



## **Southeastern Regional Seminar in African Studies (SERSAS)**

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### **"Those Who Command the Ones That Pulled the Trigger See Us As Less Than Human": The Langa Massacre and State Violence in South Africa"**

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#### **I. Preface: The Context of 21 March, 1985**

South Africa in the 1980s faced tremendous challenges. Even as some state officials paid lip service to a commitment to reform of the apartheid system, actions and rhetoric of the security forces, government officials and agencies, businesses and others with an interest in preserving the status quo showed clearly that reform would not occur without continued pressure from the numerous resistance groups operating both within the country, and in many cases from bases in other countries for those organizations, as well as from international organizations and foreign powers. Among the groups operating in exile were the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan African Congress (PAC), both of whom the government had banned in the wake of the Sharpeville Massacre of 21 March 1960.

In September 1984 the townships and homelands across the country exploded in a spontaneous challenge not only to the implementation of the Tri-Cameral Parliament, which gave symbolic but largely ineffective representation to the Indian and Coloured populations but not to the black majority, but also to the political, social, and economic conditions that blacks confronted daily. The rebellions spread from their point of origin in the Vaal Triangle in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) region down and across to much of the rest of the country. Quickly the Eastern Cape became a tinderbox, which should have come as no surprise to astute observers of the South African scene of the mid-1980s. Historically a hotbed of activism, the Eastern Cape was perhaps also the poorest region of the country. This poverty was exacerbated by industrial difficulties in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage, the largest urban area in that part of the Cape. As employment figures surged upward of as much as 40%, rampant poverty spread, and access to basic services declined, black political and social demands merged with an ever-tense economic situation that only appeared to be worsening. As the protest crescendoed, the state felt compelled to react, often through violent means. This fueled hostilities between the masses and the security forces who stood to buttress the prevailing system of institutionalized white supremacy. This was the context of the events of 21 March, 1985 and the subsequent escalation of the conflict between the apartheid state and the black liberation movement that followed.

## **II. A Funeral Gathering: Introduction**

The temperature was already beginning to rise on March 21, 1985 when the mourners began gathering at Maduna Square in the African township of Langa, outside of industrial Uitenhage, twenty kilometers distant from Port Elizabeth. They did not know at that point that the South African security forces had banned the funeral for which they had assembled, to be held in Kwanobuhle, another township ten kilometers distant. The funeral was to be held for four victims of the unrest in the Eastern Cape during the previous fortnight. But in South Africa, especially during the 1980s, mass funeral gatherings were also political events, and as such represented a significant danger in the collective mind of the apartheid state.

As it turned out, the mourners never made it to the funeral. In fact many would never leave Maduna Road alive. For on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Sharpeville Massacre the sins of the fathers of the past generation would quite literally be visited upon the sons and daughters of a new one. As in 1960 the South African Police (SAP) would open fire on a crowd of unarmed demonstrators. And once again the event would take on international significance, and would help to define the interaction of the state and its opposition. However, where in the aftermath of 1960 the result had been the effective quashing of a culture of massive resistance, the Langa Massacre would prove to be a catalyst for some of the most tumultuous years in South African history. What had begun in the Vaal Triangle six months earlier and had steadily increased in volume during the intervening time reached a full crescendo in the wake of the tragedy at Langa. Massive black resistance would not allow the state to thwart its advance in the mid-1980s.

The Langa Massacre is significant for a number of reasons. Symbolically, of course, it is vital, coming as it did on such a monumental anniversary in the history of the struggle against apartheid. That the state could have allowed for another massacre of such dimensions to occur on a day so fraught with meaning reveals to a great extent just how out of touch state security officials, and indeed most of white South Africa, were with the conditions of oppression that the masses faced on a daily basis. But Langa was vital for more than its symbolism, for from the events there one can draw numerous real and concrete conclusions. First and foremost, if there had been any doubt, the events on that March day clearly gave the lie to the reformist impulse that the National Party (NP) claimed had moved it toward the constitutional reform that had created the Tri-Cameral Parliament, which in turn had fed the fires of the Vaal uprising. It also revealed clearly just how far the state would go to protect its power, and thus served further to polarize the state and the forces that opposed it. This in turn served to bolster the reformist urge from the oppressed masses, to expand the need and desire for large-scale resistance to apartheid, and to politicize many who might otherwise have been willing to stay disengaged or accept the allegations of government reform on their face. The period since 1976 and the Soweto uprisings had seen an upsurge of protest. This resurgence accelerated after the Vaal Uprisings, but the Langa Massacre gave the protests their greatest resonance both within the country and on the international stage. More than perhaps any single event the Langa Massacre set the stage for the tensions of the years from 1985 to 1987. In that latter year the government would finally achieve some level of success in quelling tensions after the imposition of a second, more stringent State of Emergency following the one lasting from July 1985 to March 1986.

Of course the state security apparatus learned lessons from the Langa Massacre as well. But those lessons were of a far more portentous and menacing nature. For what the security structure learned was that events such as the Langa Massacre did have all of the effects listed above. And thus from Langa the securocrats both in Pretoria and around the country learned that frontal confrontation was not the tactic of choice. In reaching that conclusion the state began stepping up its already extensive reliance upon covert operations by what became known as the "Third Force" and its colleagues in Vlakplaas, Koevoet, the "Hammer Unit" and in other official and quasi-official arms of the security forces. This consequence as much as any would determine the way in which the state would combat its opposition during the years that followed the shootings at Langa. And this reliance upon the terror and lack of accountability that characterized covert operations would in turn be the defining model for a state-imposed reign of terror that would last for nearly a decade after the shots were first fired from police vehicles at Langa on the morning of 21 March, 1985.

## **III. "The Police Were Forced to Open Fire"; "Those Who Were Killed in Cold Blood Did Not Die In**

## Vain": Differing Interpretations

From almost the minute the smoke cleared and the shooting died down, the question of what happened at Langa became fodder for widespread debate from every element of South African society, and the rest of the world too wondered what the answers were. Within hours of the removal of the fallen bodies from the macadam road, all sides in the conflict were prepared to point fingers, and each provided his or her own spin for what had transpired.

Not surprisingly, the state weighed in quickly with a missive that placed blame at the feet of an unruly crowd. In the statement of Louis Le Grange, the Minister of Law and Order, he asserted that the "police were forced to open fire on a crowd of people estimated at between 3,000 and 4,000." The crowd was "armed with stones, sticks, petrol bombs and bricks." It was not until the crowd "was about five metres from the police" that "the commanding officer fired a warning shot into the ground next to the leader." But this shot had no effect and the crowd surrounded the police, who were "pelted with stones, sticks and other missiles, including petrol bombs." Le Grange argued that the police had no alternative but to open fire, in self defence. Once the shooting commenced "the crowd retreated and firing immediately ceased." In the official police account seventeen died and nineteen were wounded. Le Grange closed with an admonishment:

I am particularly perturbed that notwithstanding the fact that the police and my office informed the media as quickly as possible after the incident of the corrected facts it came to my notice that grossly exaggerated messages which stated that the police had opened up with machine guns and that wounded people had been shot dead in cold blood, had been related to the media. This is a calculated distortion of the facts. <sup>1</sup>

It remained to be seen just who was distorting which facts and to what ends. But almost immediately some skeptics called in to question the veracity of the country's Minister of Law and Order. Certainly other interested observers did not take the Le Grange statement at anything resembling face value. Oliver Tambo, President of the African National Congress (ANC) spoke for his organization in a statement in which he blasted the "act of banditry" of the state. Presumably issued from ANC headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia, the proclamation condemned the apartheid state and called to arms the comrades in the struggle for freedom. However, Tambo did not blame all police equally. For while the "root cause" of the Langa Massacre lay in the "criminal contempt for black people that characterizes the apartheid system" he maintained that "those who command the ones that pulled the trigger see us as less than human." He entreated his supporters to understand that "those who were killed in cold blood did not die in vain," and he reminded the aggrieved that:

Together we have learnt the meaning of sacrifice. Together we have learnt the lesson of history that victory can only come through struggle. Together we must make the pledge that nothing will stop us until power is in the hands of the people. To the bereaved mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, we say be comforted and be proud in the knowledge that you blessed the nation with heroes and heroines who laid down their lives so that we should all be masters of our destiny. To you we extend our heartfelt condolences. <sup>2</sup>

It is clear from these two messages that the two main opponents took slightly different approaches but to the same ends. Both used their responses to the crisis for propaganda purposes. First and foremost, both Tambo and Le Grange were speaking to their devout, the true believers and supporters of their respective crusades. They were rallying their troops to the cause. Secondly, however, they were making their plays for the middle ranges of public opinion. This was especially true in the Le Grange release in which he scolded the media and attempted to control the factual evidence of the case that he knew would enter the living rooms of most white South Africans via radio and television. With the public lacking on-the-scenes coverage of the event, the ability to control the spin after the shootings would be of monumental importance. Through its domination of the resources of the media, the state began with the upper hand. Yet an element of the old laager mentality also pervaded Le Grange's statement in that he clearly was ready to secure the support of most white South Africans, circle the wagons, and wait for the conflict to clear. Tambo's statement, meanwhile, was a clear attempt to rally the supporters not only of the ANC and its affiliate the United Democratic Front (UDF), but also to garner

support from those members of the oppressed communities who might previously not have been inclined to support active resistance to the anti-apartheid struggle.

Falling somewhere in between these two entities, the ANC and the NP, was the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), a white opposition party that had formed just a month prior, in February 1985, and that sought to accelerate the pace of change and move toward gradual majority democratic rule. These liberal members who called themselves the "official" opposition were more measured in their comments than was Tambo, but their statement clearly questioned the system that had allowed for the sort of incident that would forever pockmark Langa to occur. In his press statement Dr. F. Van Zyl Slabbert, the leader of the PFP, urged a cooling off period in which the shootings could be investigated. The PFP urged the state to take a measured approach. It was clear, however, that members of the party saw the police as being a large part of the problem in the township unrest. Because of this, Slabbert asserted that "in particular police force involvement for the time being should be limited to the absolute minimum in the townships itself so that provocative action on either side can be avoided." Recognizing the vital importance of funerals as social and political outlets, and correspondingly how incendiary the state prohibition of funerals was, he argued that "of extreme importance is that the people be allowed to hold funerals without interference and when convenient for those who wish to hold them." Because the fundamental problems gripping South Africa were due on the one hand to "the unemployment and resultant economic austerity due to economic decline" in the townships, and also to "the breakdown of Government policy as far as black urbanization, local government administration and education" were concerned, the PFP was of the belief that "this fundamental problem cannot be handled through police action alone. It is essentially a problem that cries out for political and social action." In the end, the PFP statement concluded,

just an unequivocal assurance about South African citizenship for blacks would go a long way to reduce the temperature and hostility in the urban flash points. Furthermore, all efforts must be made to establish communication between Government and community leaders in these townships.<sup>3</sup>

It is because of these conflicting voices and interpretations, as well as because of an understanding that the Langa Massacre was too big an event to try to sweep away, that the government announced the formation of a commission of inquiry "to investigate forthwith all the factual circumstances regarding the incident . . . at Uitenhage where people were killed and injured and to submit an urgent report."<sup>4</sup> The Commission would be headed by, and consist solely of, Justice Donald D. V. Kannemeyer of the Supreme Court of the Eastern Cape, located in Grahamstown. The Commission opened on 25 March, 1985, when Kannemeyer announced the specific details of the hearings.

Not surprisingly, in the morass of interpretations and opinions and unknown facts surrounding the shootings, South Africans anxiously awaited the results of Kannemeyer's commission. In the meantime, however, the media was left to piece together its version of the events through all of the incomplete information at its disposal, much of which came from ideologically slanted sources. Once again, even basic facts were up for dispute. Among the main questions centered around how many died and were wounded in the massacre. The police, through Le Grange's statement and subsequent pronouncements, asserted that 17 were killed and 19 wounded. These represent the lowest numbers for either the wounded or the dead alleged by any of the parties concerned. Soon after the Le Grange announced the official estimates residents in the townships maintained that police had killed as many as 43 persons. A memorial marker that appeared in KwaNobuhle on the first anniversary of the massacre asserted that 29 were killed and listed their names.<sup>5</sup> Press estimates took all of these accounts into consideration in making their assessments that ranged from 19 to 43 dead. Kannemeyer's report would maintain that no more than 20 died. It is even more difficult to discern the number of wounded, especially as many of the wounded sought to avoid hospitals for fear of police or other state reprisal.<sup>6</sup> This difficulty in establishing basic facts pervades the inquiry into the Langa Massacre, not only from Kannemeyer's vantage point, but also from those of numerous other observers, many of whom had political motives behind their searches. It is worth noting also that thirteen years later, Jon Qwelane, a reporter who had been on the scene that day, still insisted that 42 people died at Langa.<sup>7</sup>

#### IV. Through The Looking Glass: Preparations For Conflict

Before long, despite the many disagreements, political grandstanding, and ideological interpretations, the broad swath of the narrative of what had happened at Langa on that fatal autumn morning came into focus.<sup>8</sup> The funeral mourners had begun to gather before eight o'clock that morning. They had not known that the funeral to which they had planned to ride in buses had been canceled. Indeed, for several days the government had changed and re-changed the dates upon which funerals were forbidden and allowed.

The funerals had originally been scheduled for the previous Sunday, a week after the death of several young protesters killed in a clash with police. But fearing that the funeral cum mass rally would lead to inflamed tensions, Captain Gert Goosen of the Uitenhage police had asked Chief Magistrate M. H. Steyn to have the funeral delayed until a weekday. Steyn did so, using the Internal Security Act to ban funerals on Saturdays, Sundays, Mondays, or public holidays.<sup>9</sup> Authorities had then chosen the following Thursday, March 21, as the allowable date. Showing a remarkable lack of understanding of either the history or the dynamics of the township struggle, Goosen had not realized nor had anyone informed him until the last minute that March 21st marked Sharpeville Day, a profoundly significant date on the black South African calendar. It also was a date upon which most black workers and students were likely to conduct a mass stayaway, thus making the day a de facto holiday.

Goosen scurried to postpone the funeral yet again, this time approaching Uitenhage Magistrate M. J. Groenwald, who accordingly ruled that funerals could only be held on a Sunday. Given that Steyn's previous ruling was also still in effect, the end result was the criminalization of funerals at any time, as funerals held on a Sunday -- but also funerals held on any day other than Sunday -- were illegal. Apartheid South Africa had once again stepped through to the other side of the looking glass.

The flurry of government-instigated postponements and vacillations meant that there was rampant confusion amongst township dwellers who were already anxious about the increasing violence and death that had been occurring on a daily basis. When the first mourners gathered on Thursday morning they prepared to step onto buses bound from Langa to KwaNobuhle, passing through the white town of Uitenhage. But before the first bus could head out, police in a Casspir ordered the crowd to disperse, announcing that the funeral was banned and that they should go on with their day.<sup>10</sup> The sun continued to beat hotter, rising in concert with the tension in the air. When police ordered the buses and other vehicles to leave without allowing any passengers to board, the crowd instead decided to walk to the athletic stadium that was to play host to the day's events.

The number of persons gathered that day is difficult to ascertain, although it is clear that by nine o'clock hundreds had become thousands. This was perhaps not as many as the 4,000 that police estimated, but by all accounts the crowd was growing in size, and would inevitably have continued to do so if allowed to proceed unimpeded from Maduna Square through Uitenhage, across the Swartkops River and into seething KwaNobuhle. There they would meet other mourners at the stadium where the lamentations of fallen comrades would feed off of the frustration and determination of the disenfranchised, enervated masses. In sum, it promised to be a spectacular mass rally, one that the police were in no mood or condition to countenance.

Perhaps these thoughts passed through the minds of the police in the Casspirs when they saw a Rastafarian marching and a young boy passing by on his bicycle almost like a mirage, reminding them of the direction in which the procession was heading. Possibly also the sight of a bare-breasted woman walking along evoked the old white image of the savage black masses waiting to overrun their minority white society.<sup>11</sup> Whatever the mindset of the police was, the scene was set. The people were marching. The police, in what must have seemed like a cacophony, used as many languages as they had at their disposal to coerce the crowd to disperse, to cease and desist. The crowd either did not hear the orders or refused to do so.

The Rastafarian and the boy on the bike were central figures in this drama. Apparently the "Rastafarian", the name that many observers gave to him "presumably because he wore the garb and had the comportment of one of that protest sect" was among the main leaders at the forefront of the group. Depending upon the source

describing him, he carried a bible, or a petrol bomb, or perhaps a religious totem of some sort; or maybe it was a homemade pipe for smoking dagga (marijuana). Possibly he carried nothing at all. The boy on the bike unknowingly added to the police perception of imminent danger. Late for work but not wanting to appear not to support the crowd, young Kwanele Moses Bucwa made some sort of gesture, a Black Power salute perhaps, or simply a raised fist to show solidarity. Perhaps he said, or shouted, or sang something; perhaps not. As for the bare-chested woman, excepting the police account, there was little to substantiate her existence. According to the police, however, she was a very vocal leader who hurled oaths at the officers and led the singing of freedom songs about killing whites. The police grew increasingly apprehensive. They were the only whites in sight, and they had positioned themselves in harm's way between the burgeoning group of increasingly malevolent marchers and the exposed and vulnerable white residential sections of Uitenhage closest to Langa. The Rastafarian entreated the group to forge onward. The boy on the bicycle pedaled forward while showing his support for the crowd bent on mourning the deaths of boys in his age group. Police apprehension that the situation was moving beyond their ability to control it mounted.

Their belief had some merit in fact, although not, perhaps, for the reasons they would later testify. For in a decision made hundreds of miles away in Pretoria, and in a far less tense setting six weeks before, the highest authorities in the South African Police had decided to embark on a policy of dealing with African unrest in certain situations that made fatal consequences virtually inevitable. Those officials had become increasingly frustrated with the way events had been playing out since the Vaal uprising. It seemed that the stronger the police presence in the townships was, the more emboldened protesters and troublemakers became. Far from fearing teargas, rubber bullets, or birdshot wounds, these protesters appeared strengthened by these tactics, which in turn sharpened their resistance in the townships. In the words of Major Daniel Blignault, "people in the townships boast about the number of birdshot wounds they have. The more wounds a person has, the more esteem he has in the community."<sup>12</sup> He also argued that tear-gas and rubber bullets were tactically ineffective. In Justice Kannemeyers words in the Final Report, Blignault said "that if tear-gas is used the people merely run away for a short distance and regroup and continue with what they were doing before. Rubber bullets, he says, have a similar effect."<sup>13</sup> Blignault's observations resonated among other high SAP officials. Accordingly, they made the decision to remove tear gas, rubber bullets, and birdshot as primary riot control weapons and replaced them with heavier buckshot and semi-automatic shotguns. Revelations would later show that a telex issued to the police from general De Wit, the Senior Deputy Minister of Police, informed officers who might be facing unruly mobs that "when petrol bombs or acid bombs are thrown at police vehicles, every attempt must be made to eliminate the guilty party." De Wit dispatched the telex on March 19, fewer than 48 hours prior to the events at Langa.<sup>14</sup>

The police did not enter Langa that morning with any knowledge of what was about to happen. They did, however, enter aware that there might be a confrontation. Accordingly their guns were loaded with buckshot and bullets. Less lethal weapons had been discarded. There was no teargas to disperse the crowd, no rubber bullets to send them scurrying, injured perhaps, but nonetheless alive and scurrying, thus resolving the situation with no loss of life. There was also no birdshot to leave the scars of honor on the still-living. The crowd was growing, and so were the fears of the police with their shotguns at the ready. It was going to be a hot day, but a chill wind blew across the arid plains of the Eastern Cape that morning.

## **V. "You Will Not Stop Us Today": The Langa Massacre**

Exactly what happened next is impossible to know with any exactitude. But as with all other aspects of the event, much still is known, and more can be pieced together. Lieutenant John Fouché, the officer in charge of the police dispatch that morning, also commanded one of the Casspirs. Warrant Officer Pentz commanded another.<sup>15</sup> Pentz was the first on the scene of the confrontation. Nearby was yet another Casspir that had initially passed slowly through the throng. Sergeant Lekuba, who controlled the vehicle, had tried to radio Fouché to let him know of the gathering crowd earlier, but he discovered at that point that his radio was not functioning. Lekuba pulled into a side street as the crowd ambled onward. Two other Casspirs in the area, commanded by Sergeant Le Roux and warrant Officer Bam, patrolled the townships surrounding Uitenhage nearby, but they were removed from the immediate vicinity of the crowd.

According to the Commission report, when the Casspir under Pentz's command encountered the crowd there were approximately two hundred fifty people gathered. At the forefront were two men in black gowns or coats, girdled at the waist. One was the Rastafarian, the other presumably a religious companion. As they saw the police in the Casspirs, the two robed men waved toward the crowd, encouraging them to shout louder.

It was at this point that Pentz first addressed the crowd. He did so in Afrikaans. Pentz claimed that he asked about the nature of the gathering. The Rastafarian responded, also in Afrikaans, by saying, "We are going to a funeral." Pentz informed him that the funeral had been banned, and the Rastafarian replied, "I know that," adding defiantly, "you will not stop us today."<sup>16</sup> Then the Rastafarian linked arms with a row of people, perhaps twenty five in size, and proceeded to march forward. Others quickly joined the procession increasing the numbers discernibly. Pentz then drove down Maduna Road in the direction in which the crowd was moving and stopped at the side of the road ahead of the group. There he again admonished the group to disperse, again reminding them that they were engaged in an illegal gathering. To that the Rastafarian responded with an obscene gesture.<sup>17</sup>

Pentz estimated that the crowd had already grown to a thousand or so participants with people still continuing to join the group. Pentz claimed that as he drove toward Uitenhage gathered groups threw stones at him and his men in the Casspir. As he reached a spot near where 14th and 15th Streets met Maduna Road, he stopped the Casspir and waited for assistance to arrive. Pentz had radioed Fouché and explained to him the situation in Maduna Square. Fouché returned the call, saying he would meet Pentz and his men. Fouché arrived soon after Pentz had parked on a rise in the road, and the two parked their Casspirs in an inverted "V" formation facing the growing crowd.<sup>18</sup>

By this time the crowd had arrived to meet them. The mourners on foot looked up at the police in their Casspirs, no one knowing exactly what would come next. At that point Fouché ordered the crowd to turn back and used hand signals in an effort to reinforce his message. A member of the crew in his Casspir interpreted the order into Xhosa, the predominant language spoken in the local townships. Meanwhile the crowd had grown to be "several thousand strong," according to the police. When they hesitated at Fouché's orders, the Rastafarian urged them on, swearing at the police and assuring his followers that the authorities were only trying to scare them into dispersing.<sup>19</sup>

What happened next emerged as a blur to many who were there to witness and survived to tell the tale. In the words of anthropologist Robert Thornton, "There are multiple stories of the climax of the event, the instant when the shooting started, and its immediate cause. There are almost as many stories as witnesses, and the dead have their version too."<sup>20</sup> From this point onward, the accounts grow contradictory, the evidence becomes scant, the testimony is sometimes unreliable, and the emotions grow heated. For up until the point of the shootings there may have been agitation, but there had been no moment at which violence became the inevitable outgrowth of the confrontation. In the instants prior to the order to fire, however, each new action brought with it innumerable possible interpretations, each of them running the risk of escalating an already tense situation. The crowd and the police cordon stared one another down, neither side knowing if the other would blink.

Fouché claims to have fired the first shot. He says he did so when the Rastafarian was about 10 meters from the Casspirs. Fouché claimed that he aimed his rifle shot at the ground near the man's feet. Fouché's goal was to "bring him to his senses."<sup>21</sup> If the presumption was that a warning shot would serve its purpose, according to the police it did not. Instead Fouché testified that the Rastafarian reached inside of his flowing garb and pulled out a "black notebook and a bottle with a reddish contents . . . and held these items aloft." At the same time, a woman allegedly picked up a stone and hurled it at Pentz's Casspir. This was the allegedly bare-chested woman, perhaps Coloured, the presence of whom few people can recall. It was at this point that Fouché gave the order to fire, and the police let loose with a volley of shots.<sup>22</sup>

After a few moments the gunfire subsided, but not before dozens of people had been shot, many of them killed. The police cordoned off the area as other Casspirs, as well as senior police staff from Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage, arrived on the scene. The police would later justify their actions based on their fears that their lives had been in danger, reinforced by their fear that the crowd intended to wreak havoc and kill white people in

Uitenhage. They had heard the crowd singing while marching, and one Xhosa-speaking police officer later said that the lyrics could be interpreted to mean "Today we are going to kill the white people in the town."<sup>23</sup> Finally, the Rastafarian's liquid-filled bottle appeared to some to be a petrol bomb. Perhaps the telex of two days earlier ran through the mind of Lieutenant Fouché. The presence of a petrol bomb was to be met with zero-tolerance, according to the orders on the telex, which had said that the offender was to be "eliminated."<sup>24</sup>

Yet Fouché's was only one version of events. According to other interpreters there had been no warning shot, and the first shot had been aimed with deadly intent at a different target. Witnesses before the Commission claimed that the crowd had been orderly. Although many gave the Black Power salute and sang songs a points all along the procession, most witnesses gave little stock to police assertions of imminent danger. These witnesses asserted that there no warning shot had been fired, and that the first shot had been to the head of the boy riding the bicycle, who when struck had fallen to the ground. Some argued that a third Casspir had also fired shots. They asserted that the police had even fired shots into the wounded after the main volley had ended and the bodies lay scattered. They further alleged that the police had gathered stones and placed them amongst the fallen crowd to give the appearance that they had been throwing stones at the police. Many observers also noted that the police had shown a callous disregard for the bodies of the deceased.<sup>25</sup>

Following the events at Langa black South Africa mourned, while white South Africa wrung its hands. The state security apparatus metaphorically pulled in the wagons and withdrew into the laager. Meanwhile the world watched in horror and waited for answers. Twenty Five years after the Sharpeville Massacre South African Police had again opened fire on a large crowd of black protesters. The amount of blood spilled at Langa necessitated the use of firehoses to wash it from the streets.

## **VI. "The Greatest Agitator in the Country is Apartheid": Aftermath to Violence**

Following the slayings newspapers ran editorials pleading for the violence to stop. The National Party faced a torrent of criticism and skepticism in Parliament from members of the Progressive Party. Police greatly increased their presence in the Eastern Cape townships, as the state hoped that such a visible presence would counteract the heightened hostility that the authorities faced. The state also put into place a corps of black municipal police, kitskonstabels, to maintain order. These forces, while poorly paid and trained, at least served the purpose of increasing the uniformed presence in potentially hostile areas. But the masses who were tired of indiscriminate killings at the hands of police were not to take the black municipal policemen as allies. In turn the municipal police, derisively known within the townships as "greenflies" because of the color of their uniforms and their perceived role in society, often acted as brutally as the regular police, and sometimes moreso. Police reform became a hot topic of debate, as most South Africans were shaken into awareness that holding on to the status quo would lead only to a perpetuation of the cycle of violent protest followed by even more violent repression.

On Saturday, April 13, a mass burial was held to mourn the deaths of twenty eight people who had died as a result of the struggle. Many of the dead were victims of the Langa shootings but there were others as well. A crowd of mourners estimated at between 70,000 and 80,000 people packed KwaNobuhle stadium, the intended destination of the marchers on 21 March. There likely would have been more attendees as well, but in a significant and portentous subtext, members of the ANC-aligned United Democratic Front refused entry to members of competing organizations, most notably the National Forum and the Azanian Peoples Organization (AZAPO). Such tensions would constitute a recurrent theme. There were also small-scale conflicts between the mourning masses and the heavy police presence, but it was equally clear that no one was prepared for a large-scale confrontation, and so participants in potential crises were usually able to defuse tensions before anything came of them.<sup>26</sup>

As was anticipated the funeral also served as a mass rally. Among the featured speakers was Dr. Alan Boesak, the President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and Reverend Desmond Tutu, the Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg. Boesaks remarks about the government and police were harsh. He argued that "I do not think God wants this government to continue ruling South Africa because it does not know what it is doing. Whenever you have a government of force also in power by coercion, and whenever you have a government not of the



consent of the people things like the shootings of March 21 are bound to happen." He then went on to ask what "makes it possible for police to shoot people and then throw stones next to their bodies. What makes it possible for the police to lie and hope that someone else will be held accountable." The answer was that the government has long forgotten what it meant to be human and had forgotten what justice, peace, and reconciliation were.<sup>27</sup>

Tutu was as compelling as ever. He began with a slightly self deprecating comment: "I come to you armed with only my Bible because I am a Christian leader and not a politician, though there are some who insist that I am really a politician who is trying very hard to be a bishop." Tutu then twice asked the crowd whether they ever doubted that blacks would one day be free. Each time the throng shouted in unison, "No!". Before asking the second time he explained that he wanted the answer to be loud and clear to Pretoria. He then went on to give a speech in which he reminded his observers how the government always blamed unrest in the community on agitation, and he asked whether a person with a toothache needs to be told whether he was in pain. "We do not need agitators to tell us that ours is an inferior system of education. We also do not need agitators to remind us that we live in ghettos while others live in affluent quarters. The greatest agitator in the country is apartheid." Then, rejecting racial hostility from either side, he asserted that "black people are not against whites but against injustice, oppression, and exploitation." Tutu referred to the police order to eliminate petrol bombers as an example of how cheap black life was to the state. Finally, he disavowed all forms of violence, including that within the townships between rival groups. "Let us not use the methods of the enemy because only the enemy rejoices when we set our opponents on fire. I cannot approve of these methods, even though I know you do it out of anger. But let us not undermine our cause. Let us use methods which we will be proud of when we look back after attaining our liberation."<sup>28</sup>

Interestingly, it was this focus on so-called "black-on-black" violence that the Eastern Province Herald emphasized in its editorial the next Monday lauding Tutu's speech. The editorial essentially ignored Tutu's condemnation of the South African system as well as Boesak's perhaps less temperate remarks.<sup>29</sup> Mainstream white South Africa, of which the Herald stood as a reasonably good representative, was still not prepared to recognize the entire apartheid system as the root cause of the outrage in the townships. Twenty thousand mourners would gather a fortnight later, on 28 April, to mourn the deaths of another eleven unrest victims.

As all of this was going on, the Kannemeyer Commission forged onward with its work. And as the course of its public hearings played out in the next two and a half months, the picture of what happened at Langa became more and more clear. The revelations were often troubling.

## **VII. "The Fact That So Many of the Injuries Come From the Rear is Disquieting": The Kannemeyer Commission Report**

On June 11, 1985 Justice Kannemeyer gave to President Botha "The Report of the Commission of Inquiry Into the Incident Which Occurred on 21 March at Uitenhage." The response to the report was nearly immediate. The headline of an article in the Star read: "Report a "devastating indictment" of police." The lead paragraph elaborated on this, saying "opposition spokesmen, pressure groups and legal experts were almost unanimous in calling yesterday's Kannemeyer Commission report on the Langa shootings a devastating indictment of the police." Perhaps. Certainly many liberal white observers were outraged. Helen Suzman of the Progressive Party called some of the revelations shocking. Professor John Dugard, a member of the faculty at the University of Witwatersrand's School of Law, argued that President Botha had no choice but to demand Louis Le Grange's resignation as Minister of Law and Order.

But in typical South African fashion, a few representative whites, albeit in this case the liberals, were in effect assumed to speak for the entire population. For in the very same article it is clear that almost universally, black organizations were disappointed with the decision. The United Democratic Front spokesman called the report "a whitewash," saying that "once again, the irrational actions of the South African Police have been defended." AZAPO believed that the Commission had reached "disappointingly vague conclusions" that would not "redress the agony of March 21." Halton Cheadle, a lawyer for some of the aggrieved families, expressed his exasperation: "In the findings one often comes across the phrase "persons unknown." One would have thought

that one of the commission's main aims would be to find out who ordered police to use heavier ammunition and why."<sup>30</sup> But while the report certainly was critical of the police, it could hardly be called "devastating." Perhaps South African journalist and historian Allister Sparks summed it up best when he described the report in *The Mind of South Africa*. Although Justice Kannemeyer had indeed been critical of the police throughout his findings, in the end he had concluded that no one was to blame for the massacre. "It was not the kind of verdict," Sparks criticized, "to appease the wrath of black South Africa."<sup>31</sup> Years later, Kannemeyer himself would wryly admit that "Allister Sparks damned the Commission with faint praise." Nonetheless, on the whole the retired Justice stood by the Commission and the work he did on it. He was pleased with the hearings, and asserted that he wrote the report based on the facts he had before him. "I still think," he argued a dozen years later, "that the Commission was run impeccably."<sup>32</sup> It is important, therefore, to analyze the conclusions that the Kannemeyer Commission Report reached.

In his summary assessment of the evidence before him, Justice Kannemeyer rejected that the crowd had harbored any intent to attack white Uitenhage. There was no evidence of organization, and the composition of the crowd made it highly unlikely that an attack had been planned. Furthermore, whatever chant there may have been to kill white people only began after warrant Officer Pentz appeared in the Casspir. At that time Justice Kannemeyer believed the police had been at least as responsible for having provoked the black crowd with gestures and comments. He argued that it was difficult to discern the size of the crowd, but that it had been very large. The Rastafarian had clearly been the leader of the crowd, and Justice Kannemeyer believed that evidence concluded that he had been brandishing a petrol bomb and that although there was no evidence of the crowd carrying weapons Kannemeyer believed the police assertion that the crowd was no more than a few meters away when the police opened fire and that they had been growing both larger in number and more aggressive with each passing moment of the confrontation. Thus while the crowd had not been inherently hostile, it had not been passive either, and as events heated up, Justice Kannemeyer argued that at the time the police in the Casspirs had every reason to be fearful for their lives. "In judging reactions of people in the position in which the police were placed," he wrote, "one must not adopt an armchair critic attitude. One must try to imagine oneself in the position in which they were."<sup>33</sup>

Kannemeyer believed that Fouché had tried to persuade the crowd to disperse and that his first shot had been a warning shot. After ferreting Moses Bucwa out from hiding to testify, Justice Kannemeyer found the boy to be a compelling witness. Bucwa testified that he had indeed been hit in the head by the first shot from the police after having given a Black Power salute as a display of solidarity with the crowd. He had played dead and had then sneaked off, fearful of recriminations. Justice Kannemeyer believed that Bucwa's shooting had been an accident, the result of a failed warning shot, after which Fouché had followed almost immediately with his order to shoot. Justice Kannemeyer argued that the decision to shoot had been "an awesome one" and that "his decision to make a stand where he did and his subsequent order to open fire were understandable and that he can not be criticized therefor."<sup>34</sup> Curiously, he did not explain how a warning shot aimed at the ground near the Rastafarian hit a boy on a bicycle in the head, especially as the boy had been riding off to the side of the crowd.

In his overall conclusions Justice Kannemeyer was slightly more damning.<sup>35</sup> He argued that the authorities' banning of the funerals had been the first mistake, and correspondingly that without the banning there would have been no clash on Maduna Road. Furthermore, he believed that the way in which Captain Goosen had acted to attain the prohibition of the funerals seemed to have had "a devious purpose."<sup>36</sup> He went on to argue that "the funerals . . . having been banned, the scene was set for confrontation, an eventuality with which the police were not equipped to deal."<sup>37</sup> This was largely because of the change from standard riot equipment to an approach using more deadly force, as expressed in previous police decisions and reinforced in the police telex of March 19.<sup>38</sup> These were tragic decisions for which accountability was difficult to discern. Kannemeyer was harsh in his condemnation of the police on the scenes for the fact that thirty five of the forty seven individuals whom Kannemeyer could determine had been shot were wounded in the side or back, indicating that they had been trying to flee. Of the victims who died, only one had been shot in the front. Of the injured, only five of twenty seven persons received their wounds in the front. Kannemeyer asserted that "the fact that so many of the injuries come from the rear is disquieting."<sup>39</sup> Fouché had argued that the protesters behind the front line continued to

rush the police even after the first row "had been shot down" and that the following moment "the crowd scattered in all directions." After this, Fouché argued, "he immediately ordered a cease fire after which no shots had been fired." Kannemeyer responded skeptically to that testimony and he concluded from the evidence before him that "either Fouché's evidence in this regard is incorrect or there must also have been" other officers "firing from the back of the procession." He argued that "the conclusion must be reached that the majority of shots fired by the crews of the two Casspirs were fired after the crowd had begun to disperse and run away."<sup>40</sup>

On many occasions in the report Kannemeyer's conclusions were quite critical of police behavior, testimony, and conduct. However, in the final analysis, he wrote, "the blame for the deaths of the persons killed in the incident and for the injuries sustained by others cannot be attributed to the error of judgment or the human frailty of one person."<sup>41</sup>

It is clear on the face of it that this was not the sort of judgment that would appease black South Africa, lacking as it did any decision on the accountability for the death and wounding of the protesters. Instead it was almost destined to fuel much of the discontent that followed.

### **VIII. "Naive in the Extreme": Assessing the Kannemeyer Report**

There was justification for skepticism of the Final Report of the Commission. Presumably Kannemeyer had done his best to assess the evidence before him, to be fair-minded and to let the evidence guide him. And indeed he did not shy away from sharp conclusions in which he criticized in the harshest terms some of the actions and decisions of the police, both at the command level and on the scene at Maduna Road. Nonetheless, his inability or unwillingness to assign blame and responsibility for the massacre at Langa, coupled with a number of faulty conclusions throughout the Report, justifies the ambivalence and outright hostility of many leading protest organizations while at the same time explaining how many white liberal groups could call the final Report a "devastating indictment" of the police.

Kannemeyer had accepted that the police at the scene felt that they were in grave danger as the confrontation escalated and the crowd refused to disperse. At least two factors played in this conclusion that the crowd was within ten or so meters of the Casspirs, had refused to disperse, and were growing more menacing, and that the Rastafarian wielded a petrol bomb. Kannemeyer had rejected the police assertion that they had been under fire by sticks, stones or other missiles. He had argued that not a single object that a hostile crowd could have used as a projectile was found in either Casspir nor were there any signs of debris that the crowd might have used as weapons at all close to the vehicles. Fouché himself later admitted that he had fabricated the account that the crews had been under fire.

Justice Kannemeyer's decision on the question of the crowd throwing objects and Fouché's admission blatantly counteracts Le Grange's assertion that the police had been under fire from objects that the crowd had been throwing prior to Fouché's order to open fire. At the same time, however, it seems equally dubious that the Rastafarian waved a bottle of liquid that the police discerned to be a petrol bomb, a conclusion with which Justice Kannemeyer had agreed. The Judge based his conclusion that there had been a petrol bomb primarily on the fact that among the debris left after the shooting were two broken bottle necks, one from a Fanta soda bottle, the other from a milk bottle, and that both had been stuffed with newspaper from the same issue. The evidence further showed that one of the bottle necks had the Rastafarian's fingerprints on it. The Commission also maintained that traces of petrol had been found on the papers, although the only evidence for this comes from the conclusions of the police forensics lab, a source that could hardly have been neutral in the context of the political implications of the event. Kannemeyer also had declined to accept as problematic several instances of inconsistency in police testimony that might have mitigated the conclusion of the presence of a petrol bomb. From all of the evidence before him, Justice Kannemeyer had concluded that the Rastafarian had indeed possessed a petrol bomb and that he brandished it just prior to the shootings. This is dubious at best. The evidence before Justice Kannemeyer, far from proving that there was a bomb on the scene, seems at best inconclusive. The police, who would have had every motivation for finding shards of glass and other evidence at the scene could not find a single piece of glass from either bottle that the Rastafarian(s) had allegedly brandished.

At best, this absence of material evidence seems odd. That Kannemeyer would not give it credence is problematic, to say the least. Furthermore, there had been no signs of burn or ignition marks anywhere, and Kannemeyer agrees that the Rastafarian had made no attempt at any point to ignite or throw the alleged bomb. Errol Moorcroft of the PFP had investigated the scene, had found no evidence of burn marks or other signs of the petrol bomb. He went on to testify that while Rastafarianism was "a religion of the oppressed" it was also based on non-violent tenets.<sup>42</sup> In the words of the Anthropologist Robert Thornton, "in the light of the scanty" and indeed of the mitigating "evidence at the scene, the Commissions findings in this matter seem naive in the extreme."<sup>43</sup>

Thornton instead has provided another possibility for the paper-stuffed bottlenecks. He has argued that a popular way to smoke dagga, or marijuana, in South Africa was through a bottleneck filled with paper to prevent inhalation of the herb. Thus the bottle neck serves as a pipe, the paper as a filter. Given the close association between Rastafarianism and the use of marijuana Thornton has made a compelling case for the likelihood that the alleged petrol bomb was no more than paraphernalia for recreational drug use. He also has pointed out that since Justice Kannemeyer earlier asserted that the gathered crowd had made no plans to commit violent acts it seemed odd that he would at the same time have concluded that the Rastafarian(s) had carried and flashed petrol bombs.<sup>44</sup>

As for the distance of the crowd Thornton has also revealed skepticism about Kannemeyer's willingness to accept that they were within ten yards of the Casspirs. In the aftermath of the shootings M.P. Moorcroft had paced off the distance from the location of the Casspirs' "V" formation that the officers had given and the first bloodstains on Maduna Road. He concluded that the distance had been thirty yards. Meanwhile clothing and other objects that the fleeing crowd had left on the ground was a minimum of eighteen yards away. Thus the minimum distance of the crowd was more likely between eighteen and thirty yards, and in the cases of many victims probably more than the ten yards that the police had claimed and with which Kannemeyer had acquiesced, and certainly significantly further than the five yard distance Le Grange had asserted in his press statement. Thornton has argued that because of the deadly nature of the force that the police had used at Langa, the difference between ten and thirty yards had been largely a matter of the "veracity of the police report that contradicted the physical evidence at the scene."<sup>45</sup> However, this contradiction goes to the heart of the criticisms of the final conclusions of the report. For throughout their testimony, Kannemeyer had asserted that Fouché and Pentz had often proved to be unreliable witnesses. Nonetheless, he had given credence to police assertions that they had feared for their lives. And yet it is clear that even Justice Kannemeyer did not believe that the crowd had thrown projectiles at the police; it seemed equally clear that the conclusion that there had been petrol bombs on the scene is at best dubious. Thus if the crowd had been not ten, but twenty or more meters away, yet another of the justifications for police aggression appears to have been rendered mendacious. It is no wonder that the Commission Report was met with a less-than-overwhelming reception by large majorities of the resistance struggle who too frequently had found themselves victims at the hands of the security forces.

## **IX. "In Memory of Our Martyrs Whose Blood Will Nourish the Tree That Will Bear the Fruits of the Peoples Total Liberation": Conclusions**

During the months following the massacre the government had grown to realize that large-scale incidents such as Langa were having crippling effects on the apartheid state, but the security forces and state government were not yet equipped to deal with the prospect of a transition to multi-racial democracy. The next two years would show heightened activism followed by strong state response, but much of that response would come in the form of a "third force" and other covert actions. Rather than dealing with crowds in the streets the security forces would operate from places such as Vlakplaas, the secret operations police headquarters on an old farm outside of Pretoria. This transition from frontal confrontation to covert operations, third forces, and shadow security forces would define the next stage of the struggle. Thus in many ways, the Langa Massacre was a turning point in the history of the struggle against apartheid. And yet the full fruits of that struggle would be a long time in coming.

A year after the event at Langa, thousands of mourners, protesters, and activists gathered at a memorial service to honor those who fell in the massacre. That night hundreds gathered as a memorial stone was erected in the

KwaNobuhle cemetery to honor the fallen victims. As workers set the stone in place, those gathered sang songs honoring Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo. The memorial stone was engraved with a man, a warrior, standing within the African Continent. He bears a shield in his left hand, an assegai in his raised right hand.<sup>46</sup> Beneath that carving is a list of the names of the dead. Where the Commission of Inquiry had found that twenty one persons had died in the shootings, the marker lists the names and in most cases the date of birth of twenty nine victims. The monument bore two inscriptions. Beneath the carving of the warrior and above the list of names, the inscription read:

In memory of our martyrs whose blood will nourish the tree that will bear the fruits of the peoples total liberation, and others whose whereabouts could not be established after that brutal and merciless killing.

The other inscription, at the foot of the monument, read:

We also remember all our heroes who have fallen during the course of the struggle. Their sacrifice will not be in vain. Victory is certain.

The monument was "Dedicated by the freedom-loving people of Uitenhage."<sup>47</sup> Freedom would be nearly a decade in coming, but largely as a result of what happened at Langa on 21 March, 1985, the liberation struggle would mobilize further to continue to fight apartheid. Unfortunately, the state and its security forces too would mobilize. The next few years would see things get much worse before they would get any better for those who were the victims of apartheid's abuses.

#### **A NOTE ON SOURCES:**

There simply has not been a great deal of secondary work done on the Langa Massacre, and even less that has effectively placed the massacre into its historical, political and social context. Thus most of the work for this project comes from primary sources, most of which come from archival research in South Africa. Of the works that I cite in this paper (see bibliography for full citation information) Allister Sparks' brief treatment of the incident at Langa in his "The Mind of South Africa" is typical of his work beautifully written, engaging, and well-thought out. However, his treatment is also brief and, not surprisingly given Sparks background, somewhat journalistic, and does not fully contextualize the events of Langa. Robert Thornton's paper, "The Shooting at Uitenhage, 1985: The Context and Interpretation of Violence," also has many strengths. Not the least of these is its critical interpretation of the Kannemeyer Commission Report. He makes many interesting assessments about the nature of violence as well. He is an anthropologist, and occasionally his paper shows some of the excesses of that discipline: a lack of historicity, an inclination to over-rely on theory and jargon, and an inclination to view the event as being too representative of the issue he is exploring, namely violence and its use in modern societies. Also, Thornton presented his paper in 1988, still during the apartheid years and in the midst of the ongoing struggle for liberation, and so it does lack the perspective of the past decade in which we know so much more about South Africa in the 1980s, as well as lacking also the benefit of five years of post-apartheid experience.

Of the primary sources at my disposal, unquestionably the most useful was the Final Report. Any assessment must begin and end with this important document, even if some of the conclusions in it are up for serious debate. It seems appropriate here to restate my appreciation to Judge Kannemeyer both for access to his original copy of the report, as well as for an interview that he granted to me at his home on 11 June, 1997. The report was essential to this project, obviously, and the interview gave me access to some of his insights more than a decade after he was in the news for so long.

I did archival work at several places across South Africa. Working in archives in South Africa is in many ways not much different from archival work elsewhere. Occasionally the libraries, museums, depots and other archives in South Africa are not as well stocked, staffed, and indexed, as those here in the United States, and sometimes access to technology is limited, but the archivists themselves usually compensate in friendliness, willingness to

go the extra distance in helping out patrons. Another hurdle before researchers in South African archives is the obvious effect that years of apartheid rule have on the access to documents. Thousands of tons of documents met their end in shredders and waste dumps across the country. The underground nature of resistance for most of the decades from 1960 until 1989 means that some documents have been lost, and many important events went undocumented. Further, press blackouts, gag orders, and other forms of suppression and repression mean that many voices were silenced, and others consciously moderated or did not make account of their assessments of events and issues in South Africa in the 1980s. Yet another problem with doing research in South Africa is that a vast majority of state documents are on a twenty year hold, meaning that they will not be released until twenty years after the state archives and state archive depots have received and cataloged them; thus for the Langa Massacre many possible documents, if they exist, will not even be accessible to researchers until march 2005 at the earliest.

Archives that proved essential for this project are as follows: The Cory Library for Southern African Historical Research at Rhodes University in Grahamstown; The Africana Library in the African Studies Centre at the University of Cape Town; the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape; and the African National Congress Archives at the University of Fort Hare. Without access to these vital research archives and a handful of others, my entire project on the security forces in South Africa's Eastern Cape during the 1980s would be impossible.

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#### **Press Statements:**

Louis Le Grange, Minister of Law and Order, 21 March 1985.

Dr. F. Van Zyl Slabbert, Leader of the Official Opposition, Progressive Federal Party, 21 March 1985.

H. J. Coetsee, Minister of Justice, 21 March 1985.

All three courtesy of Mayibuye Center, University of the Western Cape, Belleville, South Africa.

Oliver Tambo, ANC President, March 1985. Courtesy President's Office (File), Oliver Tambo Papers, African National Congress Archives, University of Fort Hare, Alice, South Africa.

## **Interview:**

Author Interview with retired Justice Donald D. V. Kannemeyer, 11 June 1997, Grahamstown, South Africa.

## **Newspapers:**

Clippings File From Mayibuye Center, University of the Western Cape, Belleville. Includes clippings of articles from:

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*The Washington Post*  
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*Rand Daily Mail*  
*The Sowetan Sunday Mirror*  
*Natal Mercury*

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*Sunday Times/Cape Times Eastern Province Herald The Star Daily Dispatch*

Jon Qwelane, Shades of Luyt and Vryburg: Sharpeville Lesson has been forgotten, *Saturday Star*, 21 March, 1998.

## **Endnotes:**

1. Statement by Louis Le Grange, 3-21-1985. Mayibuye Center, University of the Western Cape. (hereafter Mayibuye).
2. Letter "To the people of Uitenhage," President's Office File, Oliver Tambo Papers, African National Congress Archives, University of Fort Hare. (Hereafter ANC Archives, UFH).
3. PFP Press Statement, 21 March, 1985. Mayibuye Center.
4. Press Statement by H.J. Coetsee, Minister of Justice, undated (between March 21 and March 24, 1985). Mayibuye Center.
5. *Eastern Province Herald*, (Port Elizabeth), 22 March, 1986.
6. See Robert J. Thornton, "The Shooting at Uitenhage, 1985: The Context and Interpretation of Violence," paper Presented at an Africa Seminar, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 26 October, 1988, footnote 2. African Studies Library, University of Cape Town.
7. Jon Qwelane, "Shades of Luyt and Vryburg: Sharpeville Lesson has been forgotten," *Saturday Star*, 21 March, 1998.
8. In addition to newspaper coverage, which will be cited as appropriate, the main sources for the narrative of the massacre comes from the following: Allister Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990); Thornton, "The Shooting at Uitenhage"; Priests' Council, Roman Catholic Diocese of Port Elizabeth, *Unrest in the Eastern Cape: Report on the Langa Shootings and Their Aftermath*, May, 1985, Cory Library for Southern African Historical Study, Rhodes University; "Outlook on the Month," *South African Outlook*, March 1985. Most important of all is Judge Donald D. V. Kannemeyers final report for the government commission,

"The Report of the Commission of Inquiry Into the Incident Which Occurred on 21 March 1985 at Uitenhage," submitted to President Botha in June 1985 (hereafter cited as "Report"). Judge Kannemeyer was kind enough to allow me access to his personal copy of the final report. He also granted me a lengthy personal interview. Interestingly, it is his belief that the state did little to distribute the commission's findings, and that copies of the report are increasingly difficult to find, an assertion that I can affirm from personal experience.

9. Internal Security Act No. 74 of 1982. See report, II 3.8 (14).

10. A Casspir is a heavy police vehicle with an open top to carry personnel. The presence of Casspirs in the townships is a vivid image from 1980s South Africa, and they stood as a symbol of apartheid oppression.

11. This evokes the idea of *swart gevaar* or black danger common amongst many white and especially Afrikaner communities.

12. Quoted in Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, 345. See also "Report," XV.B.4.1 (p.106).

13. "Report," XV.B.4.1 (106).

14. "Report," XV.B.1.2.4 (95), in Afrikaans (author's translation); also partially quoted (in English) in "Authorisation to police "a license to kill," *Natal Mercury*, 30 April, 1985. In Afrikaans: *wanneer suurbomme en/of petrolbomme na polisie-voertuie, privaatvoertuie en geboue gegooi word moet daar onder alle omstandighede gepoog word om die skuldiges te elimineer*.

15. First names of the police officers, where known, have been included. Many of the names, however, can not be discerned from the documentary or secondary evidence.

16. "Report," III 3.4 (19); Author's translation. In the report the statement is written in Afrikaans: *Ons gaan begrafnis toe. Ek weet dit . . . julle sal ons nie keer vandag nie*. Also quoted (in English) in Thornton, "The Shooting at Uitenhage," p.5.

17. "Report," III.3.5-3.6, (19-20).

18. "Report," III.3.7-3.9, (20).

19. "Report," III.4.1-4.2, (20-21).)

20. Thornton, "The Shooting at Uitenhage", p.7.

21. "Report," III.4.3, (21).

22. "Report," III.4.3-4.6, (21).

23. "Report," III.4.8-5.1, (22).

24. See "Report," XV.B.1.2.4-1.5, (95-96); see also "Police telex was a 'license to kill,'" *Cape Times*; Authorisation to police a license to kill, *Natal Mercury*; and "Suzman hits at riot police" 'license' to kill," *Rand Daily Mail*, all 30 April, 1985.

25. "Report," III.6.1-6.4, (23-24).

26. "Police defuse mass burial tension," *Sunday Star* (Johannesburg), 14 April, 1985.

27. Parts quoted in *Ibid.* and in "Tutu: I'm armed with only a Bible," *Star* (Johannesburg), 15 April, 1985.

28. Quoted in *Star*, 15 April, 1985. See also *Sunday Star*, 14 April, 1985.



- [29.](#) See "Bishop Tutu says it right at Langa," *Eastern Province Herald* (Port Elizabeth), 15 April, 1985. It should be noted that the funerals were held in KwaNobuhle, and not in Langa. This might seem a minor point but it illustrates a lack of differentiation on the part of the editorial writer. This is especially germane given the angle the editorial takes.
- [30.](#) Quoted in "Report" a "devastating indictment of police," *Star*, 12 June, 1985.
- [31.](#) Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, 348.
- [32.](#) Author Interview with retired Justice Donald D. V. Kannemeyer, Grahamstown, South Africa, June 11, 1997.
- [33.](#) "Report," XXI.A.1-3.5, (149-153, *passim*), quoted 3.5, (153).
- [34.](#) "Report," XXI.A.4.1-5.3, (153-157, *passim*), quoted 4.4, 4.8 (155, 156).
- [35.](#) "Report," XXI.B.1.1-2.7, (158-166 *passim*).
- [36.](#) "Report," XXI.B.1.9, (161).
- [37.](#) "Report," XXXI.B.2.1, (162).
- [38.](#) "Report," XXXI.B.2.1-2.6, (162-165 *passim*).
- [39.](#) "Report," XIV.B.1.1-4.1.1, (88-89), quoted 4.1.1.
- [40.](#) "Report," XIV.B.4.1.2-4.1.3 (90).
- [41.](#) "Report," XXXI.B.2.7, (165-166).
- [42.](#) "Report," IX.1.1-4. (45-55).
- [43.](#) Thornton, "The Shooting at Uitenhage," p. 9.
- [44.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- [45.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- [46.](#) Assegai is an African word for a spear.
- [47.](#) Jimmy Matyu, "Emotional scenes at cemetery," *E.P. Herald*, 22 March, 1985.
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