

3. A picture of the grim conditions in the prison system of Tanzania is provided in the autobiography of the former leader of Swapo, Andreas Shipanga, held without trial in Tanzania from 1976 to 1978. Shipanga was falsely charged by Swapo with having spied for the South African government. His account of his years in prison in Tanzania appears in, *In Search of Freedom: The Andreas Shipanga Story, as Told to Sue Armstrong*, 1989, Ashanti, Gibraltar.

DRAGONS TEETH IN SOUTH AFRICA

Baruch Hirson

The Shame of Tribal Fighting

Over the past three years more than 3,000 lives have been lost in Natal and nearly 1,000 in the southern Transvaal. The number injured and maimed is not known; the loss of homes, burnt and gutted, is probably not even recorded. It is not possible to sit by complacently, while the carnage continues. It must be stopped, or inevitably the people will hold the leaders of the respective movements responsible for this carnage.

It is necessary to state the facts bluntly.

Political movements are exploiting the old clan and tribal symbols to rally their followers against opponents. Whether it be the Inkatha movement, raising troops in the style of traditional *impi*, rallying around the traditional cry of *Usuthu!* and accusing the ANC of being a Xhosa movement; or whether it be the ANC levelling charges of Zulu tribalism and pretending to be free of ethnic rivalry, there is enough evidence to say that tribalism has raised its ugly head. The only people to gain from this clash are those that hold the reins of power: the government of F W de Klerk, the right wing opposition, and the generals who control the police and the army.

The ANC and Inkatha, together with many of the smaller movements, are using the frustration and despair of the black communities to whip up passions for their own political ends. They stand by cynically (or they encourage mayhem), shedding the blood of the people in order to get at the head of the queue to speak to their white counterparts.

At national and at provincial level they mobilize their supporters and urge them on to battle. They invoke the crudest slogans to spur the people and, let it be admitted, their followers are often more bloodthirsty than their leaders. In the name of liberty and freedom they slash, mutilate, maim and kill.

But the strife does not only take place in the streets and the townships. The cancer that has gripped whole communities is to be found inside the very organizations that claim to be non-tribal. The stories emerging from once loyal members of MK and the ANC is one of ethnic rivalry among the leaders, of accusations and counter-accusations about a 'Xhosa leadership', or of 'Zulu betrayal', or of similar claims and rebuttals about other peoples (African, Indian and Coloured) who make up the South African population.

There is also the nasty smell of racist prejudice in the tone adopted towards some of the people, all leading members of the ANC and of the SACP, held by the police in connection with the so-called Vula operation in Natal. Four of the eight leading figures arrested (and apparently tortured), are of Indian origin. Nothing is said openly, but it is this that is suggested when they are described as the 'Cabal'.

The first inclination is to shout 'Shame!' at those who act this way. But shouting will serve no purpose. A shame it is, but that will not solve the problem.

There can be little doubt that the very nature of national politics draws its sustenance from this kind of prejudice and backbiting. What is happening now in South Africa, with its 'war-lords' and 'shack-lords', has its parallels elsewhere where national movements have dominated the towns and countryside. The situation in South Africa is only made more complex by the emergence of gun-toting gangs from within the state apparatus and the black political movements.

The use of vigilantes and/or criminal gangs to do the dirty work of political groups, and of overt racism to destroy opposition, has a history that stretches back in history. It was a feature of Tsarist Russia, of fascist Italy and of Nazi Germany, and more recently, of CIA operations in Europe. In condemning those excrescences, supporters of so-called resistance movements tend to ignore similar crimes perpetrated in the name of 'freedom' in the former colonial world: from Chiang Kai-shek to Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein to the Ayatollah Khomeini, Idi Amin to the Emperor Bokassa, the Burmese Generals and all their clones across Asia and the Middle East, through Latin America and Africa. Whether it was the criminals who became rulers, or the rulers who acted as criminals, is irrelevant. They were ruthless in their oppression and left behind a legacy of misery.

Shifting Fields of Battle

The recent massacres in South Africa, highlighted by the killings on 13 September on a commuter train carrying township workers home, has sharpened the debate on what is happening in South Africa. In this, one of the worst incidents of its kind, twenty six men and women were shot dead or hacked to pieces, and over 100 wounded, by armed thugs. This was a two pronged attack on unarmed commuters: one gang armed with guns and pangas stormed through a packed train, killing at random, a further detachment ambushed those trying to escape on a railway platform. The gangsters acted with military precision and were obviously highly trained. Not one word was uttered and there was no obvious immediate means of identifying the perpetrators. It was subsequently reported that members of the Inkatha branch of the Jeppe hostel in Johannesburg were responsible, but the accused claimed that they had been assaulted and forced by the police to sign confessions (*Independent*, 7 November).

The current wave of killings is usually traced back to September 1987 in Natal: over the past two months the battle ground has shifted to the PWV area. To explain what is happening journalists, alongside the ANC and the government,

have now discovered a *hidden hand* at work in the country. This is too simple and explains very little.

For the past four decades hit squads have existed in South Africa, harassing, intimidating and killing opponents of the regime. When prominent figures were targeted there was some publicity, but the assassins were never found and, until the recent disclosure of hit squads, the police and military remained protected by the government. But similar murders of less well known figures, particularly in the black townships remain hidden in the overall statistics of weekend crime. Assaults, injuries and deaths have all been ascribed to criminal elements and in the anarchy of township life there has been no possibility of proving otherwise. Only on rare occasions, when eye-witness reports could not be silenced, was the existence of hit squads mentioned. Such was the case in 1957 when police, organized in flying-squads, terrorised the population of Zeerust and crushed all resistance. Yet, little attention was paid to the disclosure of police terror in Father Hooper's book, *Brief Authority*. The flying-squads continued to operate unimpeded in other rural areas ignored or overlooked.

The brutality of the police, and particularly the special branch, was conclusively exposed when detainees disappeared, or were mysteriously found to be dead in their cells, through the late 1950s and 1960s. Although, once again, there were never any arrests, and all allegations of police misconduct were brushed aside, there was no longer any doubt about the fate of those who fell into the hands of the state security.

Ultimately there was universal condemnation of police brutality when Steve Biko, the leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, was brutally murdered in 1977. But he was only the most prominent in a long series of men and women who were 'eliminated' by the police. The total toll will never be known. Thousands were wounded or killed during the 1980s, when squatter camps were destroyed, demonstrations dispersed, students and strikers shot down, or men and women just disappeared. In the process political activists, community leaders, trade unionists, students and academics, among others, were systematically removed.

The list of victims includes those killed by letter bombs or booby traps, those who were gunned down, or those who died mysteriously in car 'accidents'. This was no *'hidden hand'*. The state was directly involved and no one can take their denials seriously.

Parallel campaigns of police and army oppression also took place in the Bantustans, or so-called homelands. These puppet regimes have brutally removed opposition groups, stopped boycott movements and prevented working class organization. Discontent has been snuffed out by armed vigilantes, and the jails have been filled with people accused of opposing the government. Reports of killings have filtered through the censored media, but in most cases a tight censorship has concealed the extent of the violence employed to silence discontent.

These events place South Africa high among those states that rule by naked terror, but this pales into insignificance when compared with South Africa's involvement in neighbouring territories. Raiding parties into Lesotho,

Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe have killed scores of men, women and children. Sometimes excused as 'hot pursuit', sometimes denied, and sometimes carried out by local agents (military or otherwise), the South African government built up an atmosphere of terror in neighbouring territories. Those raiding parties were only the visible tip of South Africa's policy of destabilization in the region. Opposition inside Namibia was stifled by an administration that was as vicious as any in South Africa and, to maintain its control, South African troops, backed by locally recruited hoods, conducted a campaign of terror against all suspected opponents. The struggle spilt across borders into Botswana, Zambia and Angola, and that provided an excuse to wage war against the MPLA government in Angola. In this the South Africans fought alongside Unita, the internal army that aimed to destroy the MPLA government. The fact that the MPLA government is tainted by its Stalinist origins does not alter the criminal nature of South Africa's war.

An even greater crime was (and is still being) committed in Mozambique. In that unhappy country Renamo has waged a war of attrition against the government that has brought misery and destruction to large tracts of the land. Renamo has no known programme except that of destabilizing the country. Its origins are unclear but it is known that the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation used it in 1974 to destabilize Mozambique in a failed attempt to deny the ZANU guerrilla army a base to the east of Rhodesia. Renamo was adopted as a satellite army by South Africa when Ian Smith, the Rhodesian would-be white messiah, was ousted. Its forces have killed, pillaged and destroyed entire provinces, descending to the lowest level of barbarism: men have been killed, women raped, ears, noses and limbs hacked off. Here too, there has been no 'hidden hand'. Renamo has official spokesmen in Portugal — and instructions from South Africa have been discovered in a captured Renamo campsite.

The involvement of the South African army and police force in criminal acts throughout the region is not in doubt, not in the past, and not today. In almost every case it has been possible to locate the centre from which the commands emanated, in Pretoria, or from some Bantustan capital. Only in some cases has there been an element of doubt. Rogue elements inside the police or army, with the connivance of their commanding officers (and cabinet ministers), have used their own operatives to carry out one or other dirty tricks campaign.

Who Are The Collaborators?

South African has a highly trained and equipped army, backed by police hit squads and armed police. But the security forces have also relied on a vast body of informers for its intelligence and hit-men for their more nefarious activities. Some were volunteers, come to earn their pieces of silver; others were bludgeoned into service. The state has enrolled criminals, people broken under detention, or men seeking to advance their own interests, and a *lumpen* element has been employed to terrorize opponents. Among the latter were vigilantes in the squatter camps who wiped out opposition groups with police connivance — after the latter proved unequal to that task.

But the state's most valuable allies, both inside and outside South Africa, have been organizations based on ethnic groups. This has been most clearly seen in Angola and Mozambique, where men with distinct tribal affiliations, hoping to ride to power on the backs of the South African army, became willing allies in the terrorgame. In Angola it was Unita, a movement with a strong ethnic backing, that sided with Pretoria. In Mozambique, Renamo found its main recruits among ethnic groups excluded from the ruling party, Frelimo. In Angola the tribal element is indisputable.

The same factor has been brought into play in the killingfields of South Africa. One of the first indications of the use of ethnic (or 'tribal') conflict extends back to clashes in the mine compounds in the early parts of the century, many of them encouraged by the mine-owners in an obvious divide and rule tactic. But it would be too simple to attribute such clashes to the employers alone. Rivalries that extend back through the 19th century separated men from different ethnic groups — and these were given new form in the mines with the appearance of kinship or age-group gangs. Tensions were always close to breaking point in the compounds where accommodation, food, and work conditions were atrocious. In these all-male societies there were rivalries over women (and over the younger men) that were explosive, and the official ban on alcohol led to clashes over scarce supplies. In the ensuing fights the rival groups merged with kinship groups that had their own record of petty gangsterism.

But much of the estrangement was over work conditions. Men from different ethnic groups were allocated different jobs, with differential rewards, that led to understandable jealousy. This was further exacerbated when different ethnic groups took opposing views on possible strike action. The fights that followed were bloody and often fatal.

These clashes were not confined to mine compounds. Conditions in the towns, which generated frustration and despair, led to the formation of gangs, many organized around kinship or age-group, almost all drawn from a single clan or ethnic group. These gangsters were beholden to no-one. They took what they wanted and left a trail of destruction behind them. They could be bought off or bribed, but ultimately they terrorized the townships. The fact that so few were brought to book by the police is not surprising. What is still unknown is the extent of collaboration between these gangs and the police in removing persons deemed 'undesirable' to the authorities.

However, local officials (on the mines and in the towns), whose task it was to control the work force, knew how to manipulate ethnic differences for their own ends. Accommodation was arranged on ethnic lines, group rivalries were encouraged through 'tribal' dance competitions and work tasks were allocated to specific 'tribal' groups. In particular policing in the compounds was allocated to 'loyal indunas' or 'headmen', Zulu-speakers were used as night-watchmen, and so on.

It is uncertain when the government found it convenient to work formally with one black ethnic group against others. A change in government policy, at least overtly, took place when Prime Minister Verwoerd and then Vorster found it possible to work together with the black governments in Malawi,

Lesotho and Swaziland, and then with Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia. Provision was even made to accommodate diplomats from neighbouring African territories, even if the police blundered from time to time in invoking discriminatory legislation against embassy staff. This was the time when the peculiar South African phrase *foreign natives* took on new meaning.

It took time to absorb these lessons and apply what was found expedient in the independent African states. Excluding early attempts at winning friends among voters when there was still a limited franchise in the Cape¹ the Hertzog and Smuts governments had limited contact with blacks who were willing to cooperate in making segregation acceptable even in the 1930s and 1940s. These included the conservative Coloureds in the Cape in 1944 who were prepared to work within segregated institutions, and Africans who worked within the Transkei Bunga, the Advisory Boards and the Native Representative Council. But these people had no large scale following and were discarded after the National Party victory in 1948.

The 'Homelands' policy provided some working relationship, but its impact was minimal because of the policy of divided political representation. The newly elected leaders of the Transkei and Ciskei, of Bophuthatswana and so on, were recognized as camp-followers but they were outside the realm of politics in white South Africa.

New possibilities for the government emerged from an unexpected quarter. The ANC, seeking support in the rural areas in the 1970s, turned to the one region in which they thought they had an ally. The story, as told by Oliver Tambo, President of the ANC, in his political report to the National Executive Committee, in 1985 was that:

It was...in this context that we maintained regular contact with Chief Gatsha Buthelezi of the KwaZulu bantustan. We sought that this former member of the ANC Youth League who had taken up his position in the KwaZulu bantustan after consultations with our leadership, should use the legal opportunities provided by the bantustan programme to participate in the mass mobilisation of our people on the correct basis of the orientation of the masses to focus on the struggle for a united and non-racial South Africa. In...our discussions with him, we agreed that this would also necessitate the formation of a mass democratic organisation in the bantustan that he headed. Inkatha originated from this agreement. Unfortunately, we failed to mobilise our own people to take on the task of resurrecting Inkatha as the kind of organisation that we wanted, owing to the understandable antipathy of many of our comrades towards what they considered as working within the bantustan system. The task of reconstituting Inkatha therefore fell on Gatsha Buthelezi himself who then built Inkatha as a personal power base far removed from the kind of organisation we had visualised...In the first place, Gatsha dressed Inkatha in the clothes of the ANC...Later, when he thought he had sufficient of a base, he also used coercive methods against the people to force them to support Inkatha...²

Tambo failed to foresee the outcome of the process that the ANC had set in train. An organization built on tribal foundations, whether 'dressed in the

clothes of the ANC' or not, was bound to put its own ends before that of a wider national movement. This became apparent one year after Inkatha was founded when the black workers of Natal staged a series of wildcat strikes and Barney Dladla, a member of the KwaZulu cabinet, placed himself at the head of a workers' demonstration. Although this was too radical for Dladla's colleagues, and he was removed from his post, Inkatha gained in prestige from his act of support. The country was then thrown into turmoil when students of the (tribal) university colleges rallied to the overthrow of Portuguese colonial rule in Mozambique, followed by the revolt of school youth (in 1976) throughout the country. The crisis concentrated the minds of government, first very tentatively and then more determinedly.

Buthelezi and Inkatha received some recognition as potential allies of the white minority. He seemed to fit the bill from many angles. He was head of a Bantustan government – and although there was some doubt about his credentials because he would not accept independence status for KwaZulu, the credibility this earned him among sectors of the black population became an asset. Parallel to this, the organization of the Inkatha movement on ethnic lines was in keeping with government policy of single-race political parties, and the stress on chiefly control was also in line with the prevailing political philosophy. Buthelezi was also an open and even enthusiastic supporter of a capitalist economy: this stamped him as a man who could be trusted.

The events of 1976–77 were crucial. Inkatha's reactionary role was revealed when its youth members turned against students who joined the struggle on the KwaZulu college campus. Thereafter migrant workers in Soweto, whose homes were in KwaZulu and who were either reluctant to accept, or opposed to, calls by the youth for one day strikes were mobilized to attack the men of Soweto who stayed at home.

There is no clear evidence about the sequence of events. Did the migrants oppose the strike call and then rally behind the Inkatha banner, or did Inkatha mobilize the workers and urge their opposition to the stay-at-home? Whichever came first, there was no doubt that leaders of Inkatha, including Buthelezi, were in the hostels (against official police instructions) in the aftermath of attacks on the student-led strikers.

Even more sinister was the presence of the police behind the migrant workers as they attacked the students and the strikers. The position of the police was clear: they aimed to crush the revolt that had started in the schools and colleges. The position of Inkatha was also evident: its leaders opposed the student-led revolt and they provided a tribal ethos for the migrants in Soweto. I exposed the role of these migrants, the police and Inkatha, in my book *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, and believe the evidence was indisputable.

The conflict with Inkatha men came to the fore again in 1987, following a dispute between striking workers in Howick (Natal) and the Inkatha leadership. This spread across Natal leading to clashes that were politically motivated (Inkatha versus supporters of the ANC) but assumed all the aspects of an ethnic dispute. The fact that the ANC (and the trade union movement) in Natal were predominantly composed of Zulu-speakers does not negate the evidence of an ethnic divide. Inkatha is no more homogeneous than the ANC.

Inkatha includes local businessmen, administrative personnel, and also the more conservative, more rurally based population (and consequently the migrant workers), the unemployed, the lumpen, and a section of the criminal population, but it is also unashamedly the movement of Zulu nationalism. The ANC did have a somewhat different mix, and although it is not very different in overall class composition in the towns, it had the support of the more urbanized (and more skilled) workers. The differences were more marked, both in the rural areas – where land possession placed overwhelming power in the hands of the traditional leaders – and in the squatter camps where Inkatha was able to recruit the ‘lumpen and the dispossessed’.

There was one further factor that set the ANC apart from Inkatha. Although ANC members in Natal are predominantly Zulu, it also included Pondo and Xhosa workers, and has now opened its ranks to whites and Indians. This does set the ANC apart from Inkatha, which place its reliance on tribal affiliation, but in many other respects the demands of both organizations do not differ by much.

Inkatha's rank and file include the demand for more land for the farmer, work opportunities for the unemployed, trading rights for the hawkers and shop-keepers – and for the leaders, the right to take their place in the ‘political kingdom’ that is offered by the talks on negotiations. The nationalism of the ANC (in alliance with the Stalinists) is rendered more complex by the presence of the trade unions and the seemingly wider community from which its members are drawn, but there are the same demands for land, work, trading rights and the right to enter the *political kingdom*.³

The programme of the ANC, when stripped of its populist appeals, is little different from that of Inkatha. There is the same mix of interests, the same heterogeneous membership to satisfy. Ultimately, because both movements aim to form an alliance with the capitalist establishment, whether with de Klerk, or by any other means, they converge in their demands. In fact, Buthelezi and the Inkatha movement saw the need to follow the capitalist line when the leaders of the ANC were still tied to the rhetoric of the Freedom Charter with its demands for nationalization of the mines and banks. It is difficult to see where the two movements differ now in their view of the economic future of South Africa.

Where then is Tribalism?

The question of tribalism, or more cogently, ‘post-tribalism’, was raised inside the ranks of the Communist Party in the 1950s. The debate opened when Lionel Forman, recently returned from Prague, advanced the ideas of the Soviet academician Potekhin who ‘specialized’ in African studies. That savant, working from Moscow and using the crude notions of nationalism then operating in the USSR, declared that the Zulu people were a nation. They had all the attributes required of such a people: territory, language and a common historical heritage. Consequently, they had to be considered a nation in some future South African confederation. Forman was convinced by Potekhin's arguments and spoke of the need for Communists to consider the

implications of there being several nations in the country. When confronted, in debate by JH Simons (also of the CPSA) on the need for unity in the struggle against apartheid, Forman argued that he was speaking of the needs of a post-apartheid society. In such a state the Zulu people would have to be encouraged if they wished to develop their language, literature, and so on.⁴

At no point in that debate was the question of the viability of such a state discussed. Kenneth Jordaan who took part in the forum, quite clearly as a non-Stalinist, did focus on the economic aspects, saying that the basis for independent nationhood had been destroyed under the conditions of capitalist control. All that he would concede was the right to cultural and linguistic autonomy if the Zulu people so demanded after liberation.

Ignoring this debate, social scientists continued to speak of tribalism and of tribal differences in South Africa. This was bolstered by the many pictures and postcards for tourists that featured bare bosomed (and obviously nubile) women; rickshaw pullers in full regalia; men engaged in 'tribal' dances; Zulu warriors waving spears; 'tribal' chiefs and indunas at ceremonial functions, and so on. All this fitted naturally with the philosophy of the National Party government and was used in the fashioning of the Bantustan policy.

It was partly as a reaction to official policy that white oppositionists rejected the use of the word 'tribe'. But there were also other considerations. Tribalism as a concept, was rejected as a term of derision, associated with primitiveness, relegating people to a 'lower' social standing. Many of the terms current in the country, they said, were coined by whites and had no historic legitimacy: 'chief', 'Nguni', 'Bantu', and a battery of words were as spurious as 'fanagalo', the pidgin language used on the mines. In fact, all the words were divisive if not insulting. The word 'tribal' was out and the word 'ethnic' took its place. That was convenient because 'ethnic' also served to replace 'race' as a concept.

A new brand of revisionist historians and other academics were in the forefront of the move to clear away the terminology they found repugnant. Some of the fruits of that move can be found in the volume edited by Leroy Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. Vail's introduction to the volume reflected the desire by academics to avoid the crude connotations embedded in the concept 'tribalism' and to understand the continued response of African communities to local loyalties. Whether this loyalty is ascribed to 'ethnicity' (as is now preferred), or 'tribalism' is less important than understanding the localism and parochialism expressed in the concept. Ultimately the lesson that emerges from the studies in the book is expressed in the title: that is, the *creation of tribalism*.

For Vail and his associates the creation of tribalism can be traced, in most cases, to missionaries, administrators, anthropologists and historians, who defined the boundaries of local communities. They did this for a variety of reasons: it was convenient for administrative means, particularly where rule was exercised by the 'chiefs' on behalf of the colonial power; or useful to the missionaries, who provided uniform calligraphies to otherwise preliterate people in order to spread the gospel; or fitted the precepts of anthropologists, sociologists, or historians, who were imbued with the philosophy of social Darwinism.

However, the new tribalism was also of functional value to many Africans, including the traditional political hierarchy that was transformed into a branch of the state bureaucracy; the men who were drawn into the labour market because it was the one security to land possession (and the more restrictive the land laws, the more the land was treasured); or to the tribal elders who sought 'possession' of the women who were confined to the 'tribal' area. That is, tribalism (and it is time to drop the inverted commas) was built afresh with each generation of administrators and tribal chieftains to meet the needs of the roles they played.

But the creation of loyalties around the tribe was only possible because of the traditions, real and supposed, upon which it could feed. The core element of any group identity was the language (whether given new form by the missionaries – as stressed by academics – or even created anew as in the obvious case of Swahili in east Africa)⁵. To these must be added the customs that were handed down through the parents or kin-groups, including religion, chiefly veneration, initiation, circumcision, dancing, bridewealth, food and taboos. None of these were necessarily of long standing but were accepted by the youth and were sacrosanct. It is these that are transferred from generation to generation – the essential residue from the past, however much adapted and altered – and these helped define tribal identity.

New requirements and accepted tradition are inextricably bound together and adapted to meet the changing requirements of each tribal (or even clan) group. It becomes dependent on, and also changes with, educational facilities and economic status, and with this, on prospects and rivalries that open up in jobs, living conditions and political developments.

In a society like South Africa where the division of labour and of living standards is so heavily influenced by ethnic considerations, the divisions between Africans and other black communities is itself a cause of considerable strain. The heavy dependence on ethnicity for advancement opens up gaps between the different communities. It also underscores new tensions between African tribesmen who compete for scarce resources and bolster this with the learned tradition of past (pre-colonial) conflicts. Tribalism, far from being eliminated by economic development is given a new lease of life by the changes to which everyone is subjected. It is bolstered by the administration and the employers because it can be used to atomize the workforce: and it is reinforced by the tribesmen themselves as a protection from the authorities. This, despite attempts from within the ranks of both the oppressors and the oppressed to blur the boundary between tribalism and integration into the modern market economy.

Nationalism and the Tribal Tradition

When the South African Native National Congress (precursor to the ANC) was formed in 1912 it was the hope of those early pioneers that tribal differences would give way to a new national ideology. The desire was sincere but the spirit was weak. Despite continued calls to unite the people (exclusive to blacks in the case of the SANNK/ANC), the tribal identities of the African

people were never forgotten. Early recollections of Congress leaders were of study groups in which the prowess of 19th century chiefs was proclaimed,⁶ and this was repeated by speakers and writers through the century.⁷ In fact, the Congress consisted in theory of 'two houses', a lower house of commoners, the upper house of chiefs. Initially the chiefs provided some of the funds for Congress, but their absorption into the state structure removed them effectively from the organization. This did not end the connections. ANC leaders always mixed with, or sought contact with chiefs at all levels.

Furthermore, there were frequent references to the tribal origins of the leaders – and many of them were open champions of one or another tribal group. Among the presidents of the ANC were Pixley ka I Seme (married into the Swazi royal family), Dr Moroka (scion of a chiefly family and apparently proud of his forefather's hospitality to the Boer trekkers), Albert Luthuli (affectionately known as 'Chief' because that was what he had been before the government deposed him), and the current Vice-President and effective head of the ANC, Nelson Mandela (also from a chiefly family). The connections with traditional society went far beyond veneration of chiefs. Commoners like Josiah Gumede, the ANC President from 1927 to 1930, who presented a radical face, was to earn his living as an *inyanga* or herbalist, deeply embedded in tribal custom. Even the rural communist leader of the northern Transvaal during the 1930s and 1940s, Alpheus Maliba, wrote in praise of the Venda chiefs and was a visitor at their kraals when he toured the Zoutpansberg region.

The connections are many and various. The use of chiefly symbols by Nelson Mandela is well known (see the many references to his use of tribal dress in biographies) that of Chief Luthuli somewhat forgotten, despite his use of tribal costume when he accepted the Nobel peace prize. He describes his founding of the Zulu Language and Cultural Society in his autobiography *Let My People Go*. The Society's aim, as laid down in its Charter, was to preserve the heritage of the Zulu people 'apportioned to us by Divine Guidance of the Almighty, the Creator, Who gave people their several Languages, Customs, Traditions and Usages'. The society, furthermore, set out to restore the past traditions of the Zulu people, to preserve Zulu traditions, laws, usages and customs and modernize the Zulu language (pp 37–38).

The point that I am making is that tribal traditions, tribal lore and tribal customs were never far below the surface. The fact that such men also proclaimed the unity of all Africans cannot negate their deep ties with sectional interests.

The loyalties to kinship were not necessarily loosened by passage through the school system. If anything, the bonds grew tighter because of the regional concentration of schools and churches. The Xhosa, living in the eastern Cape, attended schools and then Fort Hare (the only college that catered for Africans over many decades), and qualified as an African elite. The process under which this elite was produced was peculiar to a colonial situation. Xhosa-speakers enjoyed a privilege both geographical and historical in origin: they were the first in contact with the missionaries, and therefore the first into

the mission schools and colleges. Priority of conquest had produced its own law of uneven development here.

The young students rebelled against their teachers and the paternalistic conditions of the schools. There were periodic strikes and riots, and these educational establishments were hotbeds of black nationalism. Yet, ultimately, these same men (and particularly those who were not expelled) banded together to form an essential part of the leadership of the ANC. Even when they mixed with men from other regions of southern Africa at Fort Hare, the Xhosas were in the majority. The consequences were inevitable: a broad black nationalism in which all were bound together, with sectional loyalties that were bound to obtrude.

It was the bonding at Fort Hare that provided a crucial sector of the ANC leadership in the 1950s, and in this the Xhosa-speakers predominated. But friendships at Fort Hare also provided the possibility of contacts even outside the ranks of the ANC—particularly after 1960 when that organization was banned. Gatsha Buthelezi was a fellow student of several future ANC leaders at Fort Hare and this provided the basis upon which the ANCers would later urge upon Buthelezi the need to form a regional organization to fight for the freedom they had espoused together. It was from this that the revived Inkatha movement was born. The veneration of chieftdomship, taken with an opportunistic desire to bypass the ban imposed by the government, was at the roots of a movement which became a rival of the ANC.

Generalizations about national movements are difficult, if only because the multiplicity of different local conditions must be taken into account. However, it can be said with some confidence that those movements that have been backed by classes with strong economic roots tend to be unitary (and eliminate all rivals); similar movements born in poverty, with no such class to bolster them, tend to be fissiparous and splinter. In the latter case unity is achievable only through the use of armed force. It is that which lies behind the establishment of military dictatorships in so many backward (or 'underdeveloped') societies. The use of guerrilla troops, or of armed gangs and vigilante groups, as in South Africa, is evidence of such backwardness and a harbinger of a splintered society.

Is There a Way Out?

It is not possible to see a way out of the inter-movement killings, inside the politics of national liberation. The leaders do not have the will or the ability to end the conflict. They might stitch together an armistice, but the name of the game is the elimination of all rivals or of schism. Those that ally themselves to the ANC or Inkatha, or the smaller movements like the PAC or Azapo, can only be lending their energies to a politics that is ultimately destructive. There is no way out in that direction.

The two alternatives that are on offer today can only lead to anarchy and bloodshed. That is: the elimination of rivals or a patched up peace which splits at the seams. That is the best scenario—provided that right-wing parties do not intervene (as 'allies' or otherwise) to provoke even greater violence.

Whether the working class can intervene to transform the nature of South African politics is doubtful. It has not been able to form its own political organization, and at the moment seems beholden to the neo-Stalinist movement, the SACP. Yet the organized workers alone can find a way to win over, or at least neutralize, the Zulu migrant workers in the Transvaal. They alone can influence at least a section of the men who are forced to fight with the rampaging Inkatha gangs. It is a task that needs patience, energy, and also a new political philosophy. Failure to do this work will lead to more lost lives, more maimed men and women, more grief.

When the white political parties are put into the equation the outlook looks even bleaker. Ignoring the so-called Democratic Party (who are ciphers when effective forces are sought) there is only the party of government (the National Party) and the range of right-wing parties (extending from the Conservatives to the neo-Nazi gangs). F W de Klerk and his government claim to stand on the high ground, aloof from these killings. Yet it was the instruments of government, the police, the army, and the hit squads, that generated and inspired the killings throughout the region.

For Mandela to call on de Klerk to police the country in order to stop the killings is to call on the hangman to tighten the noose. The *hidden hand* is openly in control and the ANC leadership has, wittingly or otherwise, invited the police and the army to determine the future political development of South Africa.

Notes

1. I have excluded reference to many cross-ethnic attempts at cooptation. One of the more significant attempts occurred in the early 1920s when General Hertzog solicited the aid of the trade union leader Clemens Kadalie for electoral support when the African vote was still a factor in Cape politics.

2. *Documents of the Second National Consultative Conference of the ANC, Zambia, 16–23 June 1985*, pp 20–21). Tambo was not interested in historical niceties. The existence of the organization *Inkatha ka Zulu* extends back to 1922–23 when the Zulu aristocracy needed a body to campaign for state recognition for the king. It was revived by Chief Luthuli in 1935 (to promote Zulu identity and to secure recognition of the Zulu paramountcy). Buthelezi became chief minister of KwaZulu in 1972 and resurrected it as Inkatha Yenkululeko Yesizwe in 1975. See S Marks (*passim*) and Hirson (1981).

3. I stress this phrase because these were the words of Kwame Nkrumah when he campaigned for control of Ghana. That 'political kingdom', without economic viability or the possibility of economic transformation started with a bang and ended with a whimper.

4. The debate is discussed in Hirson (1981)

5. A leading member of the PAC, Peter Raboroko suggested using Swahili as the lingua franca in the 'liberated' South Africa, *Liberation*, No5, Sept.1953.

6. Thus the memoirs of Selope Thema describes papers given on the pre-colonial chiefs and their respective powers.

7. See e.g I B Tabata, *The Awakening of a People*. At his trial in 1963 Mandela also spoke of his fascination, as a child, with accounts of tribal heroes.

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WELVERDIEND SPELLS DEATH A STORY OF OVERKILL

Brian Oswin

Epilepsy is Infectious

Welverdiend is neither unusual or unique.

It is a place where young men who have been beaten to death in a police station: just another small incident, in a remote town, in a country in which violence has become routine.

Welverdiend is little more than a village, 80 miles to the west of Johannesburg. It is serviced by blacks in the township known as Khutsong, a 'sprawling, trash-strewn township of 60,000 that sits on a treeless plain between Welverdiend, about ten miles west, and the conservative mining town of Carltonville, five miles east', writes Scott Kraft, a *Los Angeles Times* staff writer. For some utterly unknown reason the young men of the township seem to suffer from epilepsy which comes on when they are interrogated in the police station. Then, without any previous history of that complaint, they throw a fit and die soon after. Because the illness is so widespread the relatives are not informed of the fatality. However the epilepsy is sometimes transitory. After two or three days it might appear that it was only a phantom disease. The victim did have a fit, but soon recovered. Then, apparently, another young man had a fit,