

# PIETERMARITZBURG - THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

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The following are abridged and independent findings of scientific and theoretical analyses of the nature and causes of the violence around Pietermaritzburg in Natal/KwaZulu.

To date much of the reporting on the carnage in the area, which has claimed the lives of 600 people from small children to the aged, has attributed the slaughter to a so-called political "power struggle" between Inkatha on the one side and the United Democratic Front and the Congress of South African Trade Unions on the other.

However, only 12 percent of our total sample identified the UDF/Inkatha conflict as a vital component of the continuing violence and when our researchers questioned youth who were directly involved in the violence, 95 percent of the activists - despite using the names Inkatha and UDF - had no political or ideological understanding of these movements.

They had no formal or even informal connection with them and quite often did not recognise the names of the leaders of the political movements they claimed to belong to.

One must therefore distinguish between the fundamental, underlying causes of the violence and the incidental causes, of which the Inkatha/UDF conflict is definitely one.

We also found conflicting evidence that criminals posing as Inkatha or UDF supporters have been responsible for a great many deaths and these groups have been acknowledged as a major part of the problem by Inkatha, the UDF, the SA Police and the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg.

There have been obvious attempts to exploit the Pietermaritzburg violence for political advantage, particularly in the media.

The following findings involved extensive field research using internationally employed methodologies and techniques. A comprehensive information-gathering strategy was formulated by skilled researchers and utilised in the conflict areas over a period of five weeks.

General and specific observations were made of social, political and economic conditions of Pietermaritzburg residents and attitudes and opinions of a substantial number of people were recorded.

Various analyses, verification tests, correlation tests and corroboration exercises with other available documentation were carried out.

It is estimated that 350 000 people live in the black townships of Pietermaritzburg, including shack dwellers.

They live in the following conditions:

- An average 11 people occupy each house, almost all houses being one or two-roomed.
- Most of the houses are of poor quality and very few have electricity.
- In many areas residents use communal taps and latrines.
- Roads are poor where there are roads.
- Health services are inadequate.
- Education is of a poor standard.
- There are few if any recreational facilities in most areas.

In addition to the appalling living conditions, there is desperate financial poverty.

The investigations suggest that there is on average one breadwinner for every 15 people, and that these people earn on average R150 to R200 per month.

According to the minimum "living levels" calculated by the Bureau of Market Research at the University of Stellenbosch, it is estimated that 70 percent of people in the Pietermaritzburg townships are living below the breadline.

The vast majority of township residents questioned felt that unemployment was the major problem faced by the communities.

While general unemployment is probably in the region of 45 percent, our research indicated a figure of 80 percent among our focus group (those most involved in the violence) who are youth between the ages of 15 and 24.

Our researchers therefore explored the dialectic relationship between unemployment, poverty and violence as a universally accepted phenomenon.

In 68 percent of the youth sample of 240, we noted the intensity of frustration experienced by those who felt circumstances blocked them from prospects of a better future.

It was these young people who found themselves generated toward group formations from where aggressive expression and violent intent were inevitable.

While youth gangs are a standard feature of ghettos wherever they exist in the world, we feel the compulsion must be even stronger in our black township ghetto societies where apartheid has caused the disintegration of both the formal community and the family.

A very positive corroboration was made by our researchers of Dollard's "frustration aggression" hypothesis in which he explained displaced and mobilised aggression in the group context.

It was not difficult to identify this "redirecting aggression" in Pietermaritzburg as typical of where people who are unable to aggress against the frustrating agent (i.e., the system that deprives them), vent their anger on available targets.

As we believe happens in the Pietermaritzburg situation, they aggress against the targets towards which they are manipulated.

Lawrence Schlemmer (Indicator) also emphasises the prevalence of displaced aggression in his analysis of black violence as has sociologist and Natal Indian Congress (a UDF affiliate) executive member, Yunus Carrim.

In the Post of March 19 he said: "People simply do not have the basic material conditions to live humanly and in their frustration and outrage they hit out at each other instead of the system, which is more difficult to attack."

It was these appalling levels in the quality of life in the affected townships that led our researchers to explore the dialectic relationship between unemployment, poverty and violence as a universally accepted phenomenon.

**W**hite history offers numerous instances of how "poverty radicalises", we made good use of Karl Marx's qualified observation (backed by a number of documented empirical studies) that extreme deprivation does not always foster revolt.

But, when peoples' expectations for a better future begin to exceed perceived avenues for realising these expectations then these people will probably become sufficiently aroused to pursue conflict.

Our research findings go a long way to validating the logical relationship between unemployment/poverty on the one side and aggression/violence on the other.

One manifestation of the unemployment/poverty condition that caught

the attention of our investigators was that of small criminal gangs who have taken advantage of the general state of violence and who have increased their activities.

Figures in the Press indicate Pietermaritzburg as one of the crime capitals of the world, with the incidence of robberies, for example, having increased by 45 percent in the second six months of 1987 over the previous six months.

How then do the Institute's findings reconcile with the popular assumption of most commentators that the sum total of the violence is attributable to the UDF/Inkatha conflict?

**A**s I have already noted, youths who are directly involved in the violence were asked about the UDF/Inkatha question.

Despite the use of the names UDF and Inkatha, 95 percent of these group activists had no political or ideological understanding of these movements and no formal or even informal

connection with them. Quite often they did not recognise the names or the leaders of the political movements they claimed to belong to.

This was particularly true of so-called UDF groups.

Attempts to exploit the Pietermaritzburg violence for political advantage have evoked angry responses from all quarters which has done nothing to reduce the level of tragedy. I believe if anything, our research findings place a big question mark over the integrity of those commentators who used the violence in a way which discredited political opponents, especially in the overseas media.

At the moment there is a strong SA Police and SA Defence Force presence in the townships and death and disruption have been greatly reduced. What is desperately needed is a plan of action to lift the quality of lives of these unfortunate people to a level where they can live in harmony no matter what ideological differences may be contained in their communities.

**95 percent of the activists questioned in Pietermaritzburg -- despite using the names Inkatha and UDF -- had no political or ideological understanding of these movements. They had no formal or even informal connection with Inkatha or the UDF and quite often did not recognise the names of the leaders of the political movements they claimed to belong to.**

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