

The Tripartite Phenomenon of Political Assassinations in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Province

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Abstract

The deliberate killing of individuals for political purposes is not uncommon in South Africa. Nevertheless, the Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN) province stands out as a major hotspot for such violence. This article delves into the phenomenon of political assassinations in KZN. By conducting a qualitative analysis of secondary data, the paper aims to provide context to the issue of political assassinations and elucidate how these killings have evolved and persisted over time. Drawing on the theories of realism and conflict theory, the article presents three distinct stages of political assassinations in KZN: The apartheid era, the transition era, and the democratic period. While existing scholarly research on political assassinations in KZN views the phenomenon as a polarised matter, this article argues that political assassinations represent a systematic progression of political violence in the province. This paper presents a structured analysis of political assassinations and traces the evolution of these murders over time.

Keywords: *Assassinations, Kwa-Zulu Natal, Power, Political violence.*

Introduction

South Africa has been experiencing gruesome occurrences of political violence. During the Apartheid era, the country faced violence motivated by the struggle for liberation. In the post-Apartheid era in South Africa, there have been widespread violent service delivery protests, student protests, and xenophobic violence (Nomarwayi et al, 2020, p.2). Political violence is a collective phenomenon that has several sub-components, and can manifest as politically motivated-killings, demonstrations, coups, and genocide (Kalyvas, 2013, cited in Balcells, 2015, p. 377). Political assassinations have been an issue of concern in South Africa since time immemorial, from the murder of prominent political personnel such as Vuyisile Mini (1964), Steve Biko (1977), Joe Gqabi (1981), Chris Hani (1993), Thomas Shabala (2005), Jimmy Mohlala (2010), Chris Nkosi (2015), and Lindokuhle Mnguni (2022).

Various scholars such as Bruce (2013), De Haas (2016), Phakathi (2019), and Ardè (2020), have written on political killings with a focus on the KZN province. Moreover, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 1998) investigated political violence in the province. In 2016, former provincial Premier Willies Mchunu established the Moerane Commission to investigate the underlying causes of political killings in KZN. As such, it may be argued that there is adequate knowledge of the causes of political assassinations in the province. However, available information describes the subject of political assassinations in KZN as a compartmentalised occurrence. Systematical information about the phenomenon of political assassinations in the KZN province is scarce. Knowledge about political assassinations in KZN is dispersed and autonomous. The article argues that the issue of political assassinations in KZN is not a new problem but remains a mutilating ailment. This article adds to the discussion on political assassinations in KZN by placing the incidents in context and providing a methodical explanation of their development.

The first part of the article will give an overview of the existing scholarly literature on political assassinations in the province. Secondly, the paper will discuss the paradigm used to inform the study. The evolution of political assassinations in KZN and how the phenomenon has evolved will be covered in the third section of the article. The last part of the paper will offer recommendations and further research on the issue under scrutiny. In this article, the words political killings, political assassinations, and political murders will be used interchangeably. The article considers political assassinations in KZN

from the beginning of the Apartheid era (1948). The paper presents political assassinations as a broader aspect of political violence.

Review of Literature

Understanding the Concept of Political Assassinations

The term political assassination combines two words: political and assassination. In presenting the appropriate definition of the concept, the paper will first define the two words independently. After a proper analysis of the two words, this section will present a definition of political assassinations and explain the type of killings that can be classified as political assassinations.

The first publication of the noun “assassination” was in the first Folio of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, written in 1606 and published in 1623 (Boboc, 2014). According to Boboc (2014), an assassination is the violent murder of high-profile officials. For Rowlette (2001; cited in Mathenjwa, 2023, p. 9), the definition of the term assassination has evolved to include the selective killing of political leaders.

Several scholarly publications define an assassination as a murder with a political motive (Khatchadourian, 1974; Merriam - Webster Dictionary, 1999; Rowlette, 2001; Pape, 2002). According to Khatchadourian (1974), an assassination is the killing of a public figure for political purposes (Khatchadourian, 1974; cited in Iqbal and Zorn, 2008, p. 386). The Merriam-Webster's Dictionary (1999; cited in Mathenjwa, 2023) defines an assassination as a murder by secret or sudden attack, often for political reasons. Pape (2002) argues that an assassination is an intentional killing of a public figure accomplished violently for a political purpose.

The definitions above share standard features in the definition of political assassinations. GITOC (2002) and Boboc (2014) agree that an assassination is a violent murder. The cited scholars maintain that an assassination involves physical force with a clear intention to kill. According to this explanation, an assassination is premeditated murder. An assassination, according to Pape (2001) and Boboc (2014), is committed violently after precise planning.

The second common feature of the definitions presented is that an assassination is a murder committed for political purposes. Khatchadourian (1974) argues that the motives for an assassination are necessarily of a political nature. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (1999)

advances the same explanation, as it maintains that an assassination has a political rationale.

The emphasis on the assassination having political coherence compels the paper to explain events that can be considered political. The word political is an extension of the word politics. Anything political is directly related to politics (Mathenjwa, 2023, p. 12). Aristotle, defined politics as a noble activity in which men decide the rules they will live by and the goals they will collectively pursue (Aristotle, c. 350; cited in Kelly et al. 2020, p. 7). Heywood (2013, p. 3) shares a common understanding with Aristotle (c. 350) as he also defines politics as the activity through which people make, preserve, and amend the general rules under which they live. In essence, politics, as suggested by Aristotle (c. 350) and Heywood (2013), is concerned with general processes that involve making and changing rules that govern society.

To offer a detailed definition of the term politics, Heywood (2013, p. 3) introduced four approaches to defining politics: politics as the art of government, politics as public affairs, politics as compromise and consensus, and politics as power. For this article the paper will only make use of three assumptions. Politics as the art of government argues that everything that happens with a government is political. According to this assumption, politics is practiced within spheres of government, and whatever takes place within a government is of political concern.

The second assumption of politics as public affairs differentiates between public life and private life or state and civil society (Heywood, 2013, p. 5). From this perspective, politics is concerned with the public realm. As suggested by Heywood (2013, p. 5), establishing public institutions such as the apparatus of government, courts, police, army, and the social security system is a political commitment to regulate public affairs.

The third assumption is the broadest and most radical definition of politics (Heywood, 2013, p. 5). This perspective explains that the main objective of things deemed “political” is power. Kelly et al. (2020, p. 8) argue that politics is all about power, and power determines how ends are achieved, and enemies defeated. For Heywood (2013, p. 5), the last assumption defines politics as the quest for power that lacks any moral or ethical code.

After an analysis of the definitions given, a political assassination is the intentional killing of a person by a hired emissary for political purposes (Havens, 1970; Pape, 2002; Rowlette, 2001; Bruce, 2013). Any intentional murder of a member of the government, individuals who are

officials in public institutions, or politicians in general with the sole purpose of securing economic, political, and personal gain can be classified as a political assassination.

A Provincial Concern

According to a study conducted by the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC, 2021, p. 10), a total of 1,822 assassinations were recorded in South Africa from the year 2000 to 2020. 323 (38%) of the recorded cases occurred in KZN, making it the most significant contributor to the national trend. The GI-TOC (2021, p. 11) also found that from 2015 to 2020, the nation recorded 858 assassinations. 21% of the 858 assassinations were considered political assassinations, amounting to 180 political assassinations in South Africa from 2015 to 2020. From 2015 to 2020 of the 180 political assassinations in the country, 103 (56%) occurred in KZN. This data shows that the KZN province is a breeding ground for political assassinations.

The deliberate and planned killing of politicians is a common feature in the political affairs of the province. This gruesome act of violence directed towards politicians in KZN is not something new (Bruce, 2013; Schuld, 2013; Krelekrele, 2018; Nomarwayi, 2020). There have been many different types of political violence on the African continent and in South Africa, including civil wars, clan conflicts, colonial warfare, and anti-colonial wars (Welsh, 2000). Violence underpinned the repression of colonial rule in Africa (Fanon, 1963). In the 19th and 20th centuries, the country experienced violence under the colonial and Apartheid administrations.

Political killings are escalating in South Africa, especially in the volatile province of KZN (Makhaye, 2023). Taylor (2002) argues that during the democratic dispensation, political violence in the rest of the country decreased to lower levels, but in KZN, political strife has continued to be characterised by violent protests and political killings. KZN has a higher rate of political assassinations than the rest of South Africa (Krelekrele, 2018; Moerane, 2018; Nomarwayi, 2020).

The Underlying Causes of Political Assassinations in KZN

The Apartheid regime in South Africa was met with resistance. The National Party (NP) government was eager to maintain the status quo, and the activists were also prepared to topple the oppressive regime.

The conflict of interest between the two groups created a platform of violence and disorder in the country, with both parties anxious to achieve their ends. The Apartheid government used political assassinations to eliminate leaders of the resistance movement (Pillay, 2005; Schuld, 2013, p. 65). The government intentionally killed people who were immensely involved in the liberation struggle.

In the mid-1980s, KZN was overwhelmed by political murders (Krelekrele, 2018). Violence between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) contributed to a considerable extent to the widespread existence of political assassinations in the province (Schuld, 2013; Nomarwayi, 2020). The ANC is South Africa's governing party and was initially founded as the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in January 1912 in Bloemfontein to fight for the rights of black South Africans. The organisation was renamed the ANC in 1923 (South African History Online – SAHO, 2011). The ANC was one of the primary vital parties that fought against oppression and Apartheid in South Africa. The ANC emerged as the first governing party of a democratic South Africa in 1994.

The IFP emerged from *Inkatha Yakwa Zulu*, a cultural organisation established by the Zulu king, Solomon ka Dinuzulu, in 1928. The cultural movement ground to a halt after a few years; however, after failing to revive the movement in 1959, Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi succeeded in doing so in March 1975, renaming it *Inkatha Yenkululeko Yesizwe* or Inkatha Freedom Party" (O'Malley, 2022). KZN is a South African province that is home to the Zulu nation, which is the most homogenous and dominant ethnic group in the province. Historically, the majority of Zulu people were members of the IFP, the most significant rival of the ANC (Ntshoe, 2002, p. 64; cited in Nomarwayi et al. 2020, p. 4). Assassinations during the inter-party clashes in the province were used as a method to eliminate leadership from the two contending forces (Gwala, 1992; cited in Schuld, 2013).

In the democratic dispensation, political assassinations have taken on a more internal posture. Factions in the ANC as a governing party usually end with comrades killing each other (Ardè, 2020). Local government politicians in the ANC are fighting for party and municipal positions. Political killings in the ANC are driven by disputes and contestation over power, which both assure or guarantee access to financial security and benefits through state resources at the local government level (Moerane, 2018; Nomarwayi et al., 2020, p. 8).

Political assassinations in KZN during the democratic era exist within political parties, mainly the ANC.

The IFP and National Freedom Party (NFP) are also part of intra-party clashes that lead to political killings in the province (Schuld, 2013; Krelekrele, 2018; Moerane, 2018). The NFP split from the IFP, and this led to widespread political conflict between members and representatives of both parties. Party followers were intolerant of each other in different communities and Durban hostels.

The Aftereffects of Political Killings in KZN

From the mid-1980s and early 1990s, political killings in KZN divided the province. Kramer (2020, p. 543) argued that power struggles between political parties led to divisions, and eventually, almost every African community in KZN was divided in terms of political affiliation. The living conditions in the province during the transition era were hostile. These incidents were considered “black-on-black” violence (Krelekrele, 2018). Political affiliation determined whether one was a victim or perpetrator of political violence in some districts of the province.

Political killings in KZN create an element of fear. According to Phakathi (2019, p. 115), political violence instills societal dread and terror. The commonality of political murders in KZN intimidates both citizens and politicians. The prevalence of political assassinations in KZN leads to voter apathy. In KZN, it is common for people to declare that they will not engage in politics because they fear being assassinated (Phakathi, 2019, p. 114).

Stories of Political Assassinations in the KZN Province

The Struggle for Liberation

In 1978, Dr. Rick Turner was tragically assassinated in KZN (Roberts and Desmond, 2022). The dynamic political philosopher and theorist was both a social activist and an educator. He was one of the first on the white left to recognise the importance of the Black Consciousness Movement and significantly impacted the resurgence of the Black Labor Movement. He impacted many upcoming activists, historians, and theorists (South African History Online, 2022). Dr. Turner was killed for his involvement in the struggle against the Apartheid regime (Roberts and Desmond, 2022).

Mr. Griffiths Mxenge was also targeted and murdered in a KZN township known as Umlazi in Durban, in 1981. Mr. Mxenge was an anti-Apartheid activist, a civil rights lawyer, and an essential ANC member. The TRC heard testimonies about the murder of Griffiths Mxenge. Dirk Coetzee, who was a former commander of the police anti-terrorist unit at Vlakplaas (a farm where activists were tortured and killed in South Africa, located 20 km away from the South African central city of Pretoria), told the TRC that he was ordered to “make a plan with Griffiths Mxenge.” Mxenge’s brutally wounded body was found in a local sports field in Umlazi (TRC, 1998, p. 234). Mxenge’s involvement in the liberation struggle made him a target.

The tragedy of political assassinations has centred on the Mxenge family, who have suffered tragic losses. Four years after the killing of Griffiths Mxenge, the spouse of the slain Mr. Mxenge, Mrs. Victoria Mxenge, was also assassinated for political reasons. Mrs. Mxenge was a prominent human rights lawyer and a leader in her own right (Madlala, 1997). When Victoria Mxenge was assassinated, she was an office bearer (Treasurer of the Natal Region Executive) in the United Democratic Front (UDF). The UDF was a coalition of groups and organizations formed on August 20, 1983, in South Africa, Cape Town, to advance the struggle against Apartheid, racism, and injustices. Victoria Mxenge was a prominent member of the UDF. The TRC (1998, p. 232) heard that Mr. Sefako (alias Bongani Raymond Malinga) from Hillcrest, Durban, was recruited by the Apartheid government Security Branch. Malinga allegedly confessed to the ANC that he had killed Mrs. Mxenge.

The year before Mrs. Mxenge’s death, the UDF mourned the passing of Toto Dweba, an activist and freedom fighter. His mutilated body was found in a town known as Eshowe (Coleman, 1998, p. 248). A member of the Durban Security Branch told the TRC (1998, p. 230) that Dweba was targeted because he was suspected to be a carrier of guns from Eswatini. Dweba’s participation in the fight to overthrow the Apartheid government earned him the same fate as Turner and the Mxenge couple.

The Road to Democracy

In the 1990s, KZN was antagonised by inter-party clashes, mainly between the ANC and the IFP. In 1990, Pietermaritzburg, a city in the midlands of KZN, experienced violence that was later termed the “Seven Day War.” The ANC and IFP supporters were protagonists in this armed conflict. The war led to the deaths of 200 residents of

Vulindlela and Edendale. The IFP, allegedly with assistance from the police, was suspected of being responsible for the attacks (SAHO, 2000).

Skhumbuzo Ngwenya was also assassinated in Pietermaritzburg. Ngwenya was an ANC supporter and vice-president of the Imbali Youth Organisation (Imbali is a township in Pietermaritzburg). He was shot and killed on February 8, 1992, while leaving a restaurant in Pietermaritzburg (TRC, 1998, p. 45). Ngwenya had allegedly been harassed and assaulted by KwaZulu Police members and IFP supporters over several years. In 1990, Cele Nompumelelo Iris “Magwaza,” an ANC district organiser for Southern Natal, was shot dead by IFP gunmen in Ndwedwe, near Durban KZN (TRC, 1998, p. 30).

Reggie Hadebe, the ANC Natal Midlands deputy chairperson, was assassinated on October 27, 1992. Daluxolo Luthuli, who testified in the TRC, told the Commission that on Saturday, after the assassination of Reggie Hadebe, there was an IFP march to the Durban city hall from Pietermaritzburg. At the march, he met Bongani Sithole, who informed him of his involvement in the assassination of the deputy chairperson (TRC, 1998, p. 283).

In 1991, Chief Mhlabunzima Maphumulo was assassinated. Maphumulo was the president of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALES). CONTRALES is an organization unifying traditional leaders on matters concerning traditional communities (Mathonsi and Sithole, 2017: 37). Chief Maphumulo led CONTRALES to align itself with the ANC, as he was a firm believer in a unified South Africa (Van Kessel, 1997). The move by Maphumulo placed him at odds with the IFP. The relationship between Chief Maphumulo and the IFP was frictional. Washington Duke Sosibo was also assassinated for political reasons. Sosibo was a traditional headman and a local IFP organizer; he was shot dead in 1992 in a small town in the midlands of KZN, known as Richmond (Coleman, 1998, p. 256).

The New Dispensation

The Moerane Commission (2018, p. 413) found that political assassinations are a local issue, involving mainly councillors, potential councillors, and branch leaders of political organisations. An IFP councilor, Mr. Peter Nxele, was assassinated in May 2008. Peter Nxele was murdered after he flagged that R50 000 was missing from a council business grant (Ardè, 2020, p. 42).

Mr. Mthunzi Gwala was killed on July 14, 2012, at a hostel in Umlazi. Previously, Gwala had been a member of the IFP but later joined the NFP. Sizwe Gwala, a brother to the deceased, told the Moerane Commission (2018, p. 132) that on July 14, 2012, he and his late brother went out for drinks in the hostel where they lived. Someone who was an IFP member said he does not drink with NFP members. Mthunzi responded affirmatively, maintaining that he was a member of the NFP and even showing the NFP t-shirt he was wearing. Mr. Sizwe Gwala advised the deceased that they should leave the place of entertainment due to the minor quarrel. Sizwe Gwala and Mthunzi Gwala stayed in different hostel rooms. Sizwe Gwala, the deceased's brother, was notified that his brother, Mthunzi, was shot dead in his room. Sizwe told the Moerane Commission that he believes Mthunzi, his brother, was killed because of the quarrel regarding his NFP membership.

Similarly, Mrs. Thokozile Phakathi was assassinated on 10 July 2015. Phakathi was a member of the ANC. She was active at Kwa-Ndengezi and served as the Women's League chairperson (Moerane Commission, 2018, p. 32). In the Moerane Commission (2018), Phakathi was described as a hardworking member of the ANC, volunteering to assist community members. Due to her hard work and commitment, political fame was bestowed upon her. This led to her nomination as ward councilor. The then-sitting councilor had occupied the position for more than two terms. Phakathi was reluctant to accept the nomination understanding that accepting the nomination would not put her life at risk particularly as a female (Moerane Commission, 2018, p. 33). Phakathi was assassinated just a few months after accepting the nomination.

Phumza Diko gave evidence to the Moerane Commission regarding the assassination of her late fiancé, Mr Tshibase of uMzimkhulu. Tshibase was a professional teacher and a part-time proportional representational (PR) councillor. Diko told the Commission (2018, p. 71) that Tshibase, during his second term as ward councilor, mentioned that certain people did not want him, but the community needed him. Tshibase was shot in April 2017 and survived but later died in May 2017.

Vusumuzi Ntombela, was shot and killed in 2017 while teaching, and one learner, Elizabeth Nhleko, was also killed, and another, Bongumusa Cele, suffered gunshot injuries but survived. Mr. Ntombela was also a local councilor. Simphiwe Ntombela, a brother to the late

Vusumuzi Ntombela, told Ardè (2020, p. 49) that “Vusumuzi wouldn’t move with the wind, and that is why he was assassinated.”

In 2017, Mr Sindiso Magaqa was assassinated. Magaqa was an extrusive member of the ANC and had joined the movement at a young age. He served in different positions in the ANC through deployment. At the time of his death, he was a PR councilor at uMzimkhulu municipality. Magaqa’s family believes that he was shot because of his whistleblowing efforts against corruption at uMzimkhulu municipality (Moerane Commission, 2018, p. 50).

Framing Political Assassinations in KZN

The issue of political assassinations in KZN should not be explained using a single theory because the nature of such violence has been changing over time. Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis, and Bezuidenhout (2021, p. 47) argue that theories are abstractions; hence, they must be considered partial and incomplete explanations or descriptions of a phenomenon. This article consults two theories to explain political killings in the province sufficiently. The paper is informed by conflict theory and political realism.

Colonialism was an economic endeavor. Colonialism is usually distinguished by settlement and economic dominance (Heywood, 2011, p. 182). Conflict theory, as proposed by Karl Marx, holds that society will always be in a state of conflict because of the constant battle for limited resources (Finance Institute, -CFI, 2022). Conflict theories maintain that competition over limited resources leads to violent conflict. According to Nickerson (2022), conflict theory emphasises economic inequality and deprivation as causes of conflict. Conflict theory is essential to this study because, in South Africa, social exclusion and a relative lack of economic opportunities have been the driving forces behind widespread violence since the colonial and apartheid administrations (Nomarwayi, 2020, p. 2). Conflict between the ANC and IFP was central to competition for positions of power in the anticipated new democratic regime. Political violence and unrest in the KZN must be understood against the political conflict between the ANC and IFP (Ntshoe, 2002; Schuld, 2013; Krelekrele, 2018). Leaders from both parties were interested in maintaining political relevance and influence in KZN. Political Killings spurred on by rivalry and confrontations between political parties, specifically the ANC and IFP, polarised the province.

Political realism is the view that everything political is a self-serving exercise. Politics is all about self-enrichment and gaining and maintaining power. Power is how ends are achieved, enemies are defeated, and compromises are sustained (Kelly et al., 2020, p. 7). Realism maintains that competition makes men invade for gain (Donnelly, 2000, p. 14) According to Ashley (1981), realism depicts a politically divided society of pervasive insecurity, recurring violence, generalised expectations of war, and self-animating strategic logic against strategic logic. Realism is founded on a pessimistic notion regarding humans (Gilpin, 1984). As suggested by Thucydides, men are motivated by honour, greed, and fear (Thucydides, 2012; cited in Barientos, 2018, p. 1). In addition to expressing a negative impression of human nature, Machiavelli claims that men are ferocious, violent, iniquitous, arrogant, and greedy. (Machiavelli, 1532; cited in Donnelly, 2000, p. 18). Due to the character of humans, competition becomes a violent and deadly experience. Machiavelli argues that it must not be taken for granted that all men are wicked and that they will always give vent to the malignity that is in their minds when the opportunity is offered (Machiavelli, 2011; cited in Donnelly, 2000, p. 9).

The theories are useful in understanding political assassinations over the three phases of South Africa's politics. Today politicians are still interested in the acquisition of power, this is the very nature of politics. Bruce (2013, p. 13) argues that political killings are a feature of political contestation at the provincial government in KZN. Nomarwayi (2020, p. 8) shares the same sentiments as Bruce (2013) and Moerane (2018), as she maintains that political killings are driven by disputes and contestation over political power, which both assure access to financial security and benefits through state resources at the local government level. Politicians in KZN are killing each other out of greed to secure political power positions and fear of losing such benefits. A case in point is that politicians in local government are interested in positions of power because of the easy access (in terms of academic and vocational competence) and monetary benefits attached to these positions (Moerane, 2018, p. 413).

Methodology

This study took the form of a qualitative research study. The phenomenon of political assassinations in KZN was the main issue under scrutiny. The study does not investigate any quantitative aspects of political assassinations in the province. The investigation was

exclusively concerned with political assassinations in KZN. The process of inquiry into the general change in political assassinations in the province was best informed by the qualitative approach because "qualitative research systematically analyses data to provide a better understanding of a phenomenon" (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2021, p. 201). The qualitative approach works in the best interest of the study to establish and find relevant information. The author did not conduct any interviews.

The province of KZN was the main area under investigation. Every secondary source used for the investigation was intentionally selected because it addressed the topic of political assassinations, especially in KZN. Political assassinations that occurred across the nation were not taken into consideration. Preference was given to sources that specifically discussed the issue of political assassinations in KZN.

Findings and Analysis

The Three-Pronged Phenomena of Political Assassinations in KZN

This section presents the findings of the research study. The paper establishes that political killings are still an issue in KZN, having persisted from the Apartheid era through the transitional period and subsequent democratic rule. In light of this, the nature of such killings continues to change and target different people for different reasons. Political assassinations must be understood as a systematic evolution of political violence in the province. The paper finds that political assassinations in KZN have existed in three phases (the Apartheid era, the Transition period, and the Democratic dispensation). These are discussed and analyzed below:

The Apartheid Era

The history of South Africa has been marked by violence from colonialism, Apartheid, and the persecution of natives. South Africa's past is depicted through tales of its civil wars, land appropriation, and servanthip. As such, the study finds that the Apartheid rule represents a significant part of the nation's history because segregation was legislated. This law imposed racial segregation and the separate development of different races.

The Apartheid system in South Africa enforced social divisions and segregation. This segmentation was solely based on skin color. Apartheid ensured that there was stratification of the population into the order of White, Coloured, Asian, and Bantu (Ayubi, 2023, p. 127). South Africa split into two distinct worlds under the apartheid regime: one for Europeans and one for non-Europeans. The white-skinned South Africans inhabited a world that was expansive, happy, and developing. On the other hand, the non-European world was a teeming place filled with Black, Coloured, and Indian South Africans.

The living conditions in the two worlds were not congruent. At the expense of non-Europeans, the Apartheid regime promoted the advancement and emancipation of Europeans. The exploitation, hardship, and marginalisation of non-Europeans served as the foundation for the Apartheid government. The regime actively oppressed and excluded non-Europeans through policy and violence. Unjust treatment, brutality, and deprivation were undeniable norms of the regime. The exclusion of non-Europeans entailed not just social factors but also political, economic, and cultural aspects. South Africa's past of colonialism and Apartheid can be understood through the lens of political realism. Both systems were concerned with self-enrichment, gaining and maintaining power. The actions of both administrations sought to invade for gain as argued by Donnelly (2000).

The study finds that during Apartheid SA, political assassinations were carried out by the NP government to remove political activists in efforts to remain in power as suggested by the political realism theory. These themes are discussed below:

Political Killing of Activists

The study finds that the main targets of political assassinations during the Apartheid era were activists. The study establishes that these were leaders of the community who set out to seek political change in the country. The government killed members of the opposition to the tyrannical Apartheid state on purpose and in secret.

In the Apartheid era, the KZN province experienced the brutal murder of people like Dr. Rick Turner (1978), Mr. Griffiths Mxenge (1981), Mrs. Victoria Mxenge (1985), and many others who were active members of the liberation struggle. The common denominator in the biographies of targeted individuals during Apartheid is activism.

The Apartheid Government as a Perpetrator of Killings

The study finds that political killings during Apartheid were a vertical type of political violence. In addition, it establishes that the NP government used violent means against activists. Moreover, the study maintains that the security forces of the regime were the main assassins during this era. In this regard, it is argued that the government established killing squads, such as the assassins' agency in Vlakplaas, with a mandate to eliminate notable and vital activists of the liberation movement.

The findings are corroborated by literature, for instance, Brigadier Christian Earle, who was an investigating officer, gave testimony at the TRC (1998) that he believed Turner was killed by people who were part of the security forces and that they wanted to conceal details on his murder and not have it known. The TRC (1998) also found that Dirk Coetzee, Almond Nofomela, Joe Mamasela, Brian Ngqulunga, and David Tshikalanga killed Mr. Griffiths Mxenge. All of Mxenge's killers were police officers and agents of the Apartheid government's death squads. Furthermore, the TRC (1998, p. 232) heard that Mr. Marvin Sefako (alias Bongani Raymond Malinga) was recruited by the National Security Branch to kill Mrs. Victoria Mengo.

The Apartheid government was fully involved in the act of intentionally killing activists in the apartheid era. The Apartheid government was eager to maintain power and advantage, while the activists were adamant that South Africa must change the general rules governing society. This contradiction led to the adoption of political assassinations as a *modus operandi* of the Apartheid government in trying to maintain and preserve political power.

The Transition Period

The study demonstrates that the possibility of a new democratic South Africa sparked a wave of violence in the country. Moreover, the study maintains that KZN has remained entangled in the unrest that was sparked before and during the transition period, which sought change from the racial Apartheid regime to the non-racial democratic dispensation. During this process, the KZN province experienced widespread incidents of political murder.

The incidents of the transition period can be framed within the basic assumptions of conflict theory. The conflict theory argues that conflict is inevitable between groups bound by mutual interests (Hayes, 2022).

During the transition period, there was competition for political power in the anticipated “new dispensation.” Political assassinations were used mainly by the ANC and the IFP to eliminate competition and preserve advantages in the new dawn.

Inter-Party Clashes

The study establishes that political assassinations during the transition period were endemic in the political rivalry between the ANC and IFP. The fight between the two parties was motivated by the desire to have territorial control in certain parts of the province and secure political power in the new South Africa, both in national and local government. Political tension between the ANC and IFP was also rooted in ideological differences. The IFP advocated for a federal South Africa in opposition to the ANC’s unified idea. Conflictual ideas between the two parties led to fatal political disputes.

The study finds further that the NP government was also the leading actor in the violence during the transition era. As a policy to divide and conquer, the NP government supported the IFP with the provision of arms, ammunition, and training to precipitate violence in the province. The Apartheid police were closely associated with IFP leaders and supporters during the transition era. Standard ideas of separation and national patriotism influenced the relationship between the IFP and the NP.

The relationship between the IFP and NP can be located within the political theory of realism. Political realism argues that politics is all about power and political protagonists can adopt whatever means to secure power (Kelly et al, 2020). The plan to divide the black majority in KZN was used by the NP government to perpetuate violence and disorder in the province.

Moreover, the study maintains that political violence in the transition era was horizontal. This means that citizens were fighting with each other. Supporters of both parties used assassinations to eliminate members of the opposing party. It was typical for a group of supporters to invade houses and kill individuals for their political beliefs and party affiliation. Members of political parties precipitated violence firsthand without any benefit of payment or hiring emissaries to kill those who held different political views. The political murders in the transition era were motivated by ideological passions and hatred for those who supported a different political party.

Political violence in KZN during the transition era demonstrates the extent of power politics as explained by realism. According to political realism, power is the main political objective, and power is the means by which enemies are defeated and compromises sustained (Kelly et al, 2020). In the transition era, competition for power was regulated through violent events as the ANC and IFP clashed with each other under the influence of the NP.

The Proliferation of Weapons in the Province.

The study argues that during the transition period, there was easy access to weapons in KZN. As such, the study maintains that the supply of unregulated weapons contributed to the extensive use of violence for political purposes in the province (Goba, 2022). These were vast amounts of arms and ammunition deposited in KZN without formal accountability. This is corroborated by literature, for instance, Eugene de Kock, a notorious police officer, gave testimony that he provided AK-47s, light machine guns, explosives, and truckloads of ammo to high-ranking IFP officials (Krelekrele, 2018).

Judge Richard Goldstone was appointed chair of the Commission of Inquiry on the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation on October 24, 1991 (Hurisa, 2009; cited in Krelekrele, 2018). The functions of the Commission included a duty to investigate the causes of violence and intimidation. In 1994, testimony before the Goldstone Commission detailed how an ESKOM member agreed to sell 1,000 LMF rifles to intermediaries acting on behalf of a high-ranking government official in the KZN. Despite the company's later claims to have revoked the purchase, a number of its registered firearms remain missing (Goldstone Commission, 1994, p. 12). The death squad located in Vlakplaas also provided weapons to the KZN. An estimated 65 out of 70 tonnes of weaponry sent to the KZN government in the 1980s are believed to have disappeared.

The Democratic Dispensation

The research finds that political assassinations in the democratic period were more internal and mainly caused by factional battles. The paper argues that comrades in KZN are killing each other, and the ANC is at the forefront concerning political killings in the province. The IFP, NFP, and Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement are also experiencing deadly factional battles. The latest and common phenomenon is that

political parties are not fighting with each other, but there are internal rivalries within political parties in KZN. Considering this, Phungula (2023, p. 101) argues: “Despite ideological similarities and membership in the same political party, it would seem that the pursuit of political power overshadows party membership”.

Political assassinations within the democratic dispensation are fuelled by the quest for attaining, maintaining, and increasing political power, as suggested by realism. Moreover, the phenomenon can be understood through the lens of conflict theory, where aspiring politicians are willing to go to extremes, including murder to hold on to political power, which is believed to allow for access to the public purse. This finding is corroborated by the findings of the Moerane Commission, which stated: “Election as a councillor also lends itself to the orientation of a patronage network. However, should the councillor lose his/her position, not only does the councillor lose their income and social status, but the entire patronage network may suffer a similar loss” (Moerane Commission, 2018, p. 414).

Politics as a vocation

Factions in the ANC are a significant concern. The cadre deployment policy in the ANC has created a platform of absolute competition for positions of power. Phungula, (2023) maintains that this can be linked to the reality of a struggle over scarce resources, as argued by the Conflict Theory.

The tenderpreneur system has also made the ANC a war party because political cohorts compete to secure positions of power and manipulate government contracts for self-enrichment through tenders. This view is buttressed by Phungula (2023), who maintains that fierce competition for positions in political parties’ structures can be linked to or understood in the context that political power yields access to resources and furthers business interests.

The paper revealed that stomach politics are central to the widespread existence of political killings in the province. This finding is corroborated by Phungula (2024, p. 102), who maintains that “politics in the province are not only an ideological issue based on the quest for democracy but an issue of bread and butter for those wanting to remain in power.

Whistleblowing

The study establishes that there is a relatively new trend of political violence directed towards whistleblowers in the province. Politicians and citizens who report incidents of maladministration and corruption in public offices or private companies are targeted and killed as a way to evade accountability and prosecution. The study argues that to report wrongdoing in KZN, especially at the municipal level, is to endanger one's life, as politicians are willing to kill anyone who seems to be an obstacle to self-enrichment activities. Not all politicians operate from a realist perspective of selfishness and greed. Some politicians wish to use politics to advance moral values such as justice, fairness, empowerment, and economic development. However, these individuals are killed by colleagues who see politics as an opportunity to cease power for personal development. Politicians such as Sindiso Magaqa and Peter Nxele were killed because they were vocal about corruption in local municipalities (Ardè, 2020). In light of this, Phungula (2023) found that gaps in consequence management in local government have provided fertile ground for the scourge of political violence to fester by failing to punish perpetrators of corruption.

Political power from the barrel of a gun

In KZN, notoriety has become an essential feature for political contestation. Making it to the election booth or party slate means one must conquer colleagues to ensure the possibility of being elected as a representative or an official. The act of intentionally killing comrades as a way to secure power and government contracts is the new method of doing business in the ANC. To secure power in KZN, one must always be on the lookout as comrades are willing to kill to influence political ends.

Recommendations

Political assassinations are not suitable for a democratic society. Such killings infringe upon fundamental democratic values, especially universal suffrage. The government should investigate and analyse the issue of political killings in KZN. The government needs to consider political assassinations as a systematic evolution of political violence. Political killings are not a stagnant aspect but a developing and dynamic event. The government, academics, researchers, and journalists must

analyse the recent and anticipated trends of political killings to contain the issue and prepare for future developments.

Further Research into the Issue

Existing information considers political killings as political violence directed at politicians, but the nature of such violence continues to change and remains a crucial factor in provincial politics. The causes of political assassinations in KZN are inconstant, and there is an alteration in the individuals targeted. There must be consideration and investigation of the new trends in political killings happening in KZN. The pool of victims continues to expand. It is not only local councillors and mayors that are mainly affected by political killings in the democratic dispensation. There is a relatively new tendency towards violence facing whistleblowers and traditional leaders. There is also a rise in violence against women involved in politics in KZN (Phungula, 2023, p. 270).

These killings have existed since colonial times, when colonial masters would remove anyone who stood in their way in their quest to exploit African countries. A similar pattern is noted today, where the calibre of today's politicians is less focused on ethical and moral leadership but will go to extremes, including killing, to remain in power.

Conclusion

The paper has described the issue of political assassinations in KZN. The article argued that political killings in KZN are a changing aspect and must be studied as a systematic progression of political violence. The study also maintained that political assassinations in KZN have existed in three phases, namely the Apartheid era, the Transition period, and the Democratic dispensation.

The nature of the causes of political assassinations has changed over time. The paper gave a historical analysis of political assassinations in KZN and how recent trends differ from the killings that took place during the oppressive era. Political killings in the democratic period are complex and dynamic. In the contemporary politics of the KZN province, political assassinations must be investigated as an ever-growing concern that will continue to change and exist in different forms unless the government, journalists, academics, and researchers advise on significant legislation to halt the existence of such brutal and crippling political violence.

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