostels across the East Rand and in squatter camps like Phola Park. As Xhosa groups by and large aligned themselves with the ANC and the township residents did the same, the conflict entered the third phase identified by Zulu migrant as a political war between the IFP and ANC. In this a total polarisation of the East Rand had occurred, in which both police and informers played an active role in fomenting the violence. Zulu speakers in the townships were now perceived as potential spies unless they enthusiastically supported ANC campaigns. Migrants who had bought houses in the township were forced to flee to the hostels, Zulu women fled to take up residence in the hostels in large numbers – a hitherto unprecedented development. The most cold-blooded and violent acts of barbarism were perpetrated on both sides.

Tensions between opposing taxi associations simmered throughout this period. In March 1990 a new wave of bloody conflict erupted with a full scale taxi war between the Katlehong Taxi Organisation (Kato) and the Germiston District Taxi Association (GDTA). The conflict was initially over taxi routes but very soon became politicised. Most GDTA members were Zulu-speaking and were not popular among youth activist,

whereas Kato won the approval of the youth, partly because they offered students discounts. As a result the GDTA targeted Cosas members and killed five students in one attack. Hostel dwellers aligned themselves to the GDTA apparently after youth attacked a taxi with migrant workers. The intense conflict that ensued between the two taxi associations and their supporters resulted in the death of fifty people in one month. Attempts by community organisations to intervene initially proved fruitless. The Katlehong Civic and the local Crisis Committee called a mass meeting that was attended by more than 10 000 residents where it was decided to boycott taxis until the dispute was resolved.[27] After a month of warfare a UDF task force convened a meeting between the associations in an attempt to resolve the conflict. Only after both associations accepted responsibility for and agreed to end the conflict, was it decided to call off the boycott and permit the taxis to operate again.[28]

Taxi drivers from all three Kathorus townships claimed that they were forced to take sides in the war between the ANC and IFP. As was the case in Katlehong, many taxi drivers either lived in the hostels or had strong links to migrants living in the hostels. This was due in part to the fact that migrant workers were regular long distance commuters. Many of these taxis operated from the hostel, transporting inmates to and from work. Township residents also made use of this service and this was usually regarded as quite normal. However, during the taxi struggles residents were forced to identify safe taxis as it was reported that Inkatha-aligned drivers were taking commuters into the hostels where they were assaulted and killed.[29] Cynthia Ncala, her mother and cousin were taken hostage after boarding a taxi in Germiston. They were taken to the Kwesine hostel where

they were forced to strip and drink petrol, after which Inkatha members took shots at their stomachs to ignite them so that they could explode.[30] The patterns of violence directed against women also requires further attention. Thokoza experienced a particular violent episode of taxi violence in September 1993 when nearly fifty people were killed. In Vosloorus hostel dwellers, especially Zulu-speakers, controlled large parts of the taxi industry and they resolutely refused to allow other taxis to operate in the township. This meant that Vosloorus residents who were more dependent on taxis because of the absence of a railway line, had to walk long distances to get to the taxi ranks, which were located close to the hostels. When new taxi owners started operating from within the township they won the support of the community but gained the extreme ire of the hostel taxi drivers. The conflict between the two taxi groups immediately assumed the character of an IFP vs ANC dispute. Oupa Simelane, a Vosloorus taxi driver, was ambushed by AK47-wielding hostel dwellers because he refused to obey their order that taxis in the area should operate from Somhlolo, a taxi rank next to the hostel. Although the driver survived the attack, six of his passengers were killed. Simelane opposed the Inkatha instruction because it meant township residents would have to walk a few kilometers before being able to get a taxi.[31] The intervention by the Vosloorus Civic Association eventually succeeded in thrashing out a compromise agreement on taxi routes.[32]

The above examples have been highlighted to illustrate that the history of the conflict in Kathorus in the early nineties was considerably more complex than is suggested by the TRC report. At one level it might be easy to define the conflict as one between the ANC and IFP, and that was probably its main feature. However, the TRC's characterisation of

the conflict as a power struggle does not take account of the myriad issues that impacted on the conflict and, in particular localities determined the precise nature of the conflict. Later this year the TRC will publish its report in a popular format, which will be more widely available than the original report. Therefore, its version of the truth and the past will probably become more influential in shaping public perceptions of our history. It is for this reason, perhaps more than any other, that a critical evaluation of the TRC's contribution to writing the country's history is absolutely essential.

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[1] TRC Final Report, Vol.1, Chapter 4
[2] Weekly Mail, 3 November 1995
[3] TRC Final Report, Vol.1, Chapter 1
[4] For example, not a single KwaZulu/Natal warlord came forward to claim responsibility for any atrocities, even though they were identified as key perpetrators of violence.
[5] TRC Final Report, Vol.2, Chapter 7
[6] TRC Final Report, Vol.2, Chapter 7
[7] Citizen, 8/09/93
[8] Vrye Weekblad, 29/05/93
[9] City Press, 23/01/94
[10] WM, 4-10/02/94
[11] TRC Final Report, Volume 3, Chapter 7, para. 531
[12] TRC Final Report, Vol.2, Chapter 7
[13] Interviews conducted with residents from Kathorus between March and June 1999
[14] TRC Final Report, Vol.2, Chapter 7, para. 203
[15] TRC Final Report, Vol.3, Chapter 7, para. 541
[16] Interview with V.Langa
[17] Sow, 21/11/91
[18] Interview with Vusi Sikhakhane
[19] Interview with Ali Mazia
[20] Ruiters, G 'South African Liberation Politics', MA Thesis, Wits, 1994 [p.39] claims there were no shacks in Vosloorus.
[21] Seekings, J, 'Quiescence and the transition to confrontation: South African townships, 1978-1984' Ph.D Thesis, Oxford University, p.94
[22] Ruiters, p.62
[23] Inteviews with Kathorus residents
[24] Thokoza Archive
[25] Interview with Koos Maseko, et al and Lawyers for Human Rights Report
[26] City Press, 19/08/90
[27] Sow, 08/03/90
[28] Sow, 22/04/90

[29] City Press, 22/08/93
[30] City Press, 12/12/93
[31] City Press, 23/01/94
[32] Interview with Vusi Sikhakahane