

Chapter Two: Methodology

This thesis attempts to account for the severe rupture that occurred in the politics of Natal in the mid 1980s. This was represented by the violent political conflict that gripped the province. As discussed in chapter one this thesis investigates four questions:

1. How and why did conflict between political organisations in Natal become violent?
2. What forms did the political violence take?
3. Why, as a result of the violence, did ordinary people with little prior history of political activity come to identify with either the United Democratic Front (UDF) or Inkatha?
4. How were these political identities produced?

These questions are explored through an empirical investigation of the political violence between supporters of the UDF and Inkatha in Natal.

Sociology offers researchers many different ways of gathering data. However, the researcher needs to consider her/his choice with care. Firstly, the method needs to be able to provide the data that will answer the specific research problem. Secondly, the research process is not divorced from the philosophical, ethical and political debates of the time. These are of particular concern to feminist researchers. This chapter will first consider the philosophical concerns that underlie the choice of research method and then outline the research procedure used to generate the data for this thesis.

2.1 Questions of methodology

The major divide in social science research is between quantitative and qualitative methods. Survey and experimental methods are associated with quantitative methods and are often theoretically located in the positivist world view. Positivism equates the social sciences and the natural sciences and sees little relevant difference for the purpose of science between the social world and the

natural world. The objective of sociology is to formulate laws to explain social events and then to test and verify these laws through observation and measurement (see Wilson, 1983). On the other hand, qualitative methods include in-depth interviewing, oral history, documentary sources and observation amongst others. Rejecting the assumption that sociological data must be testable and generalisable qualitative researchers are principally interested in understanding social experiences from the point of view of their participants so as to illustrate how social actors ascribe meaning to these experiences (see Burawoy, 1991). Given the nature of the questions this thesis is interested in - the relationship between political violence and the making and remaking of political identities as perceived by African women in Natal - qualitative methods are a more appropriate route for enquiry. The stories and narrations these women tell and the meanings they give to those stories are critical in answering this question.

Advocates of qualitative methods argue that the strengths of this approach are in fact the exact weaknesses pointed to by positivists. Instead of seeing the interaction between researcher and subject as a source of bias, it is suggested that this is a positive interaction, which in itself generates data and understanding. Qualitative methods enable the researcher to understand not only how people act but also “how they understand and experience those acts” (Burawoy, 1991:2, emphasis added).

Western feminist researchers have developed their own critiques of traditional quantitative research methods, arguing that these methods in effect silence women’s own voices (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991:85). They were looking for a method which would not only redress the sexist imbalances in academic knowledge but would, in reflecting the experiences and voices of ordinary women, also address the power imbalances between researcher and subject (see various articles in Bowles & Klein, 1983; Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991). As such they developed strong critiques of positivism and advocated research ‘for’ women as opposed to research ‘on’ women (Klein, 1983:90). Research ‘for’ women

engaged with a participatory method, was political in focus and in line with feminism's political goals concentrated on changing women's lives. Twenty years later we/I are/am acutely aware that despite these ambitions much of this work was based on the

assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions ... (Mohanty, 1991a:55).

and very often entrenched the notion of the subject as disempowered other.

Feminist researchers, particularly in South Africa, have raised the questions of representation and authenticity (Hassim & Walker, 1992; Letlaka-Rennert, 1991; Lewis, 1992a, 1992b; Lund, 1991; Robinson, 1994 etc). This has challenged the researcher to think through not only the form of data-gathering but also their relationship to the subject in the production of knowledge. In South Africa, much of the literature from the debate, arising from the 1991 'Women and Gender in Southern Africa' Conference at the University of Natal, Durban, focused around 'who can do research on who' (see Lund, 1991; Letlake-Rennert, 1991; Hassim & Walker, 1992; Kemp, 1993; Fouché, 1993; Funani, 1993; Gouws, 1993). White women researchers were challenged both for their choice of research subject and their ability to (re)present the experiences of black women.

The debates were charged with emotion and intensity. Black women felt they were being denied the right to be heard (see Lewis, 1992a) and many white women academics found the challenges silencing. There are no easy answers to this question. As Robinson (1994) points out all researchers have to face the dilemma of being the 'outsider within'. Kemp (1993:26/7) argues that "you don't have to be one of those nouns to teach, study, or 'understand' ..." however it is important to recognise that one is crossing boundaries and position oneself accordingly: "authenticity is a sham. Every time you quote someone, you are re-presenting that person." The answer, if there is one, points in the direction of positionality, and honesty. It is necessary to locate oneself as researcher both in

the research process and in the writing, to acknowledge and to own up to the “interpretive authorial self” (Stacey, 1991:115).

Ethnographic research foregrounds the question of the production and construction of knowledge by forcing the researcher as ethnographer to

confront participants in their corporeal reality, in their concrete existence, in their time and space... [they are] ...forced to forsake the authority of science and enter into dialogue with their subjects (Burawoy, 1991:291).

Ely (1991:3) makes the point that “there are conflicting claims for what can be properly labelled ethnography”. There also seem to be different approaches within ethnography - critical, post-structural, feminist ethnography (Stacey, 1991) and a fairly traditional approach that sees ethnography as “the work of describing a culture” (Spradley, 1979:3). Without wishing to find myself in a label debate I feel it is necessary to put forward my perspective. I see contemporary ethnographic practice as critical and self-reflexive. It is sensitive to the power relations inherent in all research. It does not see its job as describing a culture but it is aware of the place of the researcher in this process. It draws on ethnographic literature from these different perspectives.

The interactions between researcher and subject foreground the question of power. Traditional positivist research situations are characterised by an asymmetry in power between the researcher and the respondents. While one can be sensitive to such dynamics, ultimately what the researcher writes is outside of the control of the subjects. Nevertheless, ethnography is a self-reflexive method that attempts to confront the power relations inherent in all research. Once again, this is done through acknowledging the location and positionality of the researcher. It is necessary to identify the points of difference and commonality and to incorporate these into the writing. It is possible to utilise

dialogic forms of ethnographic representation that place more of the voices and perspectives of the researched into the narrative and that

more authentically reflect the dissonance and particularity of the ethnographic research process (Stacey 1991:115).

As I discuss below my choice of research topic is intimately connected with my personal academic and political history. My positionality as researcher was central to the way in which the research was conducted; who I contacted, how I entered the field, the way I introduced myself and ultimately my acceptance by the respondents. I was not the neutral academic coming to discover the truth. Neutrality had no part in my choice of topic or in my acceptance in the field.

The employment of an ethnographic method is not an instant solution to the problems raised above. What it does allow is for one to anticipate some of the problems and to provide ways of negotiating them. The stories and meanings presented in this thesis are only partial accounts partly because this is the only window the research subjects open and partly because of my location on the 'outside'. Nevertheless, ethnography allows one space to explore these partial meanings and the role both the researcher and the research subject play in their construction.

2.2 Selecting a research topic

Political violence was not something any South African could escape. It marked us from the moment we entered the world as conscious engaged human beings. It shaped and patterned our being; all of us, black or white, male or female. Growing up in the South Africa of the late 1970s and 1980s, political violence impacted directly on me. First it entered my consciousness through the newspapers and the television as something that happened to other people - Steve Biko's death in detention, the police baton-charging protesters; then, as I became politically active, it moved closer to me, becoming a potential threat - the unmarked car following me, the line of police at a protest, guns and dogs ready, the childhood friend now a member of the South African Police (SAP), the person shot and killed at the place I'd just left; finally it touched those close to me - a friend whose relative was killed in a South African Defence Force (SADF) raid on

a neighbouring state, comrades from Mpophomeni abducted and killed by vigilantes, friends in hiding fearful for their lives. It engulfed Natal and it engulfed many of the people I was close to, friends, comrades and colleagues. Most of all it ensured that many of my family and childhood friends became other.

Being white and living in a racially exclusive white suburb meant that most of my knowledge of political violence was at a distance, through a third party. However while the violence happened to other people I was not unaffected. It was shaping who I was, my concerns, feelings, consciousness and identity.

I had come of political age in Natal in the early 1980s. My political involvement had thrown me up against incidents that clearly marked Inkatha in the category of collaborator. Thinking back on those times, Inkatha's violent and brutal opposition to 'progressive' forces seemed a natural progression. Long before I heard the stories of forced recruitment campaigns and brutal slayings during the floods of September 1987, Inkatha was already marked 'treat with caution' and identified as the enemy to be feared. The incidents that marked them as such were numerous but that which had the most impact on me was the attack on Mpophomeni Township. Since 1985 I had been working with members of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU) who had been dismissed for going on strike at the BTR Sarmcol factory in Howick. The majority lived in Mpophomeni, which had become a site of struggle and resistance. I was part of a support group that was assisting with campaigns for reinstatement and had also begun academic research into the issue. The phone call came early on the morning of 6 December 1986. It was Bobby Marie, organiser for the Metal and Allied Workers Union. 'An Inkatha *impi* invaded Mpophomeni last night; they abducted and killed Simon and Phineus.¹ The community's been attacked.' We were uncomprehending. Numb. Angry. Surprised? If I remember back, surprised at

¹ Simon Ngubane was a Sarmcol shop steward and leading figure in the Sarmcol Workers' Co-operative Cultural Group. I had been involved in the workshoping of the plays and had got to know him well. Phineus Sibiya was the chairperson of the shop stewards council and the co-operative.

the boldness of the attack, but not at Inkatha's declaration of Mpophomeni as the enemy, not at Inkatha's violence, and certainly not at the ineffectiveness of the police, either to protect the community or to halt the attack.

This attack was the first of many similar incidents that were to follow. During 1987 deaths from political violence steadily increased until in September of that year sixty deaths were reported (Aitchison, 1989b). In the next three years, reported deaths from political violence only dropped below fifty per month six times (Aitchison, 1990b). Despite South Africa's history of political conflict the intensity and scale of the political violence was unprecedented. In a very short space of time people who had lived happily, side-by-side for years began killing one another. From Pietermaritzburg it spread to most of Natal's African townships. Thousands of people were displaced as internal refugees and thousands more killed their political affiliation or perceived affiliation to one or other political group determining whether they would live or die.

I felt the need to say something about what was happening. Initially I responded by painting. I did three paintings in the late 1980s / early 1990s that reflected different aspects of my thoughts on political violence and in particular the way it impacted on women. The first painting (*Violence in South Africa*) (see Fig 1) explored the relationship between state violence and sexual violence; it saw all women as universal subjects. Political and state violence impacted on them by increasing sexual violence.

Fig 1: Violence in South Africa



The second painting focused on political violence in Natal. Called *Food for Guns* (see Fig 2), it portrayed women as victims of violence, the mourners of sons, male lovers and husbands. Its analysis presented women as passive; they had no agency in a war controlled and fought by men. Nevertheless, this painting

Fig 2: Food for Guns



reflected my growing concern with the silence in the written analysis of the violence that ignored the way in which women were affected by the violence and participated in it.² This concern led me to motivate that *Agenda*³ organise a workshop, inviting women living in areas affected by political violence, monitors of violence and others working in communities affected by political violence. The purpose of the workshop was to share information on the way in which women were being affected by political violence. The workshop held in Durban on 5 May 1990, resulted in an article published in *Agenda* (see Annecke, 1990) but neither the workshop nor the article had much effect on the broader gender analysis of the political violence.

² See chapter one for a critique of this literature.

³ *Agenda* is a journal publishing material on women and gender issues. At the time I was a member of the editorial collective of *Agenda*.

In 1991, I began a small research project attempting to reanalyse data collected by the Unrest Monitoring Project based at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. They had an extensive database of incidents of violence in the Natal Midlands. My purpose in reanalysing the data was to look for incidents where women were affected and to categorise them in order to understand the ways in which women were participating in the violence. My own theoretical framework suggested that women could not just be passive victims, however, it was necessary to explore this empirically. The paper (see Bonnin, 1991) resulting from this research was pivotal in my decision to pursue this topic by registering for a doctoral thesis. The problem of gender silence was not just one of the analyses of existing data, but of its collection. Questions about gender and political violence were not being asked. Furthermore, the existing data did not allow these questions to be answered.

I decided that I needed to explore questions of gender and political violence more seriously and that the only way to do this was to conduct field research myself. My early attempts to conceptualise the topic focused on women's experiences of political violence. On the few occasions when the press had focused on women's role in the violence they portrayed their activities as that of peacekeeper. Initially I wished to deconstruct this portrayal and understand in more detail how women were being affected and the roles they were playing in the violence. In essence, I hoped to question the essentialist construction of gender identity that automatically aligned women with peace. However, upon further investigation I found myself intrigued by questions of political identity.

A feature of the violence was a seemingly firm affiliation with a particular political group. In this situation it was impossible not to have a political identity (see Kentridge, 1990). However, it was also a period in which political identities underwent dramatic changes. People who were previously apolitical or loosely identified with one or other political group became virulent supporters of either the UDF or Inkatha. This situation of political violence provided an excellent

empirical example to develop our understanding of the ways in which political identities are made and remade.

Well into my fieldwork I began the third painting. *Self Portrait of a Researcher* (see Fig 3) problematises my positionality as researcher. The painting comprises four panels. Along the bottom of the canvas are the hills of Durban's Berea – my hometown, a place that I love and my refuge from global citizenship. The central panel depicts the looming Memorial Tower Building at the University of Natal's Durban campus – not only the location of my office but it also seems to represent the phallic authority of scientific knowledge, the authorial voice of the researcher. On the right the brutal world of my research informants – sourced from a press photograph, police collect distended corpses, loading them onto the back of an open truck. The left-hand panel shows the interior of my lounge, my home – quiet, safe and peaceful, filled with objects I had carefully chosen. This is where I could retreat, safe in the white suburbs, when my intellectual labours became too fraught. But the question that troubled me is: to where do my informants escape? The contrast between my world and the world of my research informants haunted me throughout the research.

Fig 3: Self-Portrait of a Researcher



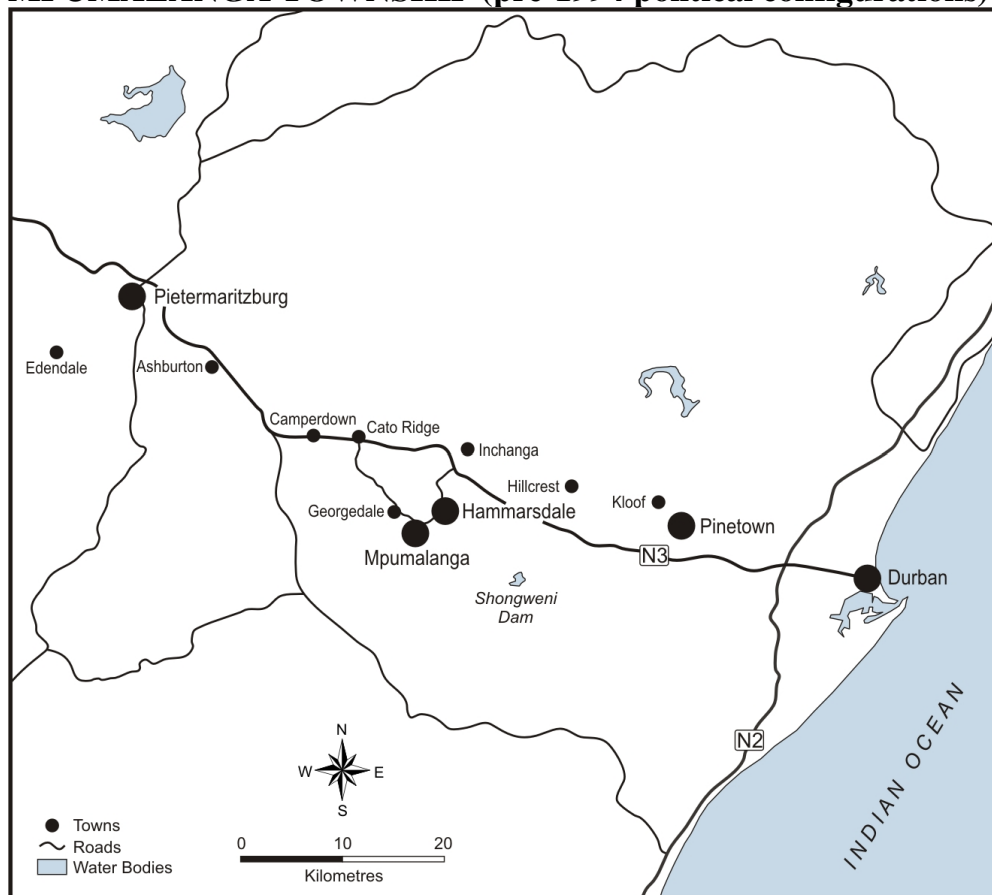
2.3 Choosing the research site: Mpumalanga township

Fighting between supporters of the UDF and Inkatha engulfed much of Natal (see chapter one). With the emphasis in this thesis being on locale and place it was necessary to find a suitable location for in-depth ethnographic fieldwork.

As a result of its history and particular circumstances Mpumalanga Township (see Map 3) provided an ideal location to investigate political violence and identities. It was built in the late 1960s as a model township to accommodate the increasing squatter problem in the Hammarisdale area – an industrial decentralisation point (see chapter three). It also provided a labour force for the Hammarisdale textile factories. Political violence began in late 1986, intensified during 1987 and continued until 1991. Since then there have been some sporadic attacks. As the records of the Unrest Monitoring Project (see below) indicated, it was one of the

worst affected areas in Natal. A peace pact signed in late 1989 had little effect and large scale attacks on certain sections of the township continued well into 1990. Large areas of the township were emptied and many residents were refugees for over a year. However, by 1992 the peace pact began to have some influence, residents returned and today many outsiders regard Mpumalanga Township as a model of peace. Furthermore, Mpumalanga is an area where women have been particularly active. Newspaper reports described six protest marches/demonstrations organised by women between 1988 and 1990.

**MAP 3: LOCATIONAL MAP OF NATAL SHOWING
MPUMALANGA TOWNSHIP (pre-1994 political configurations)**



2.4 The fieldwork process: collecting primary material

There were two main field strategies. Data was collected from a number of different archives and in-depth oral interviews were conducted.

A central purpose in collecting data from as many sources as possible was the recognition that any one piece or source of data was incomplete. In order to convince the reader (and myself) of the credibility of my research findings it was essential to look for verification and validation between different sources.

Silverman (2001:233) notes that there are two possible ways in which to validate qualitative research. The first involves comparing different kinds of data and different methods to see whether they corroborate each other. The second method involves taking one's findings back to informants. As indicated in the discussion below I utilised both these methods. I found strong coherence between sources of data. Furthermore, different chapters were given to some of my informants for comment and discussion.

2.4.1 Documentary material

The political violence in Natal has been very well documented (as discussed in chapter one). Such sources proved invaluable for the range of information they provided. Furthermore, much of this data was generated at the time and so provides a counter to the problems of memory (see below). Bailey (1987:291/2) in his discussion of the advantages of documentary sources lists a number that had resonance for this study. He mentioned a problem faced by many researchers of inaccessible subjects - that documentary sources can provide access to those who are long dead. While this is particularly pertinent for historical studies, it is doubly useful in this context where many potential research subjects have been killed in the violence. Documentary evidence allowed some, but limited, access to their stories. Secondly, by its very nature ethnography focuses on a small sample size, the additional usage of documentary material widened the scope of the research. Thirdly, documentary sources allows for the gathering of data over time. While the period of study in this research is not particularly lengthy, the use of

data collected at different times again counters some of the problems associated with memory - romanticisation, forgetfulness and the reworking of the past to fit with the current political situation.

I drew on a number of different sources of documentary evidence, some more complete than others.

(i) The database of the Unrest Monitoring Project, Centre for Adult Education, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg contains all reported incidents of political violence in the Natal Midlands, which includes Hammarsdale and Mpumalanga. The sources of these records are police unrest reports, witnesses, newspapers, SAPA reports, and well-placed individuals eg lawyers, trade unionists, community-based workers/activists. This database runs into thousands of reported incidents. Some reports are based only on police unrest reports and are very sketchy, while others incorporate detailed statements from victims and witnesses (some who subsequently were killed) and run into many pages. These records detail incidents involving both women and men, though frequently the witnesses/survivors who make the statements are women. Using key words I categorised all reports according to area in which the incident occurred. Within these data-sets I then isolated all reports containing incidents involving women. The analysis of these data-sets provided me with an overview of the violence in Natal, and contributed to the selection of the research site and the discussion in chapter five.

(ii) Newspaper clippings housed in the Natal Room Archive, University of Natal, Durban.⁴ These files were sourced from a wide range of national newspapers and include all the Natal newspapers. The clippings relate to incidents of political violence and the wider political situation, and they cover the period from 1980 to 1992. I went through the clippings covering the period 1985 to 1991. I made

⁴ This collection has since been moved to the Alan Paton Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

copies of all articles relating to incidents in Mpumalanga/Hammarsdale. These were then ordered chronologically and I summarised each article. The material from the newspapers was used extensively in chapter five and also in chapter four. Newspaper material was key in enabling me to identify organisations active in Mpumalanga prior to the violence and I was able to follow this up through key informant interviews (see below). I also found that there was corroboration between incidents mentioned in newspaper articles and narratives from the oral interviews.

(iii) Affidavits and statements. A large number of affidavits from both men and women were collected at the time of the incidents by the Black Sash and lawyers from the Legal Resources Centre (LRC), Durban. Some of these were stored, others formed part of court records when lawyers applied for restraining orders and others were quoted extensively by journalists. Unfortunately the affidavits lodged with the LRC in Durban had been destroyed as the LRC shredded their files after five years. The Black Sash lodged all their Advice Office records at the Killie Campbell Museum, and there were a few affidavits in the collection. These affidavits provided useful background material and they corroborated interview data and newspaper reports. I cited some extracts in chapter six and seven, but they were primarily used to corroborate and validate other material, .

(iv) The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings were an essential source of information. The TRC held a number of hearings into political violence in Natal. I consulted the transcripts of the victim hearings held in Pietermaritzburg and Durban as well as the amnesty hearings of the Caprivi Trainees and the Special Hearings into the Caprivi Trainees. The hearings corroborated material from the oral interviews and the newspaper clippings. They were particularly useful in shedding light on covert state activities that had been alluded to in the other sources. This material was used in chapter five and six.

The TRC research process and the final report has been critically discussed (see Wilson, 2001; Posel & Simpson, 2002). While the material I consulted can not be isolated from the context within which it was produced, I used certain primary texts generated through the TRC process very particularly. Many of the incidents, as well as the details of these incidents (what happened and who was involved) had already been the subject of much discussion during the oral in-depth interviews. The TRC affidavits submitted to the victim and amnesty hearings provided further corroboration and more in-depth details of these same events. Mpumalanga residents already knew who had gone for training under Operation Marion, and what they had been involved in upon their return to Mpumlanaga. The TRC affidavits and special hearings allowed me to verify the in-depth oral interview discussions.

(v) Archival material was located in the National Archives in Pretoria and the Regional Archives in Pietermaritzburg. In the National Archives I consulted the Department of Bantu Affairs Records for Mpumalanga and Hammarsdale. These pertained to government plans around the construction of Mpumalanga Township and the decision to relocate the residents of Hammarsdale and Georgedale. Camperdown Magistrates Records were found in the Regional Archives. This material was useful in constructing the history of the area and in tracing the genealogy of violence; it was used in the writing of chapter three and chapter four.

2.4.2 In-depth oral interviews

In-depth oral interviews, sometimes called semi-structured interviews, were used in a variety of contexts. I made two main excursions into the field – the first in 1993/4 when focus group discussions were held with older women in Mpumalanga Township and the second in 1999 when individual interviews were held with young women. In addition, a number of key informant interviews were conducted.

Oral interviews do raise the methodological problem of memory and the reconstruction of the past. One view is that provided by Thompson (1978:98):

The information provided by interview evidence of relatively recent events, or current situations, can be assumed to lie somewhere between the actual social behaviour and the social expectations or norms of the time.

According to such arguments the interview transcripts offer material accounts of events. However an opposing view sees such material as only text or discourse, according to Clifford Geertz (cited in Burawoy, 1991:3) “our business is limited to the ‘understanding of understanding’”. My approach was that interview transcripts are material accounts of actual behaviour, but that they cannot escape the reconstructions of the present. Accounts that people give of events are not ‘passive memories’ but “‘scripts’ through which people actively structure and manipulate conceptual elements ...” (Finnegan, 1992:115). Passerini, (cited in Marks, 2001:15), further cautions that ‘oral sources [should be] considered as forms of culture and testimonies of the changes of these forms over time’. The process of remembering does not lie outside the context within which they are gathered. The material gathered in interviews and the meanings generated are moulded by the context of the interview the place where the interview takes place; the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee; and, in a focus group discussion the way the person wishes to present themselves to the groups. Furthermore, the memories are selective. As Marks (2001:13) reminds us, everyone has their own point of view and they will narrate the story from their perspective. As discussed below, some of these issues did have a bearing on the in-depth interviews. Thus, it was imperative to compare this data against that elicited from the documentary sources and to “look for congruence in the different accounts” (Schrager, cited in Marks, 2001:15). In many cases the material gathered from both these sources corroborated each other.

An issue that the research literature does not seem to discuss is the impact of the event itself on recall and recollection. Given that the topics under discussion had to potential to be particularly traumatic for those recounting the narrative; I

needed to consider the possibility that the reconstruction of traumatic events could be particularly problematic. As discussed below, the principal emotion invoked during the interviews was anger. Rather than resulting in memory loss, it seemed as if anger had honed remembering to the finest detail.

The material gathered from oral interviews was primarily used in writing chapter seven, however it was also used in chapters three, four and five.

(i) Focus Group Interviews

Focus groups have become increasingly popular as a tool of qualitative research (Macun & Posel, 1998). They involve small, relatively homogeneous groups discussing a series of defined topics, where “the interaction plays an important role in generating information and data” (Macun & Posel, 1998:119). Topics and hypotheses for discussion are selected in advance, but the actual questions are not selected (Bailey, 1987:190/1). This allows a series of probes that can investigate subjective issues deeply.

This method was appropriate for a number of reasons. Firstly, the technique is more sensitive to power relations and the group dynamics often dislocate the “questioning researcher and the questioned research subject” (Robinson, 1994:12) and so allow the displacement of subject positions. Secondly, as Burawoy (1991:284) argues new meanings are produced in social arenas. These new meanings

arise from communicative labours whose comprehension requires actual or virtual participation. To gain access ... scientists have to enter into dialogue with participants.

Given the theoretical questions this thesis is interested in, a method that generates meanings seemed to be most productive. Thirdly, the lack of trust and suspicion that existed as a result of the violence suggested that group interviews were more acceptable than individual interviews. While negotiating access (see below) members of the community decided that the interviews would be group affairs.

While this was a non-negotiable it is telling in itself and informative of community dynamics at the time.

My first task was to negotiate access for the research and acceptance of the project amongst residents of Mpumalanga. The peace pact was barely two years old, many houses still stood empty and the air was thick with distrust. Nobody would talk to a stranger who did not come with the right credentials. I approached Mary de Haas, a well-known violence monitor, explained my project and asked if she would introduce me to some community leaders. She agreed to speak to activists from the area about my project. I was then put in touch with Zweli, a prominent comrade from unit three, Mpumalanga Township. He was doing a course in Community Development at the University of Natal and I met him for the first time after one of his lectures. He listened to my story. My affiliation with the University of Natal, given its history of individuals who had played a role in supporting the mass democratic movement during the days of the anti-apartheid struggle, as well as, my own personal history of involvement with the trade union movement and the BTR Sarmcol strike, were deciding factors in his decision to introduce me to key gate-keepers in Mpumalanga.

The first visit to Mpumalanga Township took place on 4 September 1993. I was introduced to local community leaders, Connie Myeni in unit one south and Sydwell Ngwana and Mr Duma in unit three (both UDF areas), in order to get sanction for the research and permission to be in the area.⁵ On this first visit to Mpumalanga we avoided areas that were known to be Inkatha and my field-notes reflect that Zweli specifically advised that we avoid Woody Glen (an Inkatha stronghold) 'as he did not know what might happen to us'. At each house I was questioned. They wanted to know who I was and what my history was. With

⁵ Even though a peace pact had been signed, there was still a lot of tension. Strangers were viewed with suspicion. It was just prior to the 1994 elections and Inkatha had not yet agreed to participate in those elections. Rumours abounded in the township that Inkatha was still recruiting clandestinely in order to disrupt the elections violently. Interviews I did in 1999 bore this out when a young woman from unit one north confirmed that during this period Inkatha had sent her for paramilitary training. Once trained they formed Self-Protection Units.

Zweli's support all agreed to endorse the research and ask women in their neighbourhood to talk to me. There was one condition - the interviews were to be done in groups.

Over the next year a total of twelve focus group discussions were held in various UDF-supporting units of the township (see table three). Some groups met more than once, and on each occasion the discussion lasted between two and three hours. Mrs Myeni and Mr Duma arranged the first two groups; thereafter a snowball sampling technique was used. At the end of the discussion I asked the group if anybody was prepared to arrange a new group at their house or to ask one of their friends to arrange a group. My requests were met with positive responses and a number of women indicated they would assist. With the exception of the church group⁶ all the groups consisted of close neighbours. Macun & Posel (1998:119) argue that as the purpose of a focus group is to encourage group discussion, it is desirable for the participants to "feel as comfortable and uninhibited with each other as possible". Nevertheless, it was important to recognise that in a group situation there is added pressure to conform to the dominant viewpoint of the group. This was particularly so in the context of political violence and the atmosphere of fear and intimidation that had resulted. I attempted to counter this by focusing the discussions around the experiences of the women involved. As the violence had forged intimate relations between neighbours, and information had great currency in the attempts to stay alive there was little they didn't know about one another.

Table 3: Focus Groups Interviewed

Date	Name of Group	Introduced by	Unit	Who was there ⁷
07/09/93	Mrs Ncgobo	Zweli	Four	One women
11/09/93	Edith's Group	Sydwell	Three	Four women and one man

⁶ This was a group of Roman Catholic women who met twice a week for prayer.

⁷ I've excluded the contact/organising person who with the exception of Edith's group usually attended as well.

Date	Name of Group	Introduced by	Unit	Who was there⁷
18/09/93		Ngwana		Two women
24/09/93	Connie's Group	Connie	One south	Three women and one man
05/10/93	Mthembu's Group	Edith	Three	Five women
16/10/93				Five women (only three were from the previous discussion) and one man.
26/10/93	Roman Catholic Church Group	Edith	Four	Twenty women
28/10/93	Mrs Mkize's	Church Group	Four	Eight women
09/11/93	Mrs Semelane's Group ⁸	Edith	Three	Four women
17/11/93				Six women (only three from the previous discussion)
13/11/93	Mrs Tusi's Group	Mrs Mkhize	Four	Ten women
04/12/93				Five women (only three from the previous discussion)
03/02/94	Connie's Group (2)	Connie	One south	One woman and one man
05/02/94	Mrs Tusi's Group (2)	Mrs Tusi	Four	
26/02/94				
15/03/94	Teacher	Mrs Tusi	Four	One woman
05/09/94	Connie's Friend	Connie	One south and Two	Two women
7/09/94				Two women

The size and membership of the groups varied. There was one very large group and two consisted of just one woman.⁹ Not everyone who had been at the first discussion returned for the second meeting and often new women arrived to

⁸ A third meeting had been planned with this group. However, when we arrived for the appointment the house was locked and Mrs Smelane was not there. We waited an hour but nobody arrived. I later received a phone call from the woman who introduced me to Mrs Smelane saying that Mrs Smelane had had visitors asking who I was and what I wanted. She had been frightened and intimidated and asked me not to come back to her house.

participate. I also found that participation varied. Some participants spoke frequently and seemed to dominate the discussion. While this was more of a problem in large groups, it also happened in the smaller groups. Some women arrived late and others left early. On some occasions, men joined the groups. It seemed that the men in the house were curious to hear what was being discussed. In the instance of Mthembu's Group, Mr Mthembu was an important local leader and he felt that 'he knew more than ten people'. When this happened I did not object to their participation and upon reflection it was interesting to contrast their stories with those of the women. Often these dynamics shifted the power balance and marginalised me as the researcher. I was not able to control the research process. My fieldnotes of 5 October 1993 reflected the following observation

The way things are happening are outside of my control. ... Groups are interesting as it definitely shifts power away from the interviewer.

It was necessary to keep in mind the point made by Stacey (1991) that research is a process in which the researcher is never in full control. At times, all research and particularly ethnographic research is unpredictable. Yet its very unpredictability often provides the insights and analytical clues. Ethnography enables the researcher to observe and get to know the community, how it functions and works. It enables the researcher to learn from the informants and all situations become learning situations.

With the assistance of an interpreter the interviewer, using a discussion guide initiated a discussion among the group. These conversations were primarily conducted in *isiZulu*. This discussion was recorded using an audio-tape for later transcription and translation. Each audio-tape was transcribed and translated in full. This allowed me to see the full context of how the discourse developed during the interaction and enabled the translation process to become transparent. Translations raised a number of problems in both the interview and in the

⁹ One of these interviews was not used. The woman's son sat with us throughout the discussion clearly monitoring what was being said and how his mother answered the questions. In addition, she would not allow the interview to be taped.

transcription process. As most of the discussion took place in *isiZulu*, I was effectively excluded from steering the discussion and had to rely on the translator to do so. A number of different translators were used, and I found that age was an important factor in the ability of the translators to both gain respect from the group and understand the objectives of the focus group discussion. Student translators were not the most successful and the two older women, with their additional life experience and political knowledge, were better placed to facilitate the group. However, the student translators were more likely to defer to me and translate frequently, while the older women steered their own course and allowed the discussion to take its own direction. However, upon reviewing the transcripts it became apparent that each approach had its own advantages and disadvantages. Transcription and translation of tapes gave rise to more technical problems. It was impossible to locate any professional transcription services that were able to handle recordings in *isiZulu* and therefore I was forced to use students. Upon checking the tapes I found numerous problems with the transcriptions and each tape had to be checked and re-transcribed as well as the translations checked. However, despite these problems the focus group research could not have been completed without the assistance of the many women (and one man) that assisted by translating and transcribing focus group interviews – for this I thank them and acknowledge their contribution.

After each visit, field notes were written and the transcribed tape formed part of the field observations (see Burawoy, 1991). I used the field notes to record information about the participants in the group, my observations about the group and its dynamics as well as additional information I was given about events/dynamics in the township at that time.

As there was still great fear of Inkatha amongst the participants full confidentiality of those participating in the focus groups was agreed to. To ensure this, with the exception of the person organising the group nobody was introduced to me by name.

My intention was also to hold focus group interviews in Inkatha-supporting areas of the township. Mrs Myeni had agreed, through her work in the reconstruction committee, to introduce me to a contact person who might facilitate a group. However, it became clear in the discussions with informants that this was not really desirable. While no-one raised outright objections, and when asked many said that it would be a good idea to get the perspective of Inkatha-supporting women, the undercurrents led me to believe that it would seriously compromise the relationship I was developing with my informants. Who I was, my views on Inkatha and the violence were central to their willingness to participate.

Informants frequently saw me as a resource person. I was asked to assist with numerous activities, from bringing University of Natal application forms, to providing a list of potential funders for the community advice centre to taking someone to see a lawyer. While I was willing to assist where possible this perception did lead to one problem. It had become clear to me that there were a number of undercurrents – their exact nature or purpose I was not sure of - in one of the neighbourhoods. I began to get suspicious that one of my informants, a woman who had organised a number of focus groups, was using her relationship with me (and the possibility that she would be able to access resources this way) to leverage her position amongst her neighbours. Deciding to be cautious, once the discussion was over I withdrew and did not pursue other contacts through her.

(ii) Individual in-depth oral interviews

Given the emphasis on generation it had always been my intention to conduct interviews with younger women.¹⁰ Reflections on the focus group interviews made me decide to conduct individual interviews with the younger women. By avoiding inter-group interactions and dynamics I wished to see if the conversations covered similar ground.

¹⁰ While a few young women did attend the focus group interviews, they were not in the majority and furthermore did not participate much.

One-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted in English with eleven young women in 1999. The women were between twenty and thirty-five years of age ie they were the peer group of the male youth who had been so intensively involved in the violence between the years 1987 and 1991. A similar set of open-ended questions was put to each woman. This allowed the conversation to develop its own direction but ensured similar ground was covered in each interview. The interviews were conducted in English in order to avoid the earlier problems encountered regarding translations and transcriptions. There was some self-selection as informants needed to have good English fluency. However, given the prevalence of English fluency amongst younger African people I regarded this problem as having a minimal effect on the sample.

Table 4: Young Women Interviewed

Date of Interview	Name	Birth Date	Unit
18/03/99	Thoko (TN2)	1972	One north
27/03/99	Thembi (TN1)	1971	Four (moved to Georgedale during violence)
30/03/99	Nomvula (NK)		One north (moved to unit six during violence)
06/04/99	Dudu (DM)	1973	Georgedale
07/04/99	Thando (TM)		Georgedale
07/04/99	Nonku (NL2)		Georgedale
09/04/99	Mandisa (MN)	1972	One north (moved from one south at the beginning of the violence)
09/04/99	Nonto (NL1)		One south
11/04/99	Mbali (MM)	1975	Six (stayed in unit three to attend school)
11/04/99	Phumzile (PM1)	1974	Three
12/04/99	Pumla (PM2)	1975	Three (moved to unit four but returned to unit three during the violence)

Contact with the informants was made through Muzwi Mkhulisi, an Mpumalanga Township resident and University of Natal Geography masters student. Muzwi was researching waste management systems and recycling in Mpumalanga

Township. He had come to see me previously to ask my advice about certain aspects of his research proposal. I asked him to assist in finding young women who were willing to be interviewed. The sample was a non-probability sample, selected through a combination of random selection (Muzwi approached women from his neighbourhood and others at the bus and taxi ranks) and snowball sampling (when a woman who had already been interviewed asked a friend to get in touch with me). The interviews were conducted at the University of Natal and each woman was reimbursed for her transport and subsistence costs. The reason for conducting the interviews at the University was to ensure a quiet venue where we would be undisturbed and get a good quality recording. Each interview lasted approximately two hours.

Permission was obtained from all the informants for the interviews to be recorded using an audio-tape recorder. They were transcribed in full by a professional agency and checked by myself. Full confidentiality of all the informants was assured.

By 1999 fear of Inkatha and the resumption of political violence had subsided significantly. Informants were curious about my interest in the topic and whether I had any direct experience of violence, but I no longer had to prove my political credibility. Their questions to me were around my education, career path, personal life and economic status. There was an expectation that I would be interviewing young women from all units of the township. There was no sanction, even from strong ANC supporters, about my interviewing young women from Inkatha-aligned areas.

(iii) Key informant interviews

In addition to the focus group interviews with older women and the individual interviews with young women, I also conducted ten key informant interviews with community and organisational leaders (see table five). These were used to elicit

information about specific events. These individuals were selected using purposive sampling:

... the researcher uses his or her judgement about which respondents to choose, and picks only those who best meet the purposes of the study. The advantages of purposive sampling are that the researcher can use his or her research skill and prior knowledge to choose respondents (Bailey, 1987:94).

The data generated from the documentary material as well as from the focus groups was used to identify these individuals.

Table 5: Key Informant Interviews

Date	Name	Organisation / Position
23/10/98	Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge	Former chairperson of Natal Organisation of Women, NOW had a branch in Mpumalanga.
25/03/99	Phozo Zondo	Branch organiser for NOW.
25/04/99	Reverend	Lives in unit one north Mpumalanga, former tenant in Georgedale/Hammarsdale prior to removals to Mpumalanga Township.
26/04/99	Rodger Sishi	Lived in unit two Mpumalanga, former mayor of Mpumalanga, founding member and chairman of Mpura.
29/04/99	Mr M	Member of old Georgedale family, landowner whose land was expropriated to build Mpumalanga Township.
24/07/00	Strini Moodley	Member of Azapo, key contact person for Mpumalanga Branch.
28/07/00	James Ngubane	Lived in unit two Mpumalanga. Member of Azapo (Mpumalanga Branch), Mpura, NUTW and vice-president of TAWU.
01/08/00	Richard Mqadi (Cele)	Lived in unit four Mpumalanga, member of Azapo, chairperson of Mpumalanga Branch.
03/08/00	Mandla Mthembu	Lived in unit one south Mpumalanga. Member of Azapo (Mpumalanga Branch).
09/12/00	Sbu Mbhele	Lived in unit three Mpumalanga, Member of Azapo (Mpumalanga Branch).
07/11/03	Bruce Buthelezi	Lived in unit one south Mpumalanga, Member of Azapo (Mpumalanga Branch), and key activist in Hayco.

The in-depth interviews with key informants were very unstructured. I prepared for the interview and made notes regarding the ground that I needed to cover,

however, each interview took its own course depending on the area of expertise of the individual.

Permission was received from all the key informants, with the exception of Mr M, to record the interview using a tape record. Interviews were fully transcribed by a professional agency and checked by myself. None of the key informants, with the exception of Mr M, requested their identity be kept confidential.

2.5 Research lacunae

I have identified two lacunae in this research.

Firstly, as discussed above the project was originally conceptualised to focus on women's experiences of political violence. While later I developed an interest in the construction of political identity, the focus was still women. Thus my research strategy highlighted women as the primary informants. However, as the research progressed, it developed its own dynamics. It became more focused on the political violence itself and in trying to understand the rupture that occurred in KwaZulu and Natal's politics in the mid-1980s. Gender and generation became more pivotal to my analysis. In analysing and writing up the research it has become apparent that in-depth interviews with a cohort of male respondents of mixed age would have added to the richness of the data and contributed meaningfully to my analysis. Given the overwhelming male membership of the youth organisations, this data would have allowed me to develop a richer picture of their organisational history and development, particularly that of the Hammarsdale Youth Congress. Nevertheless, the key informant interviews do, to some degree, mitigate this lacuna. Within this cluster there are a significant number of male activists. They were able to speak to the development of youth organisations in the area and outline their experience of political violence. While not satisfactorily closing this lacuna, these interviews do add significantly to the richness of the research data.

The second weakness relates to the problems of inaccuracies contained within newspaper reports. When attempting to corroborate newspaper reports with other documentary sources and/or in-depth interviews it became apparent that there were inaccuracies. Frequently names and sometimes even incidents were mixed up. The killing of Mashu Mbatha/Bongani Mbatha/Masha Shandu referred to in chapter six is an example of this problem. In its report of the killing of a student leader The Natal Mercury refers to the victim as Bongani Mbatha, The Weekly Mail and two oral interviews (see Interview Thembi, TN1#1-2:2; focus group Connie's group, Con1#1-2:3) gives his name as Mashu Mbatha, and Israel Hlongwane in his TRC affidavit refers to the killing of Mashu Shandu (TRC affidavit S20).¹¹ Many reasons lie behind these inaccuracies. Firstly, for a range of reasons, from state of emergency regulations to laziness, reporters often relied on official police reports. The information contained in these reports was notoriously scanty and frequently inaccurate (Aitchison, 1988:4-6). Secondly, the difficulty and danger in accessing areas where there was a war meant that many reporters did not carefully check and substantiate their information, often relying on second-hand accounts that were unverified. Thirdly, the lack of *isiZulu* language proficiency amongst mostly white English-speaking reporters could have also resulted in inaccuracies. In the example cited above, Shandu is the clan name for Mbatha, and the two are used interchangeable. Despite these problems, the inaccuracies contained in the newspaper reports seem to be mostly in the detail, rather than in the broad brush-strokes of events. I did find strong corroborations between the in-depth oral interviews and newspaper accounts.

2.6 Research Ethics

There were numerous ethical considerations associated with this research. Some are related to any research activity but others were specifically related to the subject matter of this project.

¹¹ There are other discrepancies between the various reports regarding the method used to kill him and the location of the body.

(i) *Informed consent, privacy and confidentiality.* All research participants were fully informed of the intentions of the research and that participation was voluntary. They were told that if there were any questions they did not wish to discuss, they were under no obligation to answer them and they did not need to provide any reasons. Furthermore, their identities would not be revealed without their express permission and in fact would be protected. Any information that personally identified a research participant would not be released without their permission.

(ii) *Expectations of the research informants.* It was important that I did not raise the expectations of those participating in the research, or make unrealistic promises in order to encourage participation. Research participants often have expectations that many of their problems will be addressed through the research. This was particularly so in the context of political violence when people lost so much and were facing traumas that made it difficult for them to piece their lives back together. I tried to make it very clear that while I could assist in my individual capacity where possible, my research was not of a policy nature nor was I coming from any organisation that could provide them with assistance. Some of the issues around expectations were discussed above.

(iii) *Evoking trauma.* The subject matter of this research was the source of great personal trauma for all the research participants. I needed to ensure that I was not the cause of secondary victimisation. Many participants, particularly in the 1993 focus group discussions, did find talking about these events very distressing and they evoked a lot of anger. I attempted to act responsibly in such situations; being empathetic and where necessary referring people to counselling. Fortunately, it never became necessary to refer anyone to counselling.