Chapter Eight: Conclusion

In concluding this thesis I have two intentions. Firstly, I wish to restate the major contributions that the thesis makes. And, then secondly, I shall look forward to the period after the violence, to provide some indication of Mpumalanga's story after the peace pact. Despite 'the miracle' of the peace there could be no 'clean slate'; the political violence left behind overwhelming legacies that have shaped the community as we see it today.

8.1 Restating the arguments

Chapter one outlined the arguments of the thesis. Here, as stated above, I wish to draw attention to the major contributions of this thesis.

Firstly, it offers a substantially different explanation for the political violence of the 1980s. Rejecting the structuralist explanations of much of the current literature the thesis explores the articulations of local, regional and national dynamics. By closely examining each of these spheres, I demonstrate that while each has its own independent dynamics, ultimately it was the way that these spheres intersected over time, sedimenting a particular set of social interactions so that the 'new' configuration interacted with another set of social forces, that moved specific places (and ultimately the province) up the trajectory towards political violence. None of these spheres were determining. Furthermore, there was nothing inevitable about either the political rupture that occurred in 1987 or its form. The thesis shows that at each point in the interactions of these various spheres the processes could have shifted in a different direction. Thus, political violence was the outcome of a multiplicity of social forces operating in different spatialities.

As such my approach emphasises the importance of locality, both theoretically and empirically. It shows how place, in this case Mpumalanga township, is/was a particular articulation of social relations and situated practices at all scales. A key

theoretical point that has been empirically demonstrated is that understanding 'place' is a key component in being able to answer the question, 'why did conflict become violent?'.

Secondly, the thesis demonstrates that contained within this political rupture were gendered and generational challenges that contested patriarchal order within the province. The 1980s saw the rise of youth organisations that implicitly challenged patriarchal relations. Through my discussion of the period before 1987, I show how politics increasingly became the domain of younger men. As a result political organisations that had previously mediated conflict became marginalised. What is distinctive about this thesis is that it shows that at the local level conflict was between youth on both sides. Unlike much of the other work on political violence in Natal, which argues that the conflict was between young men on the UDF side and older men on the Inkatha side.

A third contribution is the argument that an aspect of the distinctiveness of the violence was its profoundly spatialised form in combination with its gendered and generational form. The empirical material showed how at particular moments the spatial form of the violence shifted. The first spatiality of the violence was organised around the spatiality of the body, the second spatiality was the household, and the third spatiality was the re-territorialisation of neighbourhoods. As a result everyday life became profoundly political. As well as a spatialised form the violence also had a gendered and generational form. These were closely interwoven. The spatial form of the violence was central in the creation of the political identities that accompanied the violence.

Fourthly, the thesis draws attention to the relationship between the spatialised form of the violence and the construction of political identities. The discussion of the modality of the conflict shows that the specifically territorialising strategies of the violence were essential to the identity formation that occurred. These strategies set in place borders between areas that were used to define insiders and outsiders. Such definitions, along with the denigration of 'the other' and the

situated practices of everyday life were crucial to those moments of closure that are essential in the formation of identities.

Fifthly, the thesis speaks to the theorisation of place. As the theoretical discussion in chapter one illustrates, there is a broadly agreed upon view that places are formed relationally, and locality is shaped by messy and diverse interconnections. But despite these theoretical advances, this thesis shows that it is still necessary to be able to analyse conflict-driven and closed forms of territory and identity. Places are not always open, shifting and porous. In particular conditions, boundaries are set and their meaning is singular with little tolerance for alternatives.

Finally, as a result of its particular methodological approach, specifically the use of detailed ethnographies, this thesis begins to reveal the profound horror and trauma of the period. Amongst the work on the political violence in Natal there is little other work that chronicles these narratives. Furthermore, it is one of the few pieces of research to focus on the violence and rape faced by women during the political violence. I hope it will contribute to telling the hidden story of that period.

8.2 Legacies of political violence

A question that remains is: after such a traumatic period, how do people reconstruct and live their lives? What is the legacy that is left by the political violence? By way of conclusion I shall highlight some aspects of that legacy.

Over the past decade or more, Mpumalanga has been touted as an example of 'how to' achieve peace. The two political leaders, Meshack Radebe from the African National Congress (ANC) and Sipho Mlaba from Inkatha (now the Inkatha Freedom Party), have been internationally lauded as peacemakers and have achieved numerous international and local awards for peace.[1] Peace was

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[1] Amongst others, Radebe was awarded an honourary doctorate by the University of Cape Town in 1993. Mlaba chose not to accept a similar award 'saying it would be premature' (<u>Weekend</u>

carefully built through numerous meetings in the township, attended by the local leaders and residents.[2] Radebe has risen to prominence within the ANC, sitting as a member of the Provincial Parliament and later (2006) Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Social Welfare and Population Development in the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Cabinet. Sipho Mlaba represented the IFP on the Durban Metro Council.

Peace posed many challenges for the Mpumalanga community. First was the need to reconstruct a physical environment that had been devastated by political violence. It was estimated that 1500 houses were burnt out (City Press, 2 August 1992), shopping centres and schools were also damaged and burnt, no maintenance had been carried out for over four years; and the township was empty with thousands of residents having fled as refugees. In response, the Peace and Reconstruction Committee set about raising funds to address these needs.

Secondly, there was also a need to re-establish governance in the township. By mid-'91 the township administration offices, which had been burnt down, had been re-opened. Of course, this process was facilitated by national political developments in the post-'94 period. Along with governance was also the need to encourage residents to begin paying rent and services, as payment of these had fallen by the wayside.[3]

A third challenge was getting the youth back to school. Schools needed to be re-opened and the discipline of learning re-established. This was not an easy task as

Argus, 4 April 1993), and they were joint recipients of the first African Peace Award (Daily News, 21 June 1996). In May 1995 they both travelled to Burundi to 'share their vision of peace' (The Natal Witness, 27 May 1995).
[2] In February 1991 Radebe and Mlaba held meetings with local teachers (The Natal Mercury, 11 February 1991; in May 1991 a joint ANC/Inkatha rally was organised attended by over 2000 people (The Citizen, 20 May 1991); a joint ANC/IFP rally was attended by about five hundred people on 2 February 1992 (The Natal Mercury, 3 February 1992; on 21 March 1992 a joint Sharpville rally was held; and, a fourth joint peace rally was held on 8 November 1992.
[3] Residents stopped paying rent and electricity in 1986. Electricity bills had since accumulated and the supply was under threat. The ANC and IFP appealed to the KwaZulu government to waive the payment of outstanding bills. This appeal was successful and in October 1993 the KwaZulu Government wrote off more than R14 million in unpaid rent, service charges and water and electricity bills (The Citizen, 12 October 1993).

the violence had destroyed generational order and it now needed to be reinstated. This was a theme of many of the meetings and peace rallies. Young people were urged 'to stop terrorising teachers at school'; the message to parents was that they should 'stop encouraging their children to loot and steal because such actions undermine the current peace initiative'. Furthermore, the youth were told that

> not a single country in history had ever been ruled by young people. They were told it was crucial for them to educate themselves in order to prepare for their critical role as future leaders. (The Natal Mercury, 3 February 1992)

On the ground, the progress towards peace and stability was slow. There were organisational divisions within both the ANC and the IFP over the peace. Radebe was criticised by the Midlands ANC branches and Mlaba by Inkatha national leadership as well as a local grouping under Mrs Xulu from Woody Glen (City Press, 15 March 1992; Weekly Mail, 5 November 1992).[4] Tensions existed for many years after the official declaration of peace and despite the peace rallies[5] there were the occasional killings. In the interviews, ordinary people spoke about the difficulty of forgetting who had killed their loved ones.

As part of the national process towards reconciliation, the TRC set up a process to collect affidavits from members of the Mpumalanga Community[6] and in August 1998 the amnesty hearings of some the Caprivi Trainees[7] were held in the township. These were well attended by the community. The widespread rape of women during the violence was not brought to the attention of the TRC at these hearings, nor at the special women's hearings organised in Durban. This was no different from what happened nationally (see Goldblatt & Meintjes, 1997).

> … Of the nearly 8000 statements received on rights violations, only 300 deal with sexual assault and of these, only 80 relate to sexual assault on women. Only 17 of the 80 deal with rape and

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[4] The role of Mrs Xulu is discussed in chapter six.

[5] For example, the numerous news reports on the rally of 3 February 1992 mention the tensions between individuals aligned to different political parties (see The Citizen, 3 February 1992).

[6] Unfortunately, despite my best efforts these affidavits were not available. First they were in boxes in the TRC Cape Town offices from where they were going to be transported to the Central Archives, and then they were awaiting cataloguing.

[7] They applied for amnesty for fifty-six incidents involving more than one hundred murders in the Empangeni, Eshowe, Clermont and Mpumalanga townships (The Citizen, 7 April 1998).

> these mostly occurred in KwaZulu-Natal (Barolsky, 1997) where the conflict followed the more typical contours of open warfare (Goldblatt and Meintjes, 1997:10).

Thus the sexual violence endured by women during the political violence remains one of the hidden stories of the war in Natal.

Despite fears,[8] especially in 1994, national and local government elections were successfully conducted in Mpumalanga. The ANC has won the majority of votes in all national, provincial and municipal elections. The relationship between place and political identity has survived the one-and-half decades since the official end of the violence. Areas that had been UDF during the time of political violence still show overwhelming support for the ANC. Similarly, the Inkatha areas voted overwhelming in favour of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP).

Most of the initial challenges the community faced in the immediate period after 'the peace' have been successfully met. While many initiatives were specific to Mpumalanga, these aspects of reconstruction were also part of constructing a new South Africa post-1994. The most difficult challenge to resolve has been the reconstruction of houses damaged during the violence and the rehabilitation of businesses. The story here is a mixture of ineptitude, corruption, incompetence and a lack of political will. Nevertheless, there are other legacies that are less about resources and the establishment of a new political system, and more about the profound social damage to a community that was wrought by the violence.

The history of political violence sits just under the surface of politics in KwaZulu-Natal. Whenever political disagreements between the ANC and IFP in KwaZulu-Natal become too heated, some member of the provincial parliament threatens us with the possibilities of returning to the violent politics of the 1980s. Similarly, in the lead-up to the various elections that have been held since 1994 members of the press, political commentators and politicians speculate about the political heat and the incidents of violence that will take place. Political parties sign codes of

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[8] As some of the Focus Group interviews were conducted just prior to the 1994 elections, many women expressed fears that the elections would result in violence returning to the township once more.

conduct and berate each other over no-go zones. But the reality is that in each election since 1994 the levels of political violence in the province have been decreasing.

What then of the threats of a return to political violence? My analysis of the processes that gave rise to violent conflict in Mpumalanga township suggests that political violence was the outcome of a number of articulations – regional political dynamics, state and covert military support as well as local dynamics. While none of these are determining, I would suggest that covert military activities were crucial to increasing the intensity and longevity of the violence. Without such interventions it is unlikely that a civil war of such proportions (21 000 people, mostly Africans, killed in the course of the war with even more becoming internal refugees (Independent Projects Trust, cited in Krämer 2002:1) could engulf the province again.

Other legacies from the time have the potential to be more devastating. Political violence devastated household economies. When I did fieldwork in1993 and 1994 many households were in a precarious economic situation. Members were staying with relatives or in partially destroyed houses, there was no money to repair the houses and often the pensions of older members of the family were the sole form of income. As Freund (1996:187) has observed 'there is nothing exactly new in poverty in Natal'. Yet for many individual households, prior to the violence, vulnerability to poverty did not seem to be in their future. They had secured formal housing, even if it was a township matchbox; their houses were furnished and their children clothed; they had breadwinners, often male, in formal employment and other sources of income; they had sufficient resources to refurnish their houses after a first attack; and children were being educated or had just entered the labour market. Political violence changed all that. Residents emerged into the post-1994 period economically depleted and with their human assets in shreds.

Onto this grim legacy of the political violence needs to be mapped the impact of trade liberalisation and the resulting unemployment. Many of Mpumalanga's economically active residents worked in the nearby Hammarsdale industrial area. The majority of industries in this area are in the clothing and textile sectors; two sectors that have been hard hit by trade liberalisation and World Trade Organisation agreements. The 1990s was a period of factory closures and retrenchments in the Hammarsdale area. Fred Khumalo, on a visit to Mpumalanga in the late 1990s, observed,

> Ordinarily, kids finishing matric but with no money to go to a tertiary institution, would work at the factories, saving money to further their studies. Now that is all gone. In a row of ten houses, six of the supposed breadwinners are jobless (Sunday Times, 19 April 1998).

The desperate economic situation faced by many Mpumalanga households is in part the result of associated trade liberalisation. However, it is also linked to the history of political violence in the area.

By the late 1990s one of the major social problems facing Mpumalanga residents was crime. Residents complained of a lack of policing and on occasion, as in other places, took the matter into their own hands. This situation also needs to be seen as one of the legacies of the violence; the young men who abandoned their education to fight during the 1980s are now unemployed with little likelihood of finding employment in a restructuring economy looking for skilled labour. Writing in one of his newspaper columns Fred Khumalo tells us,

> Thousands of people died. Youngsters who'd grown up in good homes were sucked into the maelstrom, to emerge as bloodthirsty gunslingers – from both sides of the political divide. When the political violence died down, they had the guns and the weapons – but no targets, no future. So they found new targets – banks, shops, their fellow human beings. … Crime became their lifeblood. As a result, almost every third person I grew up with has got his own scam – hitting banks, doing housebreaking, stealing bank cards or doing the good old *ukubamba inkunzi* (mugging). (This Day, 26 January 2004)

Mpumalanga has been hard hit by the HIV/AIDS epidemic (see Mosoetsa, 2005). The spiralling of this epidemic as well as the brutal gender relations of the post-

1994 period needs to be located within a modality of political violence that was sexualised. The incidence of rape of 'enemy' women as well as the demands for sexual availability by 'boys' on the same side, created the conditions for a rampant spread of the virus. Furthermore, in the post-1994 period the economic devastation wrought on local communities by political violence has created fertile conditions for transactional sex, a trend not helped by the economic challenges of the post-apartheid era.

The young women I interviewed in 1999 suggested that the emotional trauma of the political violence remained. They said that it was difficult to trust people and that a lack of respect on the part of the male youth was evidence of the years of war. The biggest personal challenge they faced had been completing their education. It seemed that this was what was determining their lives in the post-violence period. Those who had become very involved in the violence and dropped out of school, were unemployed and struggling to make ends meet. Many of them were engaged in survivalist economic activities. But the future seemed brighter for those who had managed to leave the township during the violence to pursue their education, or through their own fortitude and strength had gone back to school. They were currently studying at tertiary institutions and had dreams of a successful future. Nevertheless, they were still left with a question,

> … we are being very confused how it happened. For even now we used to ask ourselves, we wonder who did it?, how?, why? (Interview Thando, Tho1#1-2:17)