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**uMzimkhulu Killing Fields: Investigating the Underlying
Causes of Political Assassinations in uMzimkhulu,
2016 – 2018**

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Abstract

Political assassinations have become commonplace in the Kwa-Zulu Natal province, particularly during the era of democracy. In the scholarly review of such killings in the Kwa-Zulu Natal province, the borough of uMzimkhulu has attracted much attention from scholars, journalists, researchers, and violence monitors, especially during the 2016- 2018 time frame. During this period, the uMzimkhulu town experienced a killing spree of politicians. Through a qualitative analysis of secondary data, this article intends to identify the underlying causes of political assassinations in the KZN town of uMzimkhulu from 2016 to 2018. Drawing insights from political realism, the article argues that squabbles for political power and stomach politics created a conflictual environment in the region, making the town a political killing field. Different scholars have investigated the issue of political assassinations in KZN, while also presenting the significant case of uMzimkhulu. There are scholarly publications on political assassinations as a provincial issue. However, less information focuses explicitly on the uMzimkhulu case study. The study presents three main findings. Firstly, political assassinations in uMzimkhulu were an intraparty phenomenon involving the African National Congress. Secondly, the uMzimkhulu Memorial Hall was central to the prevalence of political assassinations in the town. Lastly, the article finds that political

assassinations during the period under investigation targeted whistleblowers. This paper contributes to the literature on political assassinations in KZN.

Key words: *Political violence, Political assassinations, uMzimkhulu, Power-politics.*

Introduction

The Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN) province is not foreign to the social phenomenon of political assassinations. Taylor (2002), Bruce (2013), De Haas (2016), the Moerane Commission (2018), Ardè (2020), Mathenjwa and Phungula (2024) point out that political assassinations are frequent in KZN in comparison to the other eight South African provinces. The Moerane Commission (2018) declared KZN a hotspot for political assassinations. Krelekrele (2018: 1) further maintains that KZN stands as the foremost province in South Africa in terms of political assassinations. A research report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crimes (GI-TOC) (2021) furthers this point, highlighting the KZN province as the epicentre of political assassinations.

The issue of political assassinations in KZN has been investigated by several scholars, such as the Moerane Commission (2018), Ardè (2020), GI-TOC (2021), and Mathenjwa (2023). Research reports and articles presented by scholars and institutions have shown that the town of uMzimkhulu in KZN remains a significant case study. In the Moerane commission (2018), six witnesses gave evidence about the political assassination of three councillors and attempted assassinations of two councillors. Ardè (2020) presents a whole chapter in his book (*The War Party*, 2020) uncovering the murder and attempted murder of politicians in uMzimkhulu. For the GI-TOC (2021) and Mathenjwa (2023), the murder of Sindiso Magaqa (2017), which also took place in uMzimkhulu, is presented as a significant case study of political assassinations in KZN. Moreover, the GI-TOC (2024), along with Mathenjwa and Phungula (2024: 35), highlight Magaqa's assassination as a crucial case study reflecting the evolving dynamics of political assassinations in KZN.

The study intends to present the underlying causes of political assassinations that took place in uMzimkhulu during the 2016 – 2018 period. The first part of the article will review the literature on the assassination of politicians in uMzimkhulu. The second part of the article provides the study's theoretical framework. The third section will outline the methodology used to collect, sample, analyze, and interpret data.

Fourthly, the article will outline its findings. The last part of the paper will give recommendations on how to curb the issue of political assassinations in KZN, as it remains a social phenomenon in the province.

Analysis of Existing Literature on the Assassination of Political Figures in uMzimkhulu

Political Assassinations in South Africa

A political assassination refers to the deliberate killing of an individual by a contracted agent for political objectives (Havens, 1970; Pape, 2002; Rowlette, 2001; Bruce, 2013). Mathenjwa and Phungula (2024: 37) maintain that the deliberate killing of a government member, officials within public institutions, or politicians, aimed solely at achieving economic, political, or personal benefits, can be categorized as a political assassination.

Political assassinations are not a new phenomenon in South Africa. They have existed as a tripartite phenomenon composed of the oppressive, transition, and democratic eras (Mathenjwa and Phungula, 2024). Such killings have been a transfiguring social ill in South Africa. The overall change in the nature of political assassinations in South Africa revolves around the causes and the victims of such killings. Mathenjwa (2023) suggested that political assassinations in South Africa have existed in three eras: the oppressive, the transitional, and the democratic era.

The colonial period and the apartheid period define the oppressive times in South Africa. During this period, political assassinations were mainly directed at government officials and activists fighting for liberation (Pillay, 2005; Schuld, 2013). Political assassinations during this era were a vertical type of political violence as politicians in the top executive government positions targeted political activists at the bottom segment of the social pyramid and vice versa. Mathenjwa and Phungula (2024: 38) argue that the motivating factor for such assassinations during the oppressive era was the conflict of interest between government officials of the National Party (NP) who wanted to maintain the status quo of the colonial regime and the political activists who were eager to advocate for social and political change.

The transition era can also be referred to as the road to democracy. This was a period when South Africa experienced a political shift from

the apartheid administration system to the new democratic dispensation. During the transition era in South Africa, political assassinations were mainly common in two provinces, Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal (Truth and Reconciliation Commission - TRC, 1998; Krelekrele, 2018). In this period, political assassinations mainly were an outcome of interparty clashes in these provinces. The African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) were at the center of the political violence that took hold of the two provinces. The NP was also part of the conflict, working closely with the IFP to fuel interparty clashes between the ANC and IFP as a divide-and-conquer tactic (Nomarwayi et al. 2020: 4). Political assassinations were then used as a tactic to eliminate members of the two opposing parties (Gwala, 1992; cited in Schuld, 2013; Krelekrele, 2018). According to the TRC (1998), Ardè (2020), and Mathenjwa and Phungula (2024), political assassinations during this period were mostly common in tribal lands, townships, and hostels in KZN and Gauteng. The primary victims of such killings were political party leaders, prominent activists, influential politicians, and party supporters.

In the democratic era following 1994 in South Africa, political assassinations continue to be a significant issue within the country. As noted by Krelekrele (2018), Nomarwayi et al. (2020), Ardè (2020), and Mathenjwa (2023), these assassinations have evolved into an intra-party dilemma for the ANC. Ardè (2020) asserts that within this democratic context, members of the ANC resort to killing one another over party and deployment positions. According to Nomarwayi et al. (2020: 8), the political assassinations occurring within the ANC are fueled by conflicts and struggles for power. The Moerane Commission (2018) corroborated these findings, highlighting the prevalence of political assassinations within the ANC. Additionally, the Moerane Commission (2018) emphasized that comrades engage in lethal actions against one another for political party positions at the branch level and for deployment roles, particularly within local government and municipal frameworks. Nomarwayi et al. (2020) and Mathenjwa (2023) further argue that politicians are motivated to secure political party positions at the branch level and local government deployment offices due to the economic advantages they provide through the potential for manipulating state tender contracts.

According to Krelekrele (2018), political assassinations in the democratic dispensation are also an inter-party concern involving the ANC, IFP, and the National Freedom Party (NFP). For the Moerane

Commission (2018) and Mathenjwa (2023), the interparty clashes that led to political assassinations were driven mainly by competition for power at local government structures, especially in municipalities.

In the democratic dispensation, whistleblowers have also been key victims of political assassinations (Moerane Commission, 2018; Ardè, 2020; Mathenjwa and Phungula, 2024). In the Moerane Commission (2018), there was evidence presented regarding politicians who are fighting corruption and reporting wrongdoing when later targeted and killed, and this includes people such as Moses Phakwe (2008), Xola Banisi (2014), Sindiso Magaqa (2017), and Babita Deokaran (2021). According to Ardè (2020), the cost of reporting corruption is fatal. Mathenjwa (2023) argues that patriotic citizens who report organizational wrongdoing are mistreated, abused, dismissed, and sometimes even killed for blowing the whistle.

Political assassinations in South Africa have existed in three phases. The underlying causes for such a phenomenon revolve around squabbles for political power (Ardè, 2020; Mathenjwa, 2023). The issue of political assassinations is not a new phenomenon in South Africa. However, it continues to exist and transform. Political assassinations represent a significant national concern in South Africa; however, the province of KZN stands out statistically for having the highest incidence of intentional murders carried out for political motives.

Political Assassination in Kwa-Zulu Natal

In relation to political assassinations, there is a problem in KZN (Moerane, 2018; Ardè, 2020; Makhaye, 2023; Mathenjwa and Phungula, 2024). According to the Moerane Commission (2018), the KZN province is a killing field exposed to murders committed intentionally for political purposes. Ardè (2020) also attests to this claim as he describes KZN as a murder site, vulnerable to political killings. For Mathenjwa and Phungula (2024: 37), the KZN province is a breeding ground for political assassinations.

A study by GI-TOC (2021: 10) reported that South Africa experienced a total of 1,822 recorded assassinations between the years 2000 and 2020. Of these, 323 cases, representing 38%, occurred in KZN, establishing it as the primary contributor to the national statistics. Furthermore, the GI-TOC (2021: 11) indicated that from 2015 to 2020, the country documented 858 assassinations, with 21% classified as political, which corresponds to 180 political assassinations occurring in

South Africa during that period. Notably, of the 180 political assassinations recorded from 2015 to 2020, 103, or 56%, were reported in KZN.

uMzimkhulu: A Locality Prone to Political Assassinations

uMzimkhulu is a town located between Ixopo and Kokstad in KZN, under the administration of the Harry Gwala district municipality (Ngqwala, 2021: 41). According to the uMzimkhulu Local Municipality website (2025), the area has a population of 18,0302 people and 20 wards, of which 46% is under traditional administration. Ngqwala (2021: 14) notes that uMzimkhulu, as a Local Municipality, was previously part of the Eastern Cape Province until its incorporation into the KZN Province in March 2006, based on the new Demarcation Act of 2005.

The town of uMzimkhulu has been exposed to several political assassinations after the year 2015. Political assassinations in uMzimkhulu peaked between 2016 and 2018 (Ngqwala, 2021; Mathenjwa, 2023). Olifant (2017) finds that the spurge of political assassinations in uMzimkhulu is a relatively new phenomenon. During the 2016 – 2018 period, uMzimkhulu has been characterized as a killing field composed of hits directed at politicians involved in local government administration (Ardè, 2020).

The overview of political assassinations in KZN during the democratic dispensation casually involves the locality of uMzimkhulu. The Moerane Commission (2018), which was established to investigate the underlying causes of political assassinations in KZN, stumbled upon several testimonies regarding the escalating phenomenon of political assassinations in uMzimkhulu. Ardè's book (2020) unpacked the social aspect of political assassinations, and uMzimkhulu was presented as a significant case study. Ngqwala (2021) embarked on a research journey evaluating the gendered perspectives of post-apartheid political killings, focusing on the town of uMzimkhulu as a case study. Mathenjwa and Phungula (2024) characterized the political assassinations that took place in uMzimkhulu as a typical example of the changing nature of political killings in KZN.

Stories of assassinations and attempted assassinations of politicians in uMzimkhulu

Khaya Thobela (2017)

Khaya Thobela, following the 2016 Local Government Election in South Africa, was a councilor at the uMzimkhulu municipality (Moerane, 2018; Ardè, 2020). He was also the deputy secretary of the ANC's Harry Gwala region (Ardè, 2020). In April 2017, Khaya Thobela was ambushed at his home by unknown gunmen and died three days later in a hospital (Olifant, 2017; Moerane, 2018). According to evidence presented at the Moerane Commission (2018), Thobela's assassination happened soon after he refused to sign documents relating to the uMzimkhulu Memorial Hall.

The uMzimkhulu Memorial Hall was a key topic in the town, especially among politicians. According to Ardè (2020: 68), the uMzimkhulu Memorial Hall is a boondoggle at the center of political violence that overwhelmed uMzimkhulu between 2016 and 2018. According to the Moerane Commission (2018) and Ardè (2020):

The uMzimkhulu Memorial Hall is a glaringly obvious boondoggle. In 2012, a R4 million contract was awarded to give the hall a facelift. Five years and two contractors later, the project cost had escalated to R16 million, but most of the work was still incomplete. News reports later suggested that an official was romantically linked to the owner of the first company that was contracted and that was eventually kicked off-site.

The memorial hall was at the center of Thobela's assassination (Moerane, 2018; Ardè, 2020). The political dynamics involving the hall led to the intentional murder of three politicians who worked in the uMzimkhulu local municipality. The hall was indeed the keystone for political violence that devastated the citizens of uMzimkhulu between 2016 and 2018.

Mduduzi Tshibase (2017)

Mduduzi Tshibase was a professional teacher and a part-time PR councilor at the uMzimkhulu municipality. Tshibase, 39, was fatally shot on May 23, 2017, while entering his residence in Gugwini village, just outside Umzimkhulu. He sustained four gunshot wounds to the chest

(Mthethwa, 2018). According to the Moerane Commission (2018), Tshibase's murder was prompted by internal factional battles in the ANC.

Sindiso Magaqa (2017)

Sindiso Magaqa was a leading figure within the ANC. He held various positions in the ANCYL (African National Congress Youth League), and from 2016 to 2017, he served as a PR councilor for the uMzimbhulu municipality (Moerane, 2018; Ardè, 2020). On July 13, 2017, Magaqa was attacked by gunmen and ultimately succumbed to his severe injuries on September 4, 2017 (Moerane, 2018). Evidence presented at the Moerane Commission (2018) and Ardè (2020) indicates that Magaqa was murdered following his objections regarding the uMzimbhulu Memorial Hall.

Jabulile Stella Msiya (2017)

After the 2016 local government elections in South Africa, Jabulile Msiya was a ward councilor in uMzimbhulu. She was also a member of the Executive Council during this period (Moerane, 2018). On the 13th of July, Msiya survived an assassination attack. She was in a car with Nonsikelelo Mafa (who also survived) and Magaqa, who later passed on (Xulu, 2025). During the proceedings of the Moerane Commission (2018), Msiya indicated that factional battles of the ANC were intense in the town of uMzimbhulu, and the corruption chaos involving the uMzimbhulu Memorial Hall was central to the assassination attack she survived in 2017.

Nonsikelelo Mafa (2017)

Nonsikelelo Mafa also survived an assassination attempt that took place on the 13th of July 2017. At the time, she was in a car with Msiya and Magaqa. At the time of the assassination, Mafa was a Ward Councilor at the Adelaide Tambo branch in Ward 11, uMzimbhulu (Moerane, 2018). When Mafa gave evidence in the Moerane Commission (2018), she also indicated that factional battles in the ANC and the Memorial Hall in uMzimbhulu were at the center of the killing spree that overwhelmed the uMzimbhulu politicians in 2017. Mafa also mentioned that they (Mafa, Msiya, and Magaqa) were targeted for vocalizing corruption tendencies

committed by comrades and the irregularities involving the Memorial Hall.

Theoretical analysis of political assassinations in uMzimkhulu

The scholarly analysis of the political phenomenon that took hold of the town of uMzimkhulu between 2016 and 2018 is framed using the theory of political realism. Political realism represents a significant tradition in political thought that dismisses the notion that politics aims to provide moral or ethical values like happiness or freedom. Instead, proponents of political realism contend that politics fundamentally revolves around power. Power is the instrument through which objectives are accomplished, adversaries are overcome, and agreements are maintained (Kelly, 2020). This theory is suitable for this study because it intends to describe human nature, which ultimately shapes political events.

The review of the literature concerning the issue of political assassinations in uMzimkhulu maintains that factional battles in the ANC and corruption tactics drive such a phenomenon. Stomach politics and hunger games for political power are key premises to the issue of political factional battles. As suggested by Moerane (2018), Ardè (2020), and Nomarwayi (2020), factional battles in the ANC are fatal. Mathenjwa and Phungula (2024) also note that pursuing political power causes factional battles. The interest behind acquiring political power is the practical idea that political power guarantees economic advantages.

Political realism contextualizes the assassination of politicians in uMzimkhulu. Realist thinkers begin with an analysis of human nature. Thucydides, a classical theorist, significantly contributed to the development of realist theory. He posited that human actions are driven by fear, ambition, and a quest for dominance (Barrientos, 2018). According to Donnelly (2009), a realist perspective characterizes human nature as self-serving and therefore predisposed to immoral behavior. Political realism asserts that individuals are driven by the desire to uphold superiority and gain power.

From a realist point of view, political assassinations in uMzimkhulu between 2016 and 2018 are rooted in the political squabbles for power. This aligns with the evidence presented in the Moerane Commission (2018). In the commission (2018), factional battles in the ANC were central to the phenomenon of political assassinations in uMzimkhulu. Realists describe this behavior by describing human nature as they maintain that humans are egotistic creatures who would do anything to

access power and maintain political advantages. The claim that factional battles are a key factor leading to political assassinations is framed using political realism because realists describe politics, in essence, as a struggle for power.

Corruption in the town of uMzimkhulu led to the intentional killing of politicians who were against the nature of political administration in the municipality. Political realism explains how politicians become corrupt. Machiavelli maintains that humans are wicked and will always give vent to malignity in their minds when an opportunity is offered (Machiavelli, 1532; cited in Donnelly, 2009). For realists, once politicians occupy positions of power, they become corrupt because the decision to join politics was never to advance public interests but rather to secure personal interests.

The assassination of political figures has been characterized as a strategy employed to evade accountability (Moerane, 2018; Ardè, 2020). In uMzimkhulu, corrupt politicians eliminate colleagues who plan to expose corrupt practices or misconduct within the municipality. Political realists thoroughly elucidate this occurrence. According to realists, politicians are prepared to undertake any actions necessary to gain and sustain political power (Donnelly, 2009). Those in political and governmental positions within the uMzimkhulu municipality are willing to go to extreme lengths, including the intentional killing of comrades and colleagues, to secure economic benefits through corrupt means (Ardè, 2020).

Methodology

This study was conducted as a qualitative research study. The main issue under scrutiny was the assassination of politicians in the town of uMzimkhulu between 2016 and 2018. There were no statistical or quantitative aspects investigated concerning the assassination of politicians in uMzimkhulu. The study specifically investigated the phenomenon's qualitative aspects, focusing on understanding the causes of political assassinations in uMzimkhulu. Qualitative research systematically analyses data to provide a better understanding of a phenomenon (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2021: 201). The qualitative approach was suitable for the intended objective of the study.

The town of uMzimkhulu was the main area under investigation. The author did not conduct any interviews but made use of secondary data. Social artifacts were intentionally selected on the basis that they covered

political assassinations in the town of uMzimkhulu between 2016 and 2018. This study did not consider any political killings that occurred in uMzimkhulu before 2016 and after 2018. KZN is a volatile province when it comes to political assassinations. However, the author did not investigate national or provincial cases. Preference was given to sources that specifically discussed the issue of political assassinations in uMzimkhulu.

Findings and Discussion

A Predicament in the African National Congress

Political assassinations that occurred in uMzimkhulu from 2016 to 2018 exemplify a phenomenon characterized by Moerane (2018) and Ardè (2020) as 'comrades killing each other.' These political assassinations in uMzimkhulu during the specified period represented an intra-party issue. The ANC was the primary party implicated in this political occurrence. Members of the ANC were killing each other for political power positions.

Political assassinations in KZN have been a significant inter-party phenomenon (TRC, 1998; Krelekrele, 2018). Throughout the apartheid period, the ANC, IFP, and NP were engaged in conflict, utilizing political assassinations as a means to remove adversaries from rival parties (TRC, 1998). In the transitional period and the establishment of democracy, the KZN region continued to witness inter-party violence involving the ANC, IFP, United Democratic Front (UDF), United Democratic Movement (UDM), and the NFP (Krelekrele, 2018; Nomarwayi, 2020; Mathenjwa, 2023). However, the study found that uMzimkhulu represents the changing nature of political assassinations in KZN, as the town was overwhelmed by political assassinations driven by factional battles in the ANC.

According to Ardè (2020: 68), after the 2016 local government elections, uMzimkhulu was the stronghold of the ANC. The party dominated the local government offices of the municipality. This reality prompted factional battles as comrades competed for positions of power (Ardè, 2020; Mathenjwa, 2023). This phenomenon is explained by political realists, who maintain that politicians are egotistic, selfish, and wicked creatures who would stop at nothing to advance personal interests of securing power (Donnelly, 2009). Members of the ANC were

vying for positions of authority within the municipality and at the branch level, and political assassinations were used as a means to a political end.

The Moerane Commission (2018) determined that politicians are drawn to positions of power due to the lack of required qualifications for specific roles, such as that of a councilor. Similarly, Mathenjwa and Phungula (2024) discovered that politicians are motivated to seek power because these roles provide a chance to exploit the tender system for corrupt economic gain. This observation aligns with Machiavelli's (1532) assertion that politicians will invariably express the malignity within them when the opportunity arises (Machiavelli, 1532; cited in Donnelly, 2009). Realists characterize humans as cunning, immoral, and corrupt (Gilbert, 1965). Political power positions allow politicians to manipulate power structures to protect their interests further.

The assassinations of politicians in uMzimbhulu between 2016 and 2018 were an internal issue of the ANC. Squabbles for political power positions motivated by stomach politics were central to factional battles in the party. During this period, there were no inter-party interactions that led to the killing of politicians. However, the ANC was the main party contributing to the killing spree of politicians between 2016 and 2018 in the town of uMzimbhulu.

A Fatal Monument: The uMzimbhulu Memorial Hall

The uMzimbhulu Memorial Hall was at the center of the killing spree that targeted politicians in uMzimbhulu between 2016 and 2018. The hall's refurbishment involved many irregularities and corrupt activities (Moerane, 2018). In 2012, the initial budget allocated for the project was R4 million, but it later escalated to R16 million. Despite significant government expenditure, the project was still unfinished five years later. (Ardè, 2020: 68). The uMzimbhulu Memorial Hall was a keystone for the political assassinations that devastated uMzimbhulu between 2016 and 2018.

The Memorial Hall project was mismanaged and treated as a goose to lay golden eggs for corrupt politicians and businesspeople. The concept of improperly overseeing government projects is elucidated via the political theory of realism. According to realists, human beings are inherently immoral, self-centred, and selfish. The driving force behind human actions is the intense desire for dominance and the pursuit of political power (Gilpin, 1984). Mathenjwa argued that for politicians, political power is not an end but a means to an economic end. Therefore,

politicians for realists are forever hungry and willing to do anything to access and maintain power because positions of political power come with glory, honor, and economic advantages.

The dynamics involving the uMzimkhulu Memorial Hall manifest human beings' selfish, greedy, and immoral nature. These manifestations are depicted in two ways. Firstly, human selfishness and greed are shown through the corrupt management of the Memorial Hall to advance personal interests. Secondly, the violent and savage nature of humans is manifested through the assassination of politicians who intended to hold the implicated people accountable.

Almost 90 percent of the politicians who were killed and those who survived political hits in uMzimkhulu between 2016 and 2018 were targeted for lifting the veil on the corrupt activities that took place in the process of refurbishing the Memorial Hall. Politicians who wanted accountability regarding the Memorial Hall were targeted and killed. Political assassinations were employed as a method to block transparency and evade accountability.

Assassinated for blowing the whistle

The category of assassinations currently being examined exemplifies what Mathenjwa and Phungula (2024) referred to as the contemporary manifestation of political assassinations prevalent in KZN: Whistleblower assassinations. The political assassinations that occurred in uMzimkhulu from 2016 to 2018 can be categorized as whistleblower assassinations. Most of the individuals targeted were whistleblowers who exposed corruption within the town, particularly concerning the Memorial Hall project. According to Ardè (2020), Khaya Thobela and Sindiso Magaqa were killed for being vocal about corruption. Evidence presented in the Moerane Commission (2018) also described Mduduzi Tshibase as a politician who fought against corruption. During this period, whistleblowing played a pivotal role in the political assassinations occurring in uMzimkhulu.

The concept of eliminating whistleblowers is also contextualized within the political theory of realism. Donnelly (2000) notes that politicians are driven by the desire to uphold superiority and retain power. The targeted killings of whistleblowers in uMzimkhulu served as a strategy to preserve access to influential positions. Should implicated politicians face exposure, it would likely result in judicial action and potential imprisonment, thereby disrupting the economic benefits

derived from corrupt practices. Consequently, politicians may resort to eliminating anyone who attempts to report misconduct in the name of accountability (Mathenjwa, 2023). In uMzimkhulu, between 2016 and 2018, individuals were murdered for exposing corruption related to the Memorial Hall.

Conclusion

This study investigated the underlying causes of political assassinations in the KZN town of uMzimkhulu. The study found that political assassinations in uMzimkhulu were an intraparty phenomenon driven by factional battles in the ANC. Secondly the study established that the uMzimkhulu Memorial Hall was central to the killing spree of politicians that overwhelmed the town between 2016 and 2018. Finally, the study found that the nature of political assassinations that took place between 2016 and 2018 in uMzimkhulu were directed at whistleblowers who intended to unveil organizational misconduct of fellow comrades in the municipality. This paper is of the view that the uMzimkhulu assassinations represent the changing nature of political violence in KZN through the evolution that incorporates whistleblowers as the main targets of political hits.

Recommendations

Institutionalizing Whistleblowing

According to Mathenjwa and Phungula (2024), political assassinations in KZN are increasingly directed at whistleblowers, as corrupt leaders are prepared to eliminate anyone who reports misconduct and organizational malfeasance. In South Africa, whistleblowers continue to be at risk and susceptible to assassination. This vulnerability is often exacerbated by the ineffective criminal justice system (Mathenjwa, 2023). In certain cases, reports of organizational misconduct are made internally to the organizations and the executive management implicated in the corrupt practices, further endangering whistleblowers.

The institutionalization of whistleblowing pertains to the creation of an entity designated to receive reports that expose organizational misconduct. Such entities would subsequently conduct investigations and seek accountability. The formation of these institutions would guarantee

the protection of whistleblowers and foster an environment in which individuals feel secure in reporting misconduct.

National Oversight of the Tenderpreneur System

Within the framework of democratic governance, political assassinations are intricately associated with the tenderpreneur system in South Africa (Ardè, 2020; Mathenjwa, 2024). It is crucial to oversee the dynamics related to the tender system. The government must implement policies to regulate the tender awarding process and monitor the progress of these projects. A lack of intervention in the procedural elements of the tender system creates a political environment conducive to assassinations, as interested parties may resort to extreme measures to secure and maintain access to government contracts. Government intervention and a review of policies regarding the tenderpreneur system would help mitigate the chaotic nature of the tender system that facilitates the occurrence of assassinations.

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