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Khumalo, Sibongile

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The 1995 Shobashobane Christmas Day massacre: political mass murder that shook the new South Africa

By Sibongile Khumalo

Student number: 408420

A research report in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of the Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies, University of the Witwatersrand.

Johannesburg, March 2023

Abstract

This research report tells the story of the killing of 18 African National Congress (ANC) supporters in the village of Shobashobane on the KwaZulu-Natal south coast by an Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) aligned mob. It is one of the earliest episodes of political conflict that marred post-apartheid South Africa in what was a climax of instability in the region with a long history of violence. The survivors of the massacre still bear the scars of the onslaught and question whether the political change they fought for has brought them the future they envisaged. The gruesome attack, which took place on 25 December 1995, was a consequence of a fight for political hegemony between the IFP and the ANC.

Twenty-eight years after the massacre, the events of that fateful Christmas day are still etched in the memory of the survivors and aggravated by the challenging socio-economic conditions of the present. The court found the massacre to be politically motivated by the rival supporters. Those convicted and jailed for their role in the massacre described by the court as ‘well-orchestrated’ have all been released from prison, while others had their convictions overturned on appeal shortly after sentencing. Political violence continues to plague parts of KwaZulu-Natal in different forms, and Shobashobane remains a mishmash of complex socio-political contrasts.

Key terms: politics, violence, democracy, massacre, justice, politics

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report in the Department of Journalism, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

It has not been submitted before any other degree or examination at any other university.



2 March of 2023

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I would like to express my gratitude to the people of Shobashobane who humbly accepted me into their homes and opened up about the tragedy that befell them. Their stories opened old wounds, but in their pain, they showed amazing determination to tell their story and not only to be seen as victims.

Without the input from my old friends and former colleagues who gave me insight into the political dynamics of the 1990s in KwaZulu-Natal and connected me with the right people, this research would have been more difficult. In this regard I would like to also mention journalist and former colleague Paddy Harper, former colleagues Nathi Oliphant and Adiel Ismail for encouraging me.

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the KwaZulu-Natal Political Landscape

The KwaZulu-Natal political scene has long been dominated by the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the African National Congress (ANC). However, over the past three decades the contest for political hegemony resulted in a low-intensity civil war that forced internal displacement of people, with frequent bouts of fighting that continuously raised the suspicions of the involvement of a so-called 'third force' in fuelling the instability (Jeffrey, 1997).

This scourge of violence in KwaZulu-Natal that has highlighted the evolving patterns of violence over the years has been the subject of research by many scholars. Venter (1998) notes the rivalry between the IFP, and the ANC was one of the intriguing and paradoxical schisms in South African politics as deadly clashes between the two parties intensified in the run-up to the first democratic elections in 1994.

The IFP, formerly known as Inkatha Cultural Liberation Movement, founded in 1979 by the Zulu Prince, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, had threatened to boycott the 1994 elections without a recognition of its demands for assurances on issues including land ownership under the Ingonyama Trust. The use of the Zulu nationalist ideals by the Inkatha party probably has much to do with Chief Buthelezi's occupation of the position of leader of the KwaZulu homeland in the province (formerly known as Natal) during the apartheid regime (Mottiar, 2004).

The *Mail & Guardian's* report on 7 August 2019 under the headline: *Secret details of the land deal that brought the IFP into the 94 polls* (Lynd, 2019) published the last-minute concessions to this effect, made in late April 1994, which are said to have prevented a possible bloodbath. The IFP largely drew its support base from the rural areas of the provinces that fall under the authority of traditional Zulu chiefs, but over the decades since, its following has increased in urban areas, a factor which has been partly attributed to the migration of people from villages to cities for employment (Jeffrey,1997; Mottiar, 2004).

On the other hand, the ANC, as the oldest liberation movement on the continent (established in 1912), cultivated its following on the ideology of emancipation from White rule and the struggle for equal rights. Nelson Mandela became the ANC's leader upon his release from prison in February 1990. The same year saw the unbanning of the ANC, Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) the South African Communist Party (SACP), and the (United Democratic Front (UDF). However, the political transition period from 1990 up to the 1994 democratic elections saw a rise in instability across the country, in what Jeffery (1997) describes as 'low intensity' warfare.

Mottiar's (2014) data shows that the IFP garnered 50.32% of the provincial vote in those first democratic elections in 1994 to assume control of the province. While the IFP's arch-rival, the ANC, captured 32.32% of the provincial vote. Therefore, the ANC assumed the opposition role at provincial level in KwaZulu-Natal, despite winning the national vote in a landslide victory.

In the 1999 elections, the IFP party retained control of the province, although its provincial support dwindled to 42%. At national level, the party's vote dropped from 10% in 1994 to 8.5% (Independent Electoral Commission, 1999). However, in the 2004 elections the turnover of power arrived when the results were the party's lowest since 1994 and the IFP lost the KwaZulu-Natal province to the ANC for the first time by achieving 36% of the vote (Independent Electoral Commission, 2004).

These results demonstrate that despite the IFP's rural power base, it had lost heavily to the ANC in the country's urbanised areas. This indicates that while the IFP cannot play the role of a national party in South African politics, it has strong regional support in KwaZulu-Natal and cannot be ignored or left out of any political arrangement (Venter, 1998).

History of Violence in KwaZulu-Natal

The eastern region of what is today the KwaZulu-Natal province experienced an increase in party-political activism from the 1970s. However, Minnaar (1992) traces conflict in the region back to the wars linked to the formation of the Zulu nation in the 18th century, that include the rebellions against British colonial rule in the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879, as well as the so-called 'Zulu Civil War' to wrestle control of the region from smaller Zulu clans, which was fought in three instalments between 1880 -1884.

As the era of open warfare subsided, an entrenched cycle of revenge or retaliation with sporadic feuds between rival rural communities, conflict over cattle theft, and disputed boundaries often resulted in bloodshed (Minnaar, 1990).

Although reports have put varying figures on the number of people killed in KwaZulu-Natal because of political violence, Mottiar (2004) estimates that political unrest in KwaZulu has claimed the lives of as many as 20 000 people since 1984, and more than half of these deaths occurred after 1990, that is, after the unbanning of the country's liberation movements. The evidence shows that 1 000 people died in the three-month period that preceded the 1994 election and, between 1994 and 2000, a further 2 000 people were killed (Taylor, 2002 as cited by Mottiar).

However, this research also pays attention to the violence that occurred in the late 1980s and 1990s, particularly on the Natal South Coast, during the years known as 'the transition period'. This period was a defining time for the country's struggle against apartheid and the power struggle between the rival ANC- and the IFP- aligned groups. What erupted during the 1980s had similarities to previously recorded rural faction fighting, but with a twist, since fighting took an overtly political turn, with spears being replaced by guns during the 1990s, as the struggle for political support moved from the urban to the rural areas (Minnaar, 1992).

To the north of coastal Natal, rural areas such as Ndwendwe, Isithebe, Mthunzi, Eshowe, and Empangeni, became flashpoints, while on the south coast Umbumbulu, Umzumbe,

Mthwalume, and the greater areas of Port Shepstone (as the nearest town to Shobashobane) were engulfed in political conflict.

In the five years preceding the Shobashobane massacre of 1995, there were over 50 massacres on the South Coast (Taylor, 2002). These conflicts, as Taylor further notes, went back to the rise of the ANC-aligned UDF in the 1980s and its political assault – primarily through the radical youth - on the legitimacy of conservative traditional leadership which was seen as aligned with the IFP.

Also, in 1990 and further inland, deadly political violence raged in Pietermaritzburg's Black areas, culminating in the so-called 'Seven-Day War' that swept through townships and villages from March 25 to 31 March 1990 (Jeffrey (1997). This week of violence was estimated to have left more than 200 people dead, with many more displaced. These widespread attacks on ANC and UDF supporters were blamed on IFP supporters following an Inkatha rally in Durban on March 25, "on the way to which Inkatha claimed that UDF supporters had thrown stones at them" (Human Rights Watch,1991). Following the perceived provocation, more than 2 000 IFP supporters launched a massive attack from Mpumuza into Caluza, Ashdown, and Edenvale.

In April 1990, 15 ANC youths were killed in Umzumbe, on the south coast in what was believed to be an attack by IFP supporters determined to cleanse the area of ANC support (Engelbrecht & Schnehage 1999). These killings prompted retaliatory attacks during April and May 1990 and 101 people were subsequently killed in various areas across the south coast with the threefold emergence of the so-called 'war lords', ANC, and UDF-aligned Self Defence Unit (SDU) in 1991. The IFP's answer to the quasi-army was the Self Protection Units (SPU) which, as outlined by Padraig O'Malley in the O'Malley Archives, evolved out of the demands of communities under siege from violence and the perceived partisanship of the police in maintaining law and order. However, the formation of the protection units did not stem the politically related bloodbath, as both units were often in each other's crosshairs.

It can be argued, therefore, that such hostilities and many others were a precursor to the Shobashobane massacre. A Human Rights Report on 1 May 1995, described the areas

of KwaXolo and Shobashobane, which is part of Izingolweni as ‘tense’. On 18 January 1995, eight members of the Nyawose family were killed in an attack in Shobashobane. The report describes two members of the family as prominent ANC activists in Durban.

The later killing of nine members of the Cele and Lushaba families early in December 1995 in Paddock, once again rocked the rural district. The members of these two families were shot while asleep in their homes (and they included a six-month-old baby). The IFP claimed the deceased were their supporters (Engelbrecht & Schnehage, 1999). Days later, another group of eight people were killed and burnt in houses in Mvutshini, approximately 40 kilometres from Paddock (21 kilometres from Shobashobane) and the ANC then claimed these victims to be their sympathisers.

Taylor (2002) points out that a month before the massacre at Shobashobane local political tension between the ANC was heightened with restrictions imposed on the free movement of ANC supporters within the area by IFP-aligned groups. Taylor further states that on 29 November 1995, a group of around 50 ANC supporters were escorted to the shopping centre and started distributing ANC election pamphlets, prompting a stone-throwing incident between the opposing sides.

It is therefore common wisdom that a cocktail of murderous events had preceded the Shobashobane massacre. Engelbrecht and Schnehage (1999) describe it as the bloody climax of a year in which political tension between the ANC and the IFP on the south coast and in other parts of KwaZulu-Natal erupted into violence.

Description of the Shobashobane Massacre

Shobashobane is a hilly rural village of around seven square kilometres on the lower south coast of KwaZulu-Natal, outside Izingolweni, approximately 41 kilometres from Port Shepstone. The community is under the tribal authority controlled by inkosi Cele, but in terms of the Local government Act, it falls under the Ray Nkonyeni Municipality. A cluster of more neighbouring villages falls under various other traditional leaders.

At the time of the massacre, the village was an ANC-dominated ward surrounded by seven wards with IFP support. Despite its proximity to large towns, including the coastal

tourism hubs such as Margate, Pennington, and Southbroom minimal development had taken place at Shobashobane. It was a socio-economic disparity suffered by many other rural villages across the vast KwaZulu-Natal province. Its geographical location means that the village shares resources with the adjacent Izingolweni, where the police station servicing the area and other villages is located. The police from Izingolweni were the first to respond to the 25 December violence and faced heavy criticism from the community for ignoring the massacre's warning signs.

The attack, as it was later proven in court, was conducted by IFP supporters, in what Taylor (2002) says was planned with military precision. The victims were shot, stabbed with spears, and some had their body parts maimed during the early morning attack. The 18 victims of the massacre who were killed indiscriminately in their homesteads were, Busisiwe Mthethwa, Jabulile Mthethwa, Nokuthula Nkawana, Delani Majiya, Nelson Ngwazi, Cyprian Cele, Xolani Gambushe, Thulebona Zulu, Mcawe Shabane, Andrias Shabane, Ntombi Nyawose, Mathenjwa Nyawose, Bheshele Nyawose, Phindile Nyawose, Benzeleni Cele, Sdudla Cele, Khiphokwakhe Mthethwa, and Mdedelwa Ngwazi.

Despite its scale and apparent political motivation, the Shobashobane Massacre of 1995 was not included as part of the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) established by the new democratic government in 1995 under Nelson Mandela to seek closure and establish the truth behind many gross violations of human rights and politically motivated killings. The commission only covered the period from 1960 to 1990 and the volatile transition years leading up to the country's first democratic elections in 1994.

However, in his evidence before the commission on 12 May 1997, the then deputy president, Thabo Mbeki, who was giving evidence on behalf of the ANC, referenced the Shobashobane crime, stating that some of the people who had been arrested in connection with the massacre were not ordinary first-time criminals as they had killed before:

> It's a particular group and the reason a person who got 13 murder charges but each time he gets charged for a murder he gets bail, gets arrested again, charged, gets bail and none of the cases was moving… none. It's because the police, elements within the judiciary where you have this particular person, for instance, arrested and charged with his eleventh murder and the police officers say you can't release this person on bail, this particular time he was arrested for possession of illegal weapons and all of the other previous alleged murders had been carried out with firearms … he's caught with illegal weapons, [but] the arresting police officers say you can't give this fellow bail. The magistrate agrees. Two days later, the magistrate released the fellow on bail (Mbeki, 1997).

Having not been examined by the TRC, the Shobashobane massacre (particularly the allegations of the complicity of the local police in the violence) later became the subject of a separate inquiry sanctioned by the national government.

Rationale

The story of the Shobashobane massacre makes for a curious case in many ways, apart from the fact that it occurred on Christmas Day. Another oddity is that it occurred just over a year after the end of apartheid, a transition marked by the watershed democratic elections on 27 April 1994.

The period preceding the dawn of South Africa's democratic era was marked by widespread political violence, and KwaZulu-Natal was one of the most restless regions. Nearly 30 years have passed since the massacre and the province continues to experience outbursts of violence in varying degrees and for various motivations.

A large body of literature on the story of political violence in KwaZulu-Natal is largely told from an academic and media perspective, with volumes of scholarly studies, focused on tracing the causes of intergroup hostilities. Furthermore, the Shobashobane story, despite its magnitude, is often integrated into other episodes of violence. It is this writer's view that locating this event in the political atrocities that took place in pre-democratic

times, tends to minimise its enormity in relation to its history. Therefore, it risks being relegated to just one of the many violent acts of that era.

This research report contends to tell the human story of what became known as the country's first post-apartheid political mass killing of people. It follows the method of narrative journalism to amplify the voices of some of the people who were affected.

Therefore, this narrative work does not seek to establish or investigate the root cause or instigators of the Shobashobane killings, which Taylor (2002) argues were planned with military precision to purge the area of Khipha Nyawose, a local ANC leader who was among the 18 people killed in the attack. Rather, it is a story of exploring an atrocious past with the benefit of hindsight while assessing the present circumstances of those who survived to tell the tale.

Kentridge (1990) has observed that politically motivated killings continue to rear up in KwaZulu-Natal as a trend in which the use of violence as a means of resolving differences or eliminating political rivalries has become endemic as a social issue. Given the patterns motivated by intra-party factionalism and the elimination of those standing against corrupt practices, the prize of political loyalty paid by the victims and survivors of the Shobashobane massacre gives rise to questions about the implications of political activism in a volatile environment.

This paper is an attempt to outline the psychological impact of the violence on the survivors and how it influences their current political views. It adds a human factor to the raw numbers and accounts of violence in KwaZulu-Natal that have been documented over the years. Political dynamics in KwaZulu-Natal are still largely divided between the ANC and the IFP, although some new actors have cropped up over the years. Given this setting, the research attempts to paint an historic picture of political friction and animosity between regional archenemies and how political power struggles have evolved over the last 28 years.

Following a widespread outcry over allegations of police inertia in handling pre-warnings about the bloodbath makes the Shobashobane massacre of 1995 stand out from others

in KwaZulu-Natal. A commission of inquiry into the event was set up at the recommendation of the then national police commissioner, George Fivaz in which hearings began in January 1998 and concluded in October 1999 (The Independent Newspaper Online, 1999).

The inquiry was centred on establishing whether the Port Shepstone police knew the attack that led to the death of 19 residents aligned to the ANC was imminent but did not act to prevent it. This has since become a black spot in the story as the IFP-led provincial government under premier Frank Mdlalose, has never made the findings of the report public.

> The report of the commission into the Shobashobane Massacre near Port Shepstone in 1995 has never been made public by the province, nor that of a commission into taxi killings in 2000 (*Mail & Guardian*, 9 March 2018).

This iron ring around the Shobashobane massacre makes the story more illuminating as those who were at the centre of the brutality contribute to the documentation of suppressed memories and oral history that would serve as a reference for future studies.

1.1 Methodology

The account of the Shobashobane massacre needs to engage with different methods of information gathering. The primary method used for this report was face-to-face interviews with the survivors and witnesses of the massacre as the researcher spent time in Shobashobane interacting with residents to understand how the violence impacted their lives.

The selection of participants who were victims of the violence was primarily based on the degree of their exposure to the violence and their association with those affected or murdered. It was expected that, with the benefit of hindsight, the victims' recollections on

South Africa's first politically related mass killing of people under the new democratic system would give insight into whether the ANC-IFP rivalry led to the envisaged political future.

The researcher also attempted to get the voices of IFP supporters and local leaders from the village to gain their understanding of the massacre and why it happened. However, requests for these latter interviews were turned down.

Others interviewed in the report were former law enforcement officials, journalists and community leaders who worked on the cases. The people who were arrested for the crime have since been released from prison and some were acquitted upon appeal of their sentences. Attempts were made to get their input on this report. However, none of those contacted responded to a request to be interviewed.

This report also draws information from media reports about the massacre. The sources for vital information and details regarding the case were used from official documentation such as the transcripts of the trial proceedings obtained from the court, as well as the judgment. However, in the absence of the final report of the Moerane Inquiry into Shobashobane, the recollections of witnesses who gave statements to the commission as well as media reports provide a glimpse into the process.

In the interest of language clarity and freedom of expression, interviews with survivors who were not proficient in the English language were conducted in their home language, isiZulu. The interviews were translated into English by the researcher, whose first language is isiZulu. Interviews with journalists, former law enforcement officials, and other experts were conducted in English.

Defining the Narrative Research Method

Compared to other methods of research, narrative research takes a different approach. Andrews et al. (2008) state that, unlike other qualitative frameworks, this method offers no automatic starting or finishing points.

Similarly, narrative interviews centre on the stories the subject describes regarding the conspiracies and the structure of their accounts, and these stories may come up spontaneously during the interview or be elicited by the interviewer (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

As a transformation tool, there is also a narrative of experience model that is used as a means of human sense-making, representation, and construction. Using an experience-centred narrative fits the purpose of recounting such a poignant episode in the country's political history behind the news headlines and scholarly journals. Arguably, it also provides a window for society to make sense of the killings and formulate an understanding of the region's brutal history of violence, and perhaps how it has influenced the present-day situation of political-related killings that often flare up in the region.

Furthermore, narrative interviews serve multiple purposes, such as reference to a specific episode or cause of action significant to the narrator. They also concern the interviewee's life story, or the actor's perspective, in what can be called a biographical interview as they involve the telling of an oral communal history beyond the individual's history (Kvale & Brinkman, citing Bornat (2000); Yow (1994).

While the evidence and documents accumulated over the 15 months that lead to the handing down of the judgment on 27 March 1997 enriches the story, the experiences of the survivors also provide crucial pieces of the puzzle that comprise a more complete account of the Shobashobane massacre.

Significance of the Research

Several political and social changes have taken place at Shobashobane since the massacre. For example, the violence led to the displacement of residents and destabilised the education of the youth that had then dedicated their lives to political activism. However, over the past few years, some displaced residents have returned to the village to rebuild their homes which were burned and looted, but the emotional and psychological scars of those directly impacted by the violence have not been erased. Kentridge (1990:112) citing Wendy Leeb (n.d), a researcher at the University of KwaZulu-

Natal, states that the effects of displacement suffered by the victim of political violence in KZN province are set to have “repercussions in the future well beyond the immediate physical difficulties they suffer”.

Leeb suggests that some of the psychological effects of long-term exposure to violence and displacement is anger and grief that can manifest into a state of depression, causing the victims to be paralysed by a sense of impotence. Furthermore, the victims of violence often come to see it as the norm and a solution, as it can become the one area of life in which the individual has some control, and it can therefore be used for self-assertion (Kentridge, 1990).

It is in this space that the survivors’ stories and other legal developments and interventions that stemmed from the massacre can add to the extensive media and scholarly reports written on the subject over the last 28 years. This narration, therefore, offers an exploration into the lives of the victims and survivors and how they have recovered a sense of healing from the trauma of violence and a large-scale loss of life.

The multiple losses suffered by the Nyawose, Cele, and Mthethwa families, however, do serve as a reminder of the scale of the onslaught (each family having lost three family members). Their recollections of that traumatic day in interviews are central to this long-form journalism research report and it was envisaged that their voices, particularly in the volatile province of KwaZulu-Natal, would highlight the journey travelled by the whole of South Africa in terms of the nation’s propensity for violence and political intolerance.

Today, in the 28 years since the Shobashobane tragedy, South Africa has gone through stages of socio-economic transformation. However, while the reports of animosities between the ANC and IFP have declined, violence has not entirely left the province as seen in the cases of intra-party-political assassinations within the parties’ ranks (Burger, 2019).

Investigating the Violence

The KwaZulu-Natal violence has been the subject of several investigations and judicial commissions. The wide-ranging Goldstone Commission in 1991, a precursor to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC), delved into the root causes of a clutch of violent episodes in the region and the country after former president F.W. de Klerk appointed Justice Richard Goldstone to investigate the country's incidences of political violence 24 October 1991. The commission held a series of public hearings and delivered 47 reports before it closed on 27 October 1994. Although the commission took place before the Shobashobane massacre, its work interrogated the allegations of the so-called "third force" in cases of political violence, and its findings shed light on some of the impetus driving bloodletting in the country.

The subjects of violence investigated by the Goldstone committees were the role of police in conflicts, killings on trains, taxi violence, the Bisho massacre of 7 March 1992, and the effects of public violence and intimidation of children. One of the Commission's biggest achievements was unmasking the operations at Vlakplaas, a farm outside Pretoria, operated by a South African Security Police unit under the command of Eugene de Kock. This under-cover organisation had committed political murders during the apartheid era as well as during the transition to democracy. Goldstone's report on police involvement in violence released on 18 March 1994 triggered the criminal prosecutions of some apartheid-era police officers, including Eugene de Kock himself. The commission also had a committee probing whether any incidents of violence arose out of causes other than the political rivalry between the ANC and the IFP. Goldstone stated that the committee encountered various obstacles and could not achieve conclusive results (O'Malley Archives).

In the last three decades, new patterns of violence and instability have emerged despite the wide scope of the Goldstone inquiry, and the commission was subsequently succeeded by several other judicial processes tasked with probing more violence in the region. The province has been further plagued by the assassination of politicians; deadly violence in the taxi industry; and in the hostel accommodation facilities for migrant labour (Burger, 2019). Burger's research reveals that hostels such as Glebelands, Unit 17, in

Umlazi south of Durban, and houses in KwaMashu have been flashpoints of violence between March 2014 and January 2019, when more than 120 people died due to violence perpetrated by hitmen based at Glebelands Hostel, an ANC stronghold in Umlazi. Burger (2019) has also observed in the report: *Building Resilience in Glebelands Hostel* that there has been a sharp increase in targeted murders in the province since 2011.

Consequently, this resurgence of violence, including the politically motivated conflict in the province, led to the establishment of the Moerane Commission of inquiry to probe the scourge. In October 2016, KwaZulu-Natal premier Willis Mchunu appointed Advocate Marumo Moerane to head yet another inquiry to probe political killings in the province since 2011, focusing on rampant murders at Glebelands Hostel by hearing evidence from leaders of various political parties, civic society, and residents of the hostel.

In 2018, the findings of the Moerane Report highlighted the evidence of an unnamed witness who testified on 17 June 2017 that the causes of the violence at Glebelands were: politics; power; financial enrichment; criminality stemming from contract killings undertaken by hitmen; the failure of the EThekwini Metro to properly manage the hostel; and the failure by the SAPS and Metro Police to properly police the hostel. The report released in September 2018 found that violence was not confined inside and around Glebelands but spread far and wide and that there were many incidents where people were killed elsewhere in acts motivated by the conflict at Glebelands.

In his final report, Moreane (2018) highlighted that evidence presented to the commission indicated that weak political parties and leadership lead to factionalism and intolerance within and between parties, which, in turn, resulted in violent conflict, including the murder of political functionaries. One of Moerane's (2018) recommendations was that political parties must take responsibility for the violent competition between their members for political positions and power. The report further stated that there was overwhelming evidence from most witnesses that access to resources through the tender system is the main root cause of the murder of politicians.

However, Burger (2019) also offers some contesting arguments that the phenomenon of killings at Glebelands was facilitated by the simultaneous serious deterioration in what

has become a politically tainted criminal-justice system; escalating poverty and unemployment; and staggering levels of corruption (in both the public and private sectors); dysfunctional mechanisms of accountability; and the rise of former president Zuma's shadow state, which ensured impunity.

Literature Review

In defining violence, McKendrick and Hoffmann (1990, citing Lauer 1989), state that violence ordinarily involves using force to harm, injure or abuse others and occurs at intergroup and interpersonal levels. Interpersonal violence may be between people known to each other, while intergroup violence is more likely to involve people who were strangers before. Political violence is viewed as an act of destruction that impacts the power relations of society (McKendrick & Hoffmann, 1990). However, while an extensive body of literature on apartheid-era political violence in South Africa exists, this present project proposes to deal with the writings relevant to the causes of the ongoing violence which has existed for centuries as human violence, in contrast to natural violence, which is as old as humanity and is rooted in the earliest myths of human history (McKendrick & Hoffmann, 1990). South Africa has had its share of violent confrontations and has gained notoriety for being one of the most violent countries in the world with its colonial, apartheid, and democratic governance systems.

Between 1984 and early 1989 it is estimated that 3 500 people died because of state repression and resistance to the state (Cock, 1990: 44) - in what was classified by the government of the day as 'terrorism' or 'criminality' or the 'inevitable outcome of generic programming or tribal enmities.' Other causative factors include family and community conflicts, police killings, and the role of the so-called "third force" in fomenting violence. Ellis (1998) recalls that the term (third force) first emerged during the early months of the beginning of the transition period in 1990 and was used to define the violence believed to be perpetrated by networks within the security forces. Ellis goes on to detail that, in 1990, Nelson Mandela was among the first political leaders to suggest the presence of a third force in the spate of killings in black areas in the Vaal, East Rand, and on the train between Soweto and Johannesburg as well as in the so-called 'Seven Day War' in the

Natal Midlands in March 1990. For Mandela, these attacks, bore the hallmarks of organised and covert government trained death squads (Ellis,1988).

Similarly, Minnaar (1990) states that following the unbanning of the ANC in February and the release of Mandela from prison at the start of the 1990s, the violence continued unabated in Natal, with no end in sight for what was seen as low-intensity war. In a different paper published in 1993 by the Human Sciences Research Council Minnaar observes a notable increase in the influx of sophisticated weapons and planned attacks with numerous casualties from a single incident:

> Armed gangs led by local warlords loyal to Inkatha engaged township dwellers loyal to the UDF/ANC. By mid-February 1990, the official death toll in Natal for 1990 already stood at 240 although the Democratic Party Monitoring Unit in Durban put the figure at more than 400.

Minnaar (1990) also notes that as the murderous cycle of violence continued, human life was not the only thing lost; houses and businesses of those considered enemies were often torched, with a considerable deterioration of the already poor quality of life. Transport routes were also blocked during the rioting, thereby impacting the movement of goods and people. In Louw's (1992) review of *Conflict Trends in Natal from 1989 to April 1992,* he states that between 1987 to mid-1990, Natal became the flashpoint of conflict in the country as during the period violence spread from the Pietermaritzburg/Durban corridor to the coastal regions of Natal and inland rural areas. This well-documented orgy of political killings between Inkatha and ANC/UDF supporters that swept across various parts of Natal in the 1990s, therefore, could be seen as a precursor to the Shobashobane massacre. It was certainly observed that a ripple effect swept throughout the province in which a so-called 'Seven Day War' took place from 25 to 31 March 1990 in the Pietermaritzburg region. Minnaar (1992) describes it as one of the biggest devastations in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands as people were killed in houses torched in Sweetwaters, Taylor's Halt, and Elandskop. The biggest attack at this time in the Midlands area took place on March 27, when a combined death toll from the carnage hit 140 and during these attacks, the IFP fighters also referred to as '*impis*' appeared to

be well organised, heavily armed, and transported by buses, (Minnaar 1992:13). He further outlines the spillage of violence to the South Coast, where he states:

> By the end of 1990, the tribal structures along the South Coast were in a state of collapse, many chiefs had been driven out of their areas and after February 1990 ANC structures had openly taken control of most of the South Coast.

In the South Coast areas, the violence started when chiefs and indunas felt that the UDF and later the ANC intended to replace them with civics and village committees. The region was highly contested as affiliations changed rapidly to the extent that after 1994, the South Coast was divided into IFP and ANC zones (Minnaar, 1992). These political divisions and aggressive pursuit for dominance had, therefore, set root many years before the Christmas Day massacre and the Shobashobane Christmas Day massacre was by no means the first massacre in the area.

> The broader region had been locked into a vicious round of attacks and counterattacks for well over a decade. In the five years preceding the Shobashobane massacre, there were, in fact, over 50 massacres on the South Coast. This conflict can be traced to the rise of the ANC-aligned United Democratic Front in the 1980s and this movement's political assault, primarily through radical youth on the legitimacy of conservative chiefly authority and 'traditional' political structures (including the Zulu monarchy), who in turn sought to retain hegemony through Inkatha and the creation of self-protection units (Taylor, 2002).

Several diverse research papers and official domestic data show that acts of violence in South Africa are currently still prevalent. The annual Global Peace Index (2020) ranked South Africa at 123 out of 163 countries in terms of the global state of peace. The ranking was a three-notch climb up from the previous year’s ranking. The index noted that while the homicide and violent crime levels were remarkably high, political violence and human rights abuses remained common.

The latest national crime statistics by the South African Police Service (SAPS) from April to June 2022, shows that KwaZulu-Natal was still gripped by crime, with the police investigating 284 dockets of multiple murders during this more recent period. Police statistics show that the KwaZulu-Natal province recorded the highest number of multiple murders, followed by Gauteng and the Eastern Cape in which two or more victims were killed at a time (Cele, 2022).

Limitations

The notable limitation to this narrative project was the unavailability of the Moerane report on the Shobashobane massacre. The report was never made public and attempts to access it proved unsuccessful due to the changes that have taken place in the KwaZulu-Natal provincial administration from 1996 to present. Another limitation was that several individuals whose voices may have strengthened the story have since died. These individuals were former political heavyweights from the IFP and the ANC who held senior positions at provincial and community level. Furthermore, some of the people who were convicted for their role in the massacre are no longer alive. To minimise the gap left by this obstacle, I relied on the official transcripts of the evidence presented in court during their case and police statement to narrate their story and glean details about the extent of their involvement in the massacre and political profiles.

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SECTION II

Longform essay

Personal connection with the Shobashobane story

There is a belief that some mysteries are better left untold. However, ascribing this adage to the story of the Christmas Day massacre in Shobashobane village in 1995 would be tantamount to censoring history.

The magnitude of this mass murder where 19 people were shot and butchered to death has relentlessly occupied my mind for years. Like many people who grew up in KwaZulu-Natal in the 1990s, violence had become an unwanted feature in our lives, as the struggle for freedom by political activists intensified. Mass funerals became the order of the day.

In most cases, the political stage in the then Natal region and the KwaZulu homeland was split between the regional arch-rivals; the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the African National Congress (ANC). Their animosity drew the attention of local and international organisations and political commentators often likened the bloody skirmishes between the two parties to a 'low-intensity civil war'.

Among the many trigger points of political conflict between these rival groups was the apparent inability by party members to co-exist in communities as each party was determined to reign supreme over the other. Such a toxic mix of political power play and the use of violence to dominate opponents gave rise to feared 'warlords' from both sides, and it was their influence among the regular members that determined the marching orders and sometimes eclipsed the authority of party leaders.

When the politically motivated mass murder executed on the holiest day in the Christian calendar occurred, its ramifications reverberated throughout the country. Like many other people, my family learned of the Shobashobane attack through media.

'Police are reporting that several people have been killed in Shobashobane village in the early hours of the morning. Several homes have been set alight,' – the newsreader on uKhozi FM reported on the 8 AM bulletin.

Our family, gathered in the kitchen, momentarily went silent as the adults in the room listened intently to the breaking news. The faces in the room indicated that something big happened. After the announcement, my aunt exhaled loudly, as she had been holding

her breath throughout the newscaster's announcement; '*Oh, nkosi yami'* [Oh, my lord], she exclaimed. My father, who never took any interest in politics, sat quietly for a while, before mouthing: "These people have finally killed them".

His words left me wondering why anyone would commit such a crime on Christmas Day. As the announcer finished delivering the news bulletin, the Christmas spirit that had prevailed around our kitchen table evaporate. The rest of the family appeared to be deeply troubled by the tragedy.

For me, growing up in the shadow of the bloody political hostilities between the IFP and the ANC had forced me to be accustomed to violence from an early age. From targeted assassinations of prominent leaders, brutal wiping out of families, the banishment of youths suspected of being aligned with a party not favoured by the majority to the destruction of property owned by those seen to be sympathetic to a political enemy, violence in KwaZulu-Natal took place in various forms and levels of intensity.

Writing in *The Journal African Affairs*, Sarah Mathis (2013) says local strongmen or warlords who were often implicated in cases of violence and murder were motivated by the quest for power in their local communities. Although the court later found that the massacre was politically motivated, the identities of those who ordered and organised the attack remains unknown.

It is for this reason that Shobashobane has become a sore point in the minds of many people who have attempted to put together the puzzle of this attack.

Now, twenty-eight years later, the scars inflicted on the people of Shobashobane are still visible as the survivors of the horror attack continue live a life devoid of hope amid grinding socio-economic hardships. The prosperous future that was supposed to come with freedom at the end apartheid is still a dream.

CHAPTER 1

Finding Shobashobane

Nearly three decades have passed since the 1995 tragedy. My only point of reference to what occurred in Shobashobane village is largely informed by a trove of scholarly materials. When I embarked on my personal journey to Shobashobane to meet those who survived the carnage and lived to tell the tale, my heart was filled with mixed emotions. At some point during my road trip to Shobashobane I wanted to turn back, as the thought of how I may be received by the survivors weighed heavy on my heart and mind.

Judge Squires, in his lengthy judgment on March 24, 1997, which sentenced the men charged for the massacre observed that Shobashobane was marked by “rolling hills with spurs or fingers of high ground falling away to the valley.”

It is a world that exudes tranquillity and is far from all the trappings of the modern world. The landscape takes a different form as you leave the N2 at the Oribi Toll Plaza to join the road to Izingolweni, which leads to Shobashobane. Here there is no road signage pointing road users in the direction of the village, but locals know where it is located and how to get there.

“You just go straight on this road”, says a petrol attendant at a garage where I stop to ask directions to the village. Following the road, as directed by the petrol attendant, the lush green scenery changes to valleys pockmarked by clusters of homesteads with the traditional round huts with pointed thatched roofs that signal the beginning of a different world. Schools, with rows of single-story classes with dry and dusty playgrounds, become a common sight, alongside shebeens, taxi ranks and small spaza shops.

This fusion of traditional Zulu architecture, with trademark round-shaped huts, and modern designs makes for an interesting sight as you weave your way to the village, past Izingolweni Police Station. About 3 km outside Izingolweni, and without any signage in sight, the village, as described by many, appears. It is hilly. Its lush green landscape might compare with images of Rwanda, the small east African country which gained international infamy for its ethnic genocide in early 1994 in which 800 000 people, mainly

Tutsis, were estimated to have been killed during a 100 - day killing spree. Barely a year later, in Shobashobane, a village hundreds of thousands of kilometres away from the hills of Rwanda, at the bottom end of the continent, a massacre of a lesser scale that bore similar undertones of systematic cleansing, where the IFP supporters intentionally sought out the minority ANC supporters to eliminate them or drive them out of the village took place.

As I arrive on a sweltering morning in September 2022, I am greeted by homes which resemble any typical rural homesteads of South Africa that consist of the main modern house with a water tank used to harvest rainwater from the gutters. The main house sits next to one or two rondavels or other rectangular cottages. Other homes nearby feature the traditional Zulu huts.

While taking in the surroundings and ascending yet another short incline, the burial site for the 18 victims of the massacre emerges down the hill. The graves, with identical headstones, are laid out in a neat line. In front of the graves stands a much bigger stone in ANC colours bearing the names of the victims. It reads: “Memorial stone of the victims of the Shobashobane Massacre”.

The Christmas Day morning of 1995 had dawned like any other day, with residents like Amos Nyawose’s family, anticipating the holiday’s festivities.

I meet Nyawose in the living room of his home, which was pointed out to me by another resident who explained that the greying patriarch would give a better account of the attack as he was “one of the people who were active in politics”.

He welcomes me into his modestly decorated living room, and an old ANC sticker on the wall catches my attention.

Aged 66, Nyawose is no longer the agile and energetic man who used to attend ANC political rallies and divide his time between the village and the factory compound in Durban where he was employed for over 20 years.

Getting Nyawose to talk about the fateful Christmas Day took a great deal of cajoling, as he quizzed about my interest in the story. Satisfied by my explanation, he gave in and

started his story by recounting the many episodes of violence that preceded the massacre.

He said, “We knew that the IFP was going to cause trouble, and we were ready for them. We had prepared ourselves for anything, but when they struck, it became clear that we were outnumbered and surrounded."

The advancing attackers, some in traditional Zulu regalia, sang political songs, war cries and were blowing a trumpet horn, which in parts of KwaZulu-Natal is used to signal an attack. The commotion sent the alarmed villagers, women and children scurrying for cover while men remain behind to defend the village. War had arrived on their doorsteps.

Before the clash, which was tilted heavily in favour of the attackers, groups of men had been offloaded from buses, armed with guns, spears, machetes and sticks. They approached from the opposite end of the village; the direction of a local general dealer known as Thembalihle store. The other group moved in from the opposite side, descending Thuli Hill, almost encircling the small village of seven square kilometres.

“As they approached, we had a strong feeling that we could repel them. We were also armed,” said Nyawose.

Staging the attack on Christmas Day was a masterstroke on the part of the attackers. Traditionally, the Christmas holidays bring a lot of people together, as migrant workers from different corners of the country often return to their homelands for holidays.

Dorrit Posel, economist and Wits University Professor at the School of Economics and Finance, points out that these two major discoveries marked the start of an influx of labourers to migrate to places of employment.

The festive season travel rush ahead of Christmas is visible at bus and taxi terminals, where young and old travellers, who have not seen their families in a long time, wait their turn to get on the next transport home. The mounds of odd luggage pieces carried by the migrating crowds, often include furniture and piles of groceries, packed in large bags aptly named, ‘*khonzekhaya*’ – meaning, send our regards home’, tell a story on their own. Such is the importance of Christmas season among the Black migrant workers.

The Battlefield

It had also rained the night before Christmas, and pools of water and mud that had formed made the village's dirt road slippery. The wet condition made it difficult for those trying to escape on soggy pathways and grassy valleys. Nyawose recalls:

From the side of Thembalihle, the first gunshot went off, and soon after that, smoke went up, as people's homes were set alight as they swept deeper into the village.

As the band of attackers, known in isiZulu as impi, made their way deeper into the village, more homes went up in smoke, followed by cries of agony. Nyawose further recalls:

We could not shoot them while they were still a distance away. We estimated they would be tired by the time they got to us here, as they had been walking. It was only when they got closer that we started shooting to defend ourselves. Those among us armed with spears locked horns with the attackers.

On the morning of the attack, bodies piled up as the village was swarmed by heavily armed groups, including women and youngsters who advanced from opposite ends of the small village.

Armed with guns later described in court as G3, R4 and R5 assault rifles, the IFP attackers appeared to have more sophisticated weaponry than Nyawose’s side.

Nyawose explains:

‘Fire was exchanged, and we soon realised that we were surrounded but refused to give in. ‘They were heavily armed. Some had the type of guns that are normally carried by the police, others were armed with spears and bush knives.’

One by one, Nyawose’s comrades fell. Those who attempted to flee were soon overpowered and hacked to death.

Among those fighting on Nyawose's side was Khipha Nyawose, the valorous ward leader who had received numerous death threats for his activism. Khipha, an organiser who possessed elite political magnetism, had been central in growing the ANC membership in the village after political activism gained traction in the village in the mid-1980s.

According to Nyawose, Khipha's ability to mobilise support at the grassroots level had begun to pose a threat to IFP's dominance, and many local people claimed that the attack was partly an effort by the IFP to eliminate him.

Back on the battlefield, as it became evident that Nyawose's team was losing steam, with more attackers circling their main target, Khipha, the group retreated and fled, leaving behind burning huts and looting mobs. They fled downhill towards a raging stream at the bottom of the hill, with the attackers in hot pursuit. "We had to decide quickly whether to continue fighting or save ourselves," said Nyawose.

Nonetheless, the escape was short-lived, as the attackers caught up with them and their prized target, Khipha. As the mob focused on Khipha, two of his comrades managed to hide in plain sight. However, Khipha was not so lucky, meeting his end in a ditch by a raging river. Nyawose, who was 42 at the time of the attack, watched the young man he had known since he was born being overpowered and butchered, as the group circled him and some among them took turns inflicting blows with different weapons.

For the first time during our uneasy interview, Nyawose is overcome by emotion after I ask him what happened after Khipha was captured. He shifts from his oversized sofa, diverting his glassy gaze, and takes a deep pause. The long silence was finally broken by the arrival of Nyawose's wife, Dumazile, who joined us from the kitchen and carefully sat down on the sofa adjacent to her husband. Nyawose only managed to solemnly say: "I saw everything" - without revealing any details.

However, an eight-page post-mortem document by the District Surgeon, Segaran Ramalu Naidoo, on 5 January 1996 describes Khipha's extensive injuries in graphic detail. The report, the longest of all the victims examined by the surgeon, stated that Khipha 34, had died of multiple gunshot and penetrating wounds. He had suffered two close-range shotgun wounds to the head and face, causing extensive cerebral and cranial destruction. His body, according to the doctor's report, had also had:

multiple incised neck, chest, abdomen and back wounds, close-range shotgun wounds to the left thigh and right buttock, external genital mutilation by dismemberment, and two penetrating incised wounds across the left side of the neck laterally.

It also cited numerous incised wounds on the upper left chest. However, the most jarring part of the post-mortem was the description of Khipha's castration. The doctor noted a "large 105.150mm incision on the genital and pubic area, with exposed subcutaneous tissue". The penis and penile stump showed no evidence of haemorrhage or other features of reaction, suggesting a post-mortem injury.

Pressing for further details brought deep sorrow in me, as minutes before our conversation the jovial elderly man's demeanour changed to anguish after happily regaling the stories of his youth, including his stay at a hostel in Durban, his temporary home as a migrant worker that he shared with hundreds of other men.

To lighten the mood, he addressed my curiosity about the prevalence of the Nyawoses in Shobashobane. The surname is common in the area, alongside the Celes and Gambushes. I had been led to believe that all the Nyawoses that were slain during the massacre were members of the same household, until he painstakingly explained:

My great grandfather had many wives, about six, all the wives bore him many children, and that contributed to the growth of the Nyawoses in this area. Many of us here are blood relatives, others are not.

As a result, five of the 18 victims of the massacre were Nyawoses, including Khipha, his nephew.

I try to revive the topic of Khipha's killing, which he had witnessed from his hiding place, but the subject brings him anguish again. His gaunt face, framed by a sparse silver beard, turns dark and ashy. Seeing the discomfort on his face, I drop the topic of Khipha's killing.

Unknown to him, while Nyawose witnessed the gruesome killing of his nephew, his wife and daughter were also in peril.

Nyawose's wife looks much younger than her weathered husband of over 35 years. With a hint of worry in her eyes, she narrates that her young son, who was nine years old at the time of the attack, had been playing outside with other children when he came back running to the kitchen shouting: *'Mama, impi iyeza'*, meaning: mommy, the war is coming. She recalls that:

I was about to light the paraffin stove to heat water, and he [her husband] was already outside with other men from the neighbourhood. We were aware that the IFP people might attack us, and people around here, including the more militant young men, were confident that they would meet them head on and defeat them.

The ANC-supporting youths had been forced to flee the village because of increasing threats but later returned to protect their comrades from the continuing attacks of the IFP backers. However, the attacking impi not only had stronger firepower but also the numbers. The group of attackers that descended on the village was estimated to be around 1 000 against a community of about 850 people.

As the crowd got closer to the Nyawose homestead, Dumazile gathered her children and another girl who was visiting and ran for cover amid commotion, gunfire, and the black bellowing smoke from burning houses.

As we rushed out the gate, I heard one woman among the attacking mob calling out my name, telling me not to be so quick to run away. That's when I knew we were in trouble. I recognised the person calling my name and immediately sensed that she was not extending a friendly invitation. We ran.

During the mayhem, Dumazile was separated from the 16-year-old daughter, Phindile, and got into a crowd with other neighbours running towards the Shongwe River separating Shobashobane from the next village, KwaShoba. KwaShoba falls under a different chief and was not the target of the attack. Gunshots and hair-raising slogans about '*bulala izinja ze ANC'* (kill the ANC dogs) rang out, sending a strong statement to the targets.

Running towards the river requires navigating overgrown footpaths and bushes that had flourished due to good summer rains. Heavy downpours had pummelled the province for days resulting in severe flooding in areas around Pietermaritzburg. The floods had claimed the lives of 123 people in Edendale (The Daily News on 27 December 1995).

While the impact of the rain handed the residents a different challenge as the hilly terrain did not allow the panicked masses fleeing the carnage on foot an easy escape. Given the slippery conditions on the ground, the bid to cross the raging rivers bordering the village

and get to Shobashobane on the other side was laced with difficulty. Slipping, falling, and rolling downhill with the attacker in hot pursuit, the escape was laborious.

Phindile was one of the many people who were caught by the enemy as they attempted to evade the attackers' bullets. However, Phindile did not make it across the river. Her body was found later in the afternoon lying dead in a ditch, a few metres from the river, which had become a marker of life and death. The coroner's report said she had died from "penetrating incision wounds to the chest. Deep incised wound on the scalp, skull fractures." By mid-afternoon, when the gunfight had subsided, Nyawose, who had escaped with minor gashes, joined the police search party that combed the area for bodies.

One of the bodies they stumbled upon was that of her daughter, Phindile. Nyawose's wife laments that her daughter' was slaughtered like an animal… by men old enough to be her father.

Search for Kipha's Testicles

Although National Intelligence Agency had a minimal role in the police investigations of the massacre, the information gathered by the office headed by Sibusiso Mathebula, was passed on to the police. One of the critical pieces of information led the police to the house of an *inyanga* that had allegedly cut off and kept Kipha's testicles after he was killed.

Since the old days, Zulu people would consult *inyanga* or a seer before embarking on war or attack. As political violence raged between Inkatha and the ANC in KwaZulu-Natal, some of the feared warlords from both political formations were known to be using *intelezi*[1] to prevent them from being caught or shot by the police during attacks. As legend has it, the use of *intelezi* was common even during the times of early Zulu

[1] Intelezi- This particular plant was also used during wars to boost the spirits of the warriors, they used to drink this plant after it was ground and mixed with water and it was believed that the warriors will then fear nothing that comes their way (https://www.ulwaziprogramme.org/intelezi/)

kings, who would only go to war after first getting their regiments fortified with this concoction administered by a trusted witch doctor to make them invincible to their enemies. A powerful *intelezi* was believed to make the attacking regiments invisible to their opponents until they are too close, allowing them to surprise the enemy. Other variants of intelezi would cause the opponents severe cramps, preventing them from running away during attacks.

In some cases, even the high-calibre guns of the opponents would suddenly malfunction when pointed at a person who has been treated with a strong *intelezi*. However, its potency can be enhanced by other herbs, or human body parts.

The Shobashobane assailants were also said to have been accompanied by an *inyanga* who, according to some eyewitness testimony, was seen sprinkling what was believed to be *intelezi* on the men gathered for the attack.

As a result, the intelezi-soaked mob left a bloody trail in its wake. A few days later, after the dead bodies scattered across the small village had been collected, a search of a different kind got underway. It was the search for Kipha's missing private parts.

Mathebula revealed that one of his informants had overheard a man talking about a 'successful hit' he had been part of. He had boasted about seeing an *inyanga* cut off the manhood of a certain 'troublesome ANC dog.'

The informant relayed the information to Mathebula who immediately set up an operation with the investigators to probe the claim. The investigators then descended on his medicine shop near the bustling Reunion train station, outside Isipingo, under the guise of seeking medical help.

While the *inyanga* was busy preparing his tools and medicine for the 'patient' before him, the investigators steered the conversation towards the recent events at Shobashobane, and during the conversation he volunteered the information that he had been part of the attack and had cut off Khipha's manhood. He further indicated that Khipha's manhood was still kept in his house, recalled Mathebula.

His disclosure led to his arrest.

The man, Mdlezane Cele, later stood trial along with 18 other men, and was two years later found guilty of his participation in the massacre. Although the court found Cele guilty, the judge stated that the identity of Khipha's killers could not be established. It could also not be proved beyond reasonable doubt that any of the accused were present at the scene where he was killed or 'were aware of the assault upon him', the judge said.

Police investigator, Bushie Engelbrecht, who was at the time seen as the country's top sleuth, says the absolute horror of the massacre was not fully impressed upon the public, or detailed in new reports, understandably because of the ghastly wounds inflicted on the victims. However, he said the sheer brutality of the attack was laid bare in police photographs taken on the scene shortly after the carnage. Engelbrecht stated that some seasoned police officers in his team described the scene as 'the worst they had ever experienced.'

One of the horrors of the massacre was the killing of mother and child (Jabulile Mthethwa and her 18-month-old baby Khiphokwakhe). Their bodies were found in a ditch. The child's body was wrapped in a blanket used to strap him around his mother's back. The baby had gunshot wounds to the stomach and abdomen. The mother had been shot in the chest and abdomen, suggesting that the bullet had hit her and passed through her body to the baby. Dogs had fed on Ntombi Nyawose's corpse by the time the police found her decomposing body in thick bushes a day after the massacre.

Her face had been slashed, and the dogs had eaten away her chin, cheeks, and parts of her neck. Khipha Nyawose was not the only person who was killed and dismembered. Another victim of the attack, Delani Majola, had his hand severed at the wrist, while another's (Bheshele Nyawose) fingers were cut off.

Lengthy Investigation

It took Engelbrecht's newly formed Special Investigation Team (SIT) 13 months to bring the suspects to court.

Although the newly assembled being made up of policemen from outside the province, including Engelbrecht, who had been called from Pretoria to head the probe, they faced

a tough time gaining the trust of the community. Getting statements from the survivors was marred by distrust and a reluctance from potential witnesses to come forward with the information that could aid the investigation. This was either the result of the fear of being seen as a sell-out or *impimpi* by their comrades or the community's long-standing distrust of the police, due to allegation of lack of impartiality when dealing with cases of political violence. As a result, some local police officers from Izingolweni were among those probed by the SIT, but none were charged due to lack of evidence.

When the accused were finally brought court to stand trial, the defence's legal team centred their arguments on what they called the state's weak evidence linking the accused with the murders, and that the only alternative left for the state was to prove that the accused acted in common purpose.

The doctrine of common purpose[2] implies that whenever two or more people agree to commit an offence, they will be responsible for the acts of others that fall within their common purpose. This apartheid-era law was often used to send anti-apartheid activists to prison arrested during protests or other demonstrations. However, on 2 February 1997, when the Shobashobane trial finally got underway, this notorious piece of legislation became central to the state's case, when 23 men stood in the dock for 18 counts of murder and 9 counts of attempted murder. They pleaded not guilty to all the charges.

Despite the trail of destruction of property, theft and acts of arson left in the wake of the attack, those who were tried did not face any charges relating to such deeds.

The youngest accused was 14-year-old Dumisani Zulu. He was charged alongside Disco Nyawose, Jefe Khawula, who was discharged earlier in the trial due to lack of evidence, Solomon Shabane, Mhambi Ntobela, Themba Mkhize, Zithulele Zuma, Bhayiza Nkwadi, Dumisani Zulu, Sipho Ngcobo, Gideon Zulu, Alson Mqadi, Mlindwa Cele, Thengokwakhe Zenda, Phineas Jama, Ziwengu Zenda, Mfanafuthi Cele,

[2] Common Purpose doctrine applies "Where two or more people agree to commit a crime or actively associate in a joint unlawful enterprise, each will be responsible for specific criminal conduct committed by one of their number which falls within their common design. Liability arises from their 'common purpose' to commit the crime. Southern African Legal Information Institute (Saflii). Law Cite, Constitutional Court of South Africa. *Tshabalala v The State; Ntuli v The State. 2019*

Mdlezane Cele, Richard Nzama, Bafanyana Cele, Thulisani Mnganga, Ntakazeboni Gambushe, Bulelani Xolo and Zimele Nyawose.

What was peculiar about the list of the accused was that several of them were in one way or the other known to their victims, including siblings who turned against each other, as the court heard. As a result, the trial opened rifts between relatives and family members, as sister took the stand against brother in pursuit of justice. Amos Nyawose's wife testified against her brother-in-law, Zimele Nyawose during the trial. She said Zimele was among a group of men who killed her daughter, Phindile.

While a group of women scurried from their homes amid gunfire and smoke, a man identified as the feared IFP leader Sipho Ngcobo, was heard calling out Ncamisile Nyawose, and said to her brother, Zimele Nyawose, "there is your bitch sister". Zimele, according to a 16-year-old witness whose name was withheld, replied: "You must kill her, there is no comrade in my family." A shot went off, but the witness could not positively identify the person who discharged the firearm that shot Ncamisile.

Some were saved by being known to assailants, such as Thokozile Shabane, who told the court that as she fled her home, she heard a loud explosion and fell by a riverbank. Her pursuers caught up with her, and among them was Thula Shabane, her cousin. Seeing that the person who was about to be attacked was her cousin, Thula then diverted the attention of his fellow invaders, thus saving Thokozile from harm. But her luck was short-lived as she was later discovered by another group in her hiding spot and was stabbed all over her body with a spear.

CHAPTER 2

The Evidence

Having witnessed Khipha's murder, Amos Nyawose took the stand to give evidence. He also participated in the identity parade of the suspects. Speaking about having to help the police identify the people suspected of causing the terror in the village, Amos, who now holds an esteemed position of being an *induna* (headman) of the village, says he had no difficulty pointing out the suspects as they were known people. Amos's experience as one of the key witnesses in the mass murder trial juxtaposes with his new position, which he speaks about with immense pride.

His tribunal hears an assortment of village disputes, from cases of common assault, theft, *crimen injuria*, where neighbours have insulted each other publicly or made malicious accusations against each other, boundary disputes and livestock theft. He explains that just as it is done in a court of law, the proceedings of the tribal court are recorded and include witnesses.

And adds:

> If I see that a case is too big for me, I refer it to the chief, and then I explain to him why I decided to bring it to him for his consideration.

In most cases, the disputes brought before Amos's tribunal are between people who are known to each other, who in some cases, are neighbours or friends. During the 1996 High Court trial Amos helped identify some of the men who attacked the village.

> We were attacked by people that we knew well. The people who caused all of this knew very well what they were doing and why they were doing it. It's not like some unknown bandits descended on the village by chance.

However, despite Nyawose's confidence in pointing out the assailants, convincing the court that the suspects were guilty of the atrocities levelled against them was fraught with the legal technicalities of proving beyond reasonable doubt that the men linked with the massacre were indeed involved in the killings.

Some witnesses stumbled and gave inconsistent accounts when presented with aerial photographs of the village to point out to the court the precise scenes of the attack. Some witness accounts differed from their earlier statements recorded shortly after the attack.

The evidence presented by Amos Nyawose was largely centred on Khipha's killing, given that he was one of the people that claimed to have witnessed his capture. In his evidence, he identified the two accused Mhambi Ntobela and Zithulele Zuma as being present in the group that surrounded Khipha. He said he had known Ntobela all his life as they lived in the same area. His evidence and version of events drew criticism from the defence because they did not match the accounts presented by other witnesses, with suggestions that his evidence was a desperate attempt to link some of them to the crime.

However, Judge Squires dismissed such a suggestion by the defence on the basis that it lacked merit.

> It would be remarkable, even suspicious if there was unanimity in the description of a situation like this and not a degree of difference. Fast-moving events, observed imperfectly by an excited or frightened person will never be seen or registered in quite the same way by another observer.

Squires further remarked that if the state witnesses were concocting their descriptions, they would at least achieve some unanimity in their selection of persons they claim to have seen.

> The fact that they differ in many details strongly indicates that, in our view, their evidence is not fabricated.

The judge described Amos as a 'good witness' who survived 'a shocking ordeal', adding that his evidence showed no signs of contradiction.

There had also been a suggestion that some state witnesses who survived the massacre and were sheltered at a church in Port Shepstone may have been influenced by local ANC officials to implicate high-profile IFP supporters in Izingolweni. However, the court found no evidence to support that claim.

Having pleaded not guilty to all the charges before them, all the accused presented alibis to support their pleas. The stories ranged from being at church when the massacre occurred, visiting family in a village away from Shobashobane or being too ill to get involved in the mayhem.

Although there was a strong consensus that the attack was undertaken by IFP supporters, including Judge Squires' conclusion that the violence was politically motivated, Sipho Ngcobo, the local IFP leader, tried to dispel this assessment.

He stated in his examination that the idea that the IFP was behind the anarchy was "somewhat a disingenuous claim" because as a local chairman of the party, he could have tried to stop it. Ngcobo's attempt to distance himself and his party from the mass murder was opposed by overwhelming evidence against him by several witnesses who claimed to have seen him among the attacking mob, including the people who chased and captured Kipha Nyawose.

Like in any case in a court of law, the prosecution must prove without reasonable doubt that the accused person committed a said offence, otherwise, any doubt or lack of evidence to support the accusation weakens the case. The judgment noted that there was no evidence that any of the accused inflicted all the injuries suffered by the deceased and survivors, but there was compelling evidence placing them at the various scenes of violence.

The judge's scathing judgment highlighted the 'appalling savagery' of the convicted by pointing out that women, young and old, were chased, caught, and attacked in a 'merciless way'.

> … if you join a mob or a crowd of people bent on a particular purpose, you make yourself liable for any act done by someone in that crowd. That is the nature of the offence that I have to weigh against the interests of the accused and consider as part of the exercise together with the wider interests of the public and, although it can be regarded as one act of public violence, it is much more serious than the offence of that name because the violence was extreme and not merely aimed at disturbing the peace and quiet of the people there, but aimed at their lives and personal well-being. Even one with an infant and a child was killed, nor were the elderly and the lame spared. It was a conduct of appalling savagery.

He pointed out that 67-year-old Mdlezane Cele's participation in the massacre had been 'noticeably active' despite his age, and that if he were a younger man, his sentence would have been more severe. The judge stressed that Cele was, however, 'not too old to take part in this sort of savagery' and therefore was 'not too old to go to prison for it'.

The judgment was equally scathing about local IFP leaders, Zithulele Zuma and Sipho Ngcobo, for their participation in a mass murder that:

> It brought enormous shame to the entire country– especially the province of KwaZulu-Natal, and 'showed the outside world a residue of savage and barbaric behaviour that we hoped we were leaving behind…. If you were present at the scene as the evidence amply indicates, it is inconceivable that the same rank and file supporters would not look to you for direction or take a lead from your action even if you did not plan and organise the exercise which the probabilities overwhelmingly suggest you would have done.

Furthermore, the judge voiced concern about how the massacre had been perceived outside the country's borders. He said although the murder was not motivated by religion, race, or cultural differences, it has been labelled in some parts of the world as 'ethnic cleansing' – bringing shame to South Africa's young democracy.

> That is what shamed us all, that our people could do something dreadful and reduce us to the same level of criticism from civilised people anywhere else in the world, especially when attempts had been made at reconciliation, and we were trying to show the rest of the world that we are getting over the stage of settling our differences by killing each other.

After a lengthy reprimand of the men in the dock, Squires handed down the sentences, Solomon Shabane (41) was given a jail term of 8 years. Gideon Zulu (67), Mlindwa Cele (33), Thengokwakhe Zenda (39), each got 10 years in prison. Disco Nyawose (18), Mhambi Ntobela (50), Mdlezane Cele (67), Thulisani Mnganga (19), Ntakazeboni Gambushe (49), Zimele Nyawose (43) were sentenced to fifteen years, while the two men which were described as holding positions of authority in the local IFP structures, Zithulele Zuma (30), and Sipho Ngcobo (43), each got life imprisonment. The juvenile among the accused, Dumisani Zulu, was given a five-year suspended sentence.

Although the sentences brought a semblance of justice to the survivors, none of those among the small group found guilty of the violence are still in prison. Some of them were released earlier than expected.

Meanwhile, back at Shobashobane, the village still bears the scars of the fateful Christmas Day of 1995. Many people that fled the area in the aftermath of the massacre have over the years trickled back to rebuild their lives. However, several buildings vacated by residents are still in ruins, with roofless walls and overgrown grass sprouting out of the cracks that have formed on bare concrete floors. The few abandoned homes whose owners have not returned are a constant reminder of the tragedy that befell the village.

In December 1998, just three days before the third commemoration of the massacre, five of the men sentenced for the murders, including Sipho Ngcobo and Zithulele Zuma, walked free after a successful appeal against their conviction and sentences.

Travesty of Justice

Back in the village, Amos Nyawose looks back at the trial and the ultimate overturning of the men who were considered ringleaders of the violence as nothing short of a 'travesty of justice'.

> The sentences were incredibly short. They got a slap in the wrist. We got the shock of our lives when we heard the news that some of them were released early. It simply meant that the court process was in vain. It sent a message that those who died killed themselves.

As the village headman, the pain of losing comrades and his daughter in the massacre has not faded for Amos. He now spends his time in this capacity listening to the grievances of residents and is even more pained by what he describes as 'betrayal and neglect' of Shobashobane by the ANC. Although Amos, like most people from the village, is still an ardent supporter of the ANC, he forthrightly blames his beloved party for forgetting about Shobashobane, the village that paid the ultimate price for its support of the party.

When I first arrived unannounced at his home, one of the first things that caught my eye as I was ushered to the sitting room was a faded yellow ANC T-shirt leader peering under his navy workwear jacket, the type worn by factory workers with reflector tapes on the arms. The attire gave off the impression of a worker ready to walk into a factory floor. He sighs deeply:

> They only remember us when it is time for them to come and show their faces during the massacre commemoration in December, other than that, we are forgotten.

Every year, senior provincial ANC officials led by whomsoever is premier, gather around the cemetery to join the villagers in remembering the events of 25 December 1995. One by one, the names of the deceased are read out in a colourful government sponsored commemoration event, followed by political speeches.

In the lead-up to the commemoration, the provincial government slaughters cows to be consumed by people from the village – a tradition that brings the village together, where sore and unhappy hearts are consoled by an annual meat feast.

All that could assuage Amos' heavy heart are economic opportunities for the people who were robbed of their youth because of the violence and were forced to flee the village and abandon their education due to political violence. He feels that Shobashobane has a whole generation that was robbed of a future due to political violence, as well as parent who lost their children, while those who survived are left to fend for themselves, with little education.

> Our children, who played a crucial role in defending us from the onslaught of the enemy have no jobs, they can't get employment because they could not get an education. Yet, the very same government they put in power has forsaken them.

Ironically, despite his dissatisfaction with the governing ANC, Amos still pledges his allegiance to the party. He says the ANC is the only party I have ever known and will continue to support it.

At the heart of Amos' mixed feeling about the performance of the ANC-led government is the lack of development in Shobashobane and poverty which he says has forced the young to migrate to cities. However, the migration means nothing without the skills required by the job market. Shobashobane remains a neglected backwater of the South Coast, despite its proximity to some of the province's finest holiday resorts such as Port Edward, a tourist magnet which lies 45 kilometres away.

Shobashobane residents have no running water and share communal taps located a distance away from their homes. The government-sponsored houses handed out to residents since 2017 were only received by a few families. The disparities in the allocation the houses (popularly known as RDP houses) have created a feeling of resentment among some residents, forcing Nyawose to believe:

> We feel let down by our leaders. They were with us when this tragedy occurred and offered support, but many of them are now high-ranking officials in government but seem not to care about us.

During our conversation, Amos rattles off the names of prominent ANC activists who hail from the region who were supportive of the plight of the Shobashobane people in the 1990s and stood by them following the massacre.

They visited those who had taken shelter at a church in Port Shepstone and provided them with food following the attack and destruction of their homes. The activists now occupy top positions in national government, but according to Amos, have turned their backs on the village.

Although the social conditions have not changed much, the political landscape has undergone some radical changes over the past 27 years, including the ability to change political allegiance. Consequently, many people who were staunch IFP supporters have crossed the floor to become ANC members, some even taking up positions in the local Ray Nkonyeni District Municipality.

According to the local office of the ANC, 21 former IFP counsellors have crossed the floor to the ANC since 2000. The changes have seen former foes turn into comrades to align themselves with their former enemies. It is a political change that does not sit well with

Amos and some villagers as he laments that the blurring of political lines has made the reconciliation process difficult since people now find themselves on the side as the people once certified as enemies. He bitterly notes that the ANC supporters at Shobashobane now shout the same political slogans as their killers and that the law did not do enough to punish the perpetrators of the massacre.

Living with the Scars

After a few days of immersing myself in the life of the village, mingling with locals of different ages, I soon realised that everyone had a story of how they were impacted by the political violence. It also dawns on me that the Christmas Day massacre was the climax to a war that had been brewing in the village for nearly a decade.

Homesteads in the village often have graves inside the yard, some are just barely visible mounds with no headstones while others have elaborate tombstones. Although the graves distinctively vary in stature, they only have one common denominator – that they are a result of political violence.

One of the prominent gravesites in the village is that of eight members of the Nyawose family, the extended family of Amos, who were all shot and killed on one night in November of 1994. Their murder was linked to their alignment with the ANC. A conspicuous stone with ANC insignia stands in front of the carefully lined graves on a hillside.

Amos' wife explains the family was wiped out when a large number of ANC youths in the village were in hiding, amid rising antagonism between themselves and the IFP supporters. She recounts that:

> Many young people who openly supported the ANC were hunted down and killed, and their homes burned down.

The murder of the Nyawose family members prompted the return of some of the self-exiled youngsters, who wanted to bury their fallen comrades and their arrival served as a show of force to the enemy.

As per norm in rural settings, the responsibility of preparing the graves lies with men and male youths, who wake up early in the morning of the burial to dig the graves. The village was on high alert on the day before the funeral of the Nyawose family, with fears of another attack to prevent the burial from taking place.

The funeral took place in November 1994 under a strong police presence, but gunfire rang out soon after the burial services. Nyawose recalls that:

> The shots were aimed at the returned young comrades. From the day of that funeral, there was never really peace here at Shobashobane, right until the massacre the following year in December.

The violence at Shobashobane left orphans, created a generation without a proper education, disrupted livelihoods and left indelible physical and emotional scars.

Warnings not Heeded

Mary de Haas, a former Anthropology Lecturer at the University of Natal, (now University of KwaZulu-Natal), who established a Violence Monitor platform, describes the South Coast region instability as one of the most intense in the province in the lead up to the 1994 election, and the Shobashobane massacre was a climax of enduring political violence.

She states there had been signs that something big was being planned, but warnings, including the alerts from her violence monitoring office, were ignored by the local law enforcement authorities. De Haas is of the view that the attack was aimed at eliminating Khipha Nyawose, and that his killing was meant to discourage people from being ANC activists.

> Khipha was a strong leader with major influence. What is apparent is that the IFP violence targeted strong leaders or those who were considered to be a threat to the party due to their influence. By eliminating leaders, they thought that could stop the people from supporting the ANC.

She claims that the information collected by the Violence Monitor was shared with the Izingolweni police, but her dispatches were ignored, including the telephone call she made to the Izingolweni Police Station on the morning of the attack.

Izingolweni Police Station falls under the administrative control of the Port Shepstone, the bigger town outside Izingolweni. The Moerane Commission of Inquiry was set up by the national Minister of Safety and Security, Sydney Mufamadi, on recommendation by former police commissioner George Fivas, also focused on the allegations of police complicity in the massacre. few months after the massacre and began its work in January 1998.

De Haas was one of the witnesses called to give evidence before the Moerane Commission began its work in January 1998. Its work concluded in October 1999 and De Hass recalls:

> The outcome of that lengthy process has not been made public, and I have nagged Moerane and the province for its release, but nothing has happened over the many years. I remember that some of the sittings were quite emotionally charged because of the allegations that were presented. Evidence was presented by people from different levels of society, from police station commanders, IFP and ANC political leaders and Shobashobane residents.

She states that there was hope among the people in the village that the commission would vindicate their belief that the police played an active role in the massacre.

> Many years have passed, and no one knows the truth about the police involvement. Some people had claimed that they had seen people in police uniform among the attackers, but such allegations have never been confirmed.

An Amnesty International Report on South Africa published on 1 January 1999, after the conclusion of the Moerane Commission, said that one witness testified that he knew who had “masterminded the attack but was too afraid to name them.”

The report Amnesty International Report also states that:

> Other police witnesses established that senior regional and local police authorities had prior notice of the impending attack, but said that on the

day, all police and military resources based in the area had been withdrawn.

The inquiry also interrogated the implications of a police raid on several homes of known ANC activists in Shobashobane on the eve of the attack, which community member believe was meant to disarm and weaken the ANC supporters ahead of the attack.

Four police officers were initially charged for their alleged role in the mass murder, but the charges against the three were dropped shortly before the criminal trial.

The fourth officer was acquitted due to lack of evidence at the end of the state's case.

Media Perspective

The country's news cycle usually winds down towards the end of the year, with some publications not going on print during the Christmas week.

Michael Schmidt, one of the journalists to arrive at the scene on 26 December 1995, still has vivid memories of decomposing corpses he saw being discovered by the police in thick bushes as the search for survivors and the processing of the various crime scenes continued.

Schmidt, a former *Sunday Times* journalist based at the paper's Durban bureau, says what struck him the most about the violent attack was its "barbaric and indiscriminate nature".

He recalled a corpse of a man discovered in a thick brake of bushes, saying the man was clearly running away when he was shot. Given the peak summer heat, his corpse was starting to decompose, and dogs had started to feed on his body.

There was also a woman that Schmidt says had returned to their family's burned home; she was raking through the ashes of a burned hut where they had left their grandmother whom they had left behind as she was too old to run away.

> She did not find her among the ashes. I don't know if she was ever found. The most shocking aspect of the massacre was its indiscriminate nature. Any person they came across was killed, regardless of age or gender. This episode immediately raised fears of a possible return of the pre-1994 political violence.

The veteran journalist-turned author explains that the distinction between how media reported on the massacre compared to other volatile areas in the country was a matter of geographical location. Other areas that had been gripped by deadly political fighting, such the West Rand, the Vaal and even Soweto and are closer to urban centres, making them easily reachable by for journalists soon after an outbreak of violence.

In the case of Shobashobane, which is nearly four hours away from Durban and half-a day's drive from Johannesburg (where the country's media is concentrated) the distance meant that journalists could not get to the scene quickly. He believes that although the Shobashobane tragedy received considerable media attention, the "gravity of the massacre was obscured by geography".

> Photography can help a story to garner a lot of public attention. Arriving at a fresh crime scene soon after an incident allows photojournalists to shoot gripping photographs which are a powerful tool in storytelling. But, owing to the distance, journalists got to the Shobashobane scene much later after many of the bodies had already been collected and the injured taken to hospital. As a result, there were very few live action shots. Its remoteness affected media coverage and people's perceptions of the massacre.

Although Schmidt may not have been present on the day of the massacre, he says its impact has stuck with him, smouldering huts, weeping and distraught family members standing next to open graves on the day of the funeral.

When asked if there was ever any speculation about where the instruction to attack the village came from in the IFP hierarchy, given its apparent meticulous planning and the use of weapons. He stated that there was a possibility that the attack may have been planned at local level as the political landscape at the time was characterised by the so-called 'war lords' who commanded immense power within their constituencies, but it is rare to get admissions and be able to prove the entire chain of command.

In a report by the *Mail & Guardian* in January 1998, Izingolweni station commander Shaun van Vollenhoven, who was also subpoenaed to give evidence before the inquiry, said he never received information about a potential attack in his area.

He stressed that the area was controlled by the Internal Stability Unit (ISU) and patrolled by Port Shepstone police at the time. He also said that he could not account for the ISU's absence from the area the night before the massacre.

On 30 January 1995, five weeks after the carnage, the *Saturday Independent* editorial shone a light on the allegations of police failure to heed the warnings of the Christmas Day attack.

> Violence monitors warned a year ago about the possibility of a resurgence in political and factional conflict on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast, now the new killing fields of the region- but nobody acted.

It said that instead of acting on the information, the key role players chose to "question the impartiality" of violence monitors. The newspaper states that there had been three massacres in the South Coast region over a two-week period of December 1995, with a combined death toll of 36. One had taken place in Port Shepstone, the other one in Margate, and then it was Shobashobane.

> The human suffering and other consequences emanating from these incidents cannot be measured in real terms; families have abandoned their homes and have become refugees; lives have been wrecked and the mourning has not ended (Saturday Independent, 1995).

Unending Suffering

Flora Makhathini (72), who is taking care of her late daughter's two children, lives with strict doctor's orders not to carry anything on her head or carry anything heavy as her skull was cracked open when she was hacked with a bush knife after her attacker found her hiding in a thicket near a ravine down a hill.

She tells the story of the attack like it happened yesterday, even painting a vivid picture of the wet weather on the day as well, the height of the grass in a ditch where she had

attempted to conceal herself, to the words uttered by her attackers to her as they hammered blows to her body.

The men debated among themselves how to kill her, with others saying she mustn't be killed.

In retrospect, Flora suspects that perhaps their *inyanga* who had fortified them with *intelezi* had instructed them not to kill women because taking the life of someone who is traditionally considered to be of 'the weaker sex' is believed to make the potion less potent. Yet, against Makhathini's assumption about the murder of women, six women were among the 18 killed during the blood carnage.

Makhathini believes that was a miracle that only 18 people were killed, given the intensity of the violence and the number of people involved in the attack.

Battered and presumed dead, Makhathini, who was 45 years old at the time of the attack, was airlifted to hospital in a military plane.

With deep lacerations on her body and face and a cracked skull, she spent four weeks at Murchison Hospital before making a full recovery, which the doctors described as 'miraculous'. She lives with the pain of not being able to attend the mass funeral of her fallen comrades and neighbours on 6 January 1996. However, their graves are within view from her home.

> I consider myself lucky to have survived. The doctors would not discharge me due to my severe injuries. I really do not know how I survived.

The gash that cut under her right eye and the bridge of her nose now forms part of her facial wrinkles and become visible only when she rests her face.

Despite the passage of time that has passed since the accident, Makhathini, who survives on an old age grant still experiences occasional episodes of headaches. The headache is often triggered by the unavoidable tasks of carrying a bucket of water on her head or prolonged exposure to the sun when she makes long walks to collect water from the communal tap.

Given that she is unable to carry anything on her head due to her injuries, a ward councillor arranged for a tap to be installed in her yard.

> But that tap has run dry too, and there has been no effort to fix it. The doctor can immediately see if I have been putting a strain on myself and doing things that I am not supposed to do, like putting a bucket of water on my head.

The Makhathinis are survivors of numerous bouts of political violence, with two family members killed before 1994. Her eldest son is living with a bullet in his leg since being shot in a separate political incident that followed the massacre. As the violence escalated, her second son was forced to flee the village around 1994 to settle with relatives in Pietermaritzburg.

> The IFP were targeting young boys or men, they did not want anyone to support the ANC, but the people of this village were defiant. The scars on my body are a difficult and painful reminder of what my support for the ANC brought me. Things are far from perfect, we do not have water and our children are unemployed, but we still are members of the ANC.

Economic Hardship

Apart from the physical scars of the survivors, it is easy to tell that the suffering caused by years has been immense.

Statistics South Africa puts the unemployment rate at 33.9%, as of the third quarter of 2022. Out of the 40. 3 million of working age, between the ages of 15 and 64, only 15.8 million people were employed. At 36.8%, the unemployment rate among the Black African population group is higher than the national average and other population groups, with Black women being the most vulnerable.

Shobashobane offers a human face for the grim unemployment numbers churned by Statistics SA. With their lives having been interrupted by the violence, the adult inhabitants of the village who were youngsters during the turbulent 1990s now have little employment prospects due to lack of education.

The violence took away parents, uncles, separated families and left orphans. Education took a back seat as the communities shifted into survival mode. The young people born after into a new South Africa are battling the same socio-economic challenges along

with their ageing parents. It is a social crisis that the locals believe has been ignored by those in power, especially the provincial government, given their proximity to their plight.

The Ray Nkonyeni Local Municipality could not give a breakdown of the unemployment in its locality, with Mayor Skhumbuzo Mqadi only describing it as “very high, especially among the youth”.

At her advanced age, Makhathini, who was 45 in 1995, had to develop an enterprising spirit to supplement her old age grant and support her adult children and grandchildren.

The lone pig in her small pigsty is reared for commercial purposes. When it is big enough, the animal is slaughtered, and its meat sold to the neighbours:

> If you feed them enough, it brings handsome returns., Meat from a whole pig can make up to R4 000. Every part is sold, from the head to trotters.

The fortitude and the enterprising spirit portrayed by Makhathini contrasts with the hopelessness displayed by many in the village, who still wait on the government’s promise of job creation and a better life.

The sound of gunshots may have stopped ringing across the hills of Shobashobane, and the charred walls of homes burned down have been restored, except for a few, who have not summoned enough courage to return to the hilly village, but a new enemy has emerged. Poverty and deprivation.

The only available job opportunities in the village come in the form of short-term employment offered by Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), the national government initiative set up in 2003 with the objective of alleviating poverty and unemployment in communities. The Department of Public Works describes it as a “labour-intensive” employment system focused on government-funded infrastructure projects and other social sectors.

However, not much development has taken place in this part of the world, except for the incomplete tarred road that ends just before the gravesite of the victims of the massacre.

The abrupt end of the road a few meters away from the cemetery is coincidentally symbolic of the 18 lives that were suddenly cut short, and a village stuck between a wretched past and an uncertain future.

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