
BEYOND PROTEST: VIOLENCE, LOOTING AND ANARCHY IN JULY 2021

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08 December 2022

Introduction

The violence and looting that gripped the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and spread to Gauteng in July 2021, following the incarceration of former president Jacob Zuma was initially dismissed as protest as, on 9 July, city centres in Durban and Pietermaritzburg became ‘no go’ areas (Simkins, 2021). A mere four days later, it had become obvious that a state of anarchy – a complete breakdown of law and order – prevailed. Drawing on qualitative anthropological research, this chapter argues that what happened in those fateful few days went far beyond the type of protest South Africans have become accustomed to. Its rapid geographic spread and common modus operandi indicate that it was well orchestrated. While inciters and instigators have been identified, the ‘faceless’ people (Africa et al., 2021: 47) who planned it have, a year later, still not been identified.

Although this chapter seeks to explain what happened in July 2021, scholarly research on the topic is still in early stages. As will be indicated, the detailed factual information needed to explain adequately why these events happened remains lacking. This chapter thus explores what is known thus far, including details about the policing and intelligence inadequacies which allowed the unleashing of this state of anarchy. It is hoped that this chapter will help to inform further work to build a definitive theoretical framework of analysis for what took place.

The chapter starts by setting out the methodology and data used in compiling information about how the violence unfolded. It then describes the contextual historical, political and spatial dynamics of KZN province which facilitated the spread of the violence in July 2021, and the racial dynamics linked to it. The chronology of events is described next, using two case studies from the eThekweni Metro area. While the chapter alludes to the way in which similar disruptions spread to Gauteng, its focus is on KZN. The chapter analyses why the security arm of the state failed to pre-empt the violence and deal with it appropriately. This analysis draws on the findings of the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture; other expert panel reports on policing and security services, and the author’s own longitudinal research and interventions with government departments on policing and the functioning of the criminal justice system. The chapter concludes by arguing that the events of July 2021 are an indicator of a crisis of governance, especially in regard to criminal justice. This crisis need to be urgently addressed if disruptions of a similar nature are to be prevented from recurring.

Methodology

The chapter draws primarily on information collected by the author during the period in which the destabilisation occurred and in ensuing follow-up research. The methodology is of a qualitative

anthropological nature: members of the author's extensive networks, established over decades, provided information to produce a body of ethnographic material which can be used for theorising, an approach outlined by Okely (1996: 16–17). While the classic anthropological fieldwork method (which produces ethnographic data) involves the researcher's physical presence, the participation that informs this chapter has, increasingly, and especially in the type of violent situations described here, been conducted through personal interactions via online, telephonic and email communications.

The research is an example of what anthropologist Sally Falk Moore (2016) refers to as a processual approach to ethnography. Event data, she argues, unlike framed questions, are outside of the fieldworkers' control; yet an unexpected event provides an opportunity to 'examine its larger social ramifications, its more enduring consequences' (Moore, 2016: 25). Qualitative research of this nature recognises that the knowledge produced is itself influenced by the involvement of the researcher (Davis, 2001: 3). This impact is conspicuous in the long-standing field of Action Anthropology, in which the researcher makes specific interventions on behalf of the community being studied (Tax, 1975).

In the present case, the network of people providing information has expanded over the past two decades; information was offered in return for assistance from the researcher. Reports from community members and interventions by the researcher form a body of empirical material. For ethical reasons, in this analysis informants remain anonymous unless the identity of individuals is on public record (as in communications with the police or parliament) or permission is provided by the informant. The chapter also draws on relevant publications and selected media which form part of the social fact (Spitulnik, 1993), including social media such as messages and visual material circulating via systems such as WhatsApp. Unless cited otherwise, the information in the chapter is from the author's own records. The chapter also uses the detailed account of the July 2021 events documented by Hunter, Singh and Wicks (2021) as the main published account to date of the events as they unfolded in KZN and Gauteng.

The contextual dynamics of KZN

The province-specific dynamics of KZN help provide the essential backdrop to the events of July 2021. While KZN, like the rest of South Africa, shares the apartheid legacy, including its spatial planning – its distinctive attributes originate in its pre-1910 status as a British colony. Compared to other provinces, KZN has a far larger population of people of Indian origin (described here as 'Indians'), and the combination of colonialism and an assiduous promotion of a Zulu identity by the erstwhile KwaZulu

bantustan government has fuelled an ethno-nationalism, which was conspicuous in the political violence of the 1980s and early 1990s (De Haas, 2021; Sithole, 2021). Under the Presidency of Nelson Mandela, in an attempt to heal the deep divisions of the past, a conspicuous nation-building activity was pursued in the early years of South Africa's democracy. However, when Jacob Zuma became president in 2009, inclusive nation-building attempts declined. For example, Zuma is on record as associating his persecution for corruption and state capture with his Zulu identity, reinforcing a politicised ethnicity (De Haas, 2021: 169).

The spatial planning of apartheid forms much of the background to events described in this chapter, especially in Phoenix which was built as an Indian township during the apartheid years. The city of Durban, now part of the eThekweni Metro, followed the typical Group Areas planning of an expanding circle, with white areas surrounded by so-called coloured and Indian residential areas (in effect, buffer zones), and the black urban (township) and rural areas on the outer periphery. The nature of the KwaZulu Bantustan (like others, based on colonial era 'reserves') consisted of disparate parcels of land, some of which, like the largest townships of Umlazi and KwaMashu, were part of the Greater Durban area. As is illustrated below, during July 2021, the 'buffer zone' residents were the most vulnerable when anarchy was unleashed.

The events of 1949, described as African/Indian riots, are etched in the memories of eThekweni's Indian residents. Fifty Indians died, 503 were injured, and tremendous damage was done to their property in attacks by Africans – although many more Africans died, largely at the hands of police and military (Brooks and deB Webb, 1965: 292). These riots occurred in the context of a close working relationship between African National Congress (ANC) and Indian Congress political leaders and were fuelled by virulent 'anti-Indianism' in white politics of the time (Meer, 2019).

Since then, inter-racial tensions have surfaced periodically, and in 2014, the KZN Premier and members of the Executive Council established a special committee to investigate threats to social cohesion in the province and to inform the government's response to such threats. The committee's research confirmed the existence of such threats, including identity-driven prejudices impeding the building of a common South African identity. It stressed that socio-economic inequalities, linked to unaccountable and corrupt governance, were the biggest threat to cohesion and were linked to a sense of African marginalisation and exclusion (Report of the Special Committee on Social Cohesion, 2015).

Alongside the persistence of these impediments to cohesion, governance of the province deteriorated further after the municipal elections of 2016, when Zuma supporters in the African National Congress (ANC) captured major municipalities, such as eThekweni (De Haas, 2016). Under the leadership of

Mayor Zandile Gumede, what is now known as the Radical Economic Transformation (RET) faction of the ANC took control. This control was tangible in decisions about tenders and the appointment of senior municipal employees. Specific illustrations included irregularly appointed metro police (Magubane, 2021) and Gumede, together with 21 others, being put on trial for corruption (Kubheka, 2022).

The wheels of spreading violence to inland areas, as happened in July, were oiled in the early 1990s when political violence with overt ethnic overtones in KZN spread rapidly to the hostels, informal settlements, and trains in what is now the province of Gauteng (De Haas, 1993). These networks extend into the present and help explain the events of July 2021. Detectives currently investigating common murders describe how criminals are often immediately relocated to hiding places in Gauteng, including in or around hostels closely linked to KZN. The Report of the Expert Panel into the July 2021 Civil Unrest refers to the role of these hostels in facilitating the spread of the violence (Africa et al., 2021: 42). Furthermore, KZN is the home base of an extremely powerful (and, according to police sources, untouchable) long-distance taxi association, which has country-wide tentacles. The Expert Panel on the July Unrest refers to mini-bus taxis transporting agitators from KZN to Gauteng and being seen there going from mall to mall (Africa et al., 2021: 43).

The arrest of Zuma and its aftermath: Destruction and looting unleashed

Following his refusal to appear before the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, chaired by Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo, former president Jacob Zuma was sentenced to 15 months of imprisonment. After various stalling tactics, the deadline to hand himself over to the police and prison authorities was set for midnight of Wednesday 7 July 2021. In the days leading up to that deadline, a crowd of family members and supporters, comprising mainly people claiming to be members of the Umkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans Association (MKMVA) and their allies in the ANC-RET forces, had gathered at Zuma's Nkandla homestead (Hunter et al., 2021: 24–26). They had also been joined by Zihogo 'Mgilija' Nhleko, leader of the Zulu King's regiments, in full warrior attire, whose presence was condemned by members of that family (Mboti, 2021).

Messages and photographs from the author's contacts showed a huge contingent of police vehicles, including police members from outside of KZN, lined up outside the homestead. From within the compound emanated gunshots and seditious threats. Amid fears of a bloodbath should Zuma fail to hand himself in, the country was on edge. The relief as Zuma was escorted out of the complex by police and prison officials, minutes before midnight, according to observers at the scene, was palpable

(*Reuters* journalist, personal communication, 7 July 2021; *Bloomberg* journalist, personal communication, 7 July 2021; Phillip Mhlongo, personal communication, 7 July 2021).¹

The messages and visuals of three WhatsApp groups set up by supporters of Zuma between 8 and 10 July are described in a statement by lawyer and GOOD political party secretary-general, Brett Herron, in August 2021. He says the groups alluded to ‘acts of terrorism, insurrection, looting and violence’ (Herron, 2021). The three WhatsApp groups were the ‘eThekweni shutdown’, the ‘Free Zuma’ and ‘the INK shutdown’ groups. The periods during which these messages were sent coincided with the rapid spread of violence in those contiguous Inanda/Ntuzuma/KwaMashu (‘INK’) areas. Herron extracted the names and telephone numbers of the members of the groups: they included employees of the eThekweni municipality; ANC members active in ward structures; a close relative of Zuma who wins municipal tenders; a member of the Zulu regiment at Nkandla; and a South African National Defence Force (SANDF) soldier (Herron, 2021). A prime agitator of the violence, against whom a case was opened by the DA, was Jacob Zuma’s daughter, Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla (Hunter et al., 2021: 53). Other star social media inciters were Bonginkosi Khanyile, known for his involvement in the student FeesMustFall movement, and former SABC Radio Zulu employee, Mgizwe Mchunu. Khanyile and Mchunu were subsequently arrested and are facing incitement-related charges (Hunter et al., 2021: 68–69; Khumalo, 2022; Goba, 2022a). As at October 2022, KZN prosecuting authorities were still investigating whether to prosecute Zuma-Sambudla, while the cases of both Khanyile and Mchunu remained on the court roll (Singh, 2022).

The large security presence at Nkandla dispersed after Zuma had been arrested, and by Friday 9 July, the national roads in the province – the N2 running north and south of Durban, and the N3 national freeway inland – were blocked by immobilised trucks, the keys of which were stolen after drivers had been stopped and forced to park across the roads (Hunter et al., 2021: 71). Initially, it seemed to be a variation of previous attacks on trucks by truck associations aligned to the RET faction, which had a history of attacking, blocking and stoning trucks (Nxumalo, 2020). By late that day the N11 near Ladysmith was blocked by burning barricades, and the Mooi River toll plaza (long a scene of protest) was blocked when thirty trucks were torched (Hunter et al., 2021: 51, 55). At least one regional road leaving Pietermaritzburg (Old Greytown Road) was also blocked and cars were attacked.

Later the same day, protest action commenced in central Durban, especially in the Overport area towards the Umgeni River (Hunter et al., 2021: 51). Here, increasing numbers of informal settlements have taken shape for over thirty years, Kennedy Road being one of the earliest (Hindson and McCarthy,

¹ Two journalists and a politician present outside the homestead on evening of 7 July 2021, who were in touch with the author, in the hours leading up to Zuma leaving the complex, were fearful that violence could erupt.

1994: 222). As will be shown in the case studies below, the recruitment of looters from nearby shack areas was to become a standard practice during the next few days (Africa et al., 2021: 43). Protests, accompanied by looting, had started in the INK area, moving towards the central city area (Hunter et al., 2021: 49).

By Saturday 10 July, the intentions of the inciters and their associates in fuelling the mayhem were clear. In Newcastle, about thirty armed men used the same tactics employed on the main national roads, forcing truck drivers to stop and park along the N11 (Hunter et al., 2021: 58). Concerns were raised about the possible targeting of the Durban and Richards Bay harbours, and the King Shaka International Airport (Hunter et al., 2021: 58–59). By the time the intelligence agencies alerted the ministerial security cluster to the probability of the violence spreading, it had already started in Gauteng, around the George Gough hostel in Johannesburg (Africa et al., 2021: 42). In some instances, minibus taxis from KZN were going from mall to mall in Gauteng, especially those near informal settlements (Africa et al., 2021: 42–3). Hunter et al. (2021: 66–69) describe how the violence spread from Jeppeshtown, Johannesburg to other parts of the city, including areas in Soweto, Alexandra, Hillbrow and the central business district. The unrest then spread to Mamelodi in Tshwane, where police and security personnel fought off an onslaught on a local mall (Hunter et al., 2021: 125–128).

As the events in Gauteng unfolded, and the looting and destruction in eThekweni metro intensified, ANC representatives, on two separate television panel discussions about the violence, continued to insist it was only protest. These televised discussions took place on the afternoons of 10 and 11 July on SABC and Newzroom Africa, respectively. The ANC NEC had met over that weekend and, on Monday 12 July, acting Secretary-General Jesse Duarte, in the official statement for the NEC meeting, described the ongoing violence, looting and destruction as ‘sporadic acts of violence, looting, intimidation and destruction of property’ (Hunter et al., 2021: 51).

While the television panel discussion of 11 July was underway, the malls at the huge southern Durban township of Umlazi were being looted and, in some cases, set on fire. That evening, a resident known to the author sent her a telephone message telling her that he had just left the eMaweleni Mall in Umlazi, with an accompanying picture of the mall in flames (Personal communication, 11 July 2021). He expressed fears that there might be people trapped inside the mall and added that he had seen a police car speed past without stopping. It subsequently transpired that the KwaMnyandu and Megacity malls in Umlazi had also been looted and partially set on fire (Makhaye, 2021).

Also in Umlazi, the smaller and newer of the township’s two police stations was so badly damaged that it stayed closed for weeks. According to locals, as well as a journalist (Telephonic communication, August–September 2021), it had been looted of guns and ammunition which, the sources said, were

used in gang-related massacres weeks after the looting. Despite the author raising questions in correspondence with South African Police Service (SAPS), no reply about whether such looting occurred has ever been received (Letter to District and Provincial Commissioners of SAPS, 8 September 2021). However, a media statement released by the SAPS on 30 September 2021 acknowledged that a firearm belonging to a Bhekithemba police member was among the firearms and ammunition recovered in a raid that morning (SAPS, 2021).

A voice message forwarded to the author via WhatsApp by a Pietermaritzburg resident (Personal communication, 11 July 2021), threatening that the city would be shut down the following day, turned out to be true. According to a research assistant of the author who was in close contact with the author at the time (Personal communication, 11–15 July 2021; 12 August 2021), the modus operandi was said to be the same (with slight variation regarding vehicles) as that described to her as being used in rural south and north coast KZN towns, including Bulwer, Richmond, Ixopo, Port Shepstone, KwaDukuza, Eshowe and Esikhaleni (the Richards Bay area). Vehicles that arrived in Pietermaritzburg were described as beautiful new double-cab vans with tinted windows carrying unknown people who emerged from their vehicles with tools, who started inciting others and smashing locks, security bars and gates so looters could enter malls or small businesses. These vans were mainly white, and without number plates; they left without a trace once access to shops or malls by looters had been enabled by breaking barriers such as doors and gates.

The only mall in Edendale, the sprawling, densely populated black African area around the city, was looted, set on fire, and razed to the ground. A video circulating on social media, received by the author on 13 July via WhatsApp, showed a man breaking into an ATM and removing wads of cash. The video, which the author has a copy of, was passed to the local District Commissioner for investigation via email on 22 July 2022, but no further feedback was received about its authenticity (Email to District Commissioner SAPS Umgungundlovu District, 22 July 2022 and WhatsApp, 13 July 2022). The looting and burning in Pietermaritzburg itself included two other malls (Brookside and Southgate), and the local Makro store (Hunter et al., 2021: 98, 101).

A tense situation developed in the Khan Road area of Pietermaritzburg, a formerly Indian suburb which now includes informal settlements. The author forwarded a message she received about criminals threatening businesses and homes, and fanning racial tensions, to the SAPS District Commissioner Umgungundlovu, requesting him to take urgent action to prevent escalation (see also Erasmus, 2021). The District Commissioner was approached due to the general lack of confidence in the local Mountain Rise police (within whose jurisdiction the area falls), where some members are alleged to collude with

the local RET faction councillor who, at the time of writing, was on trial for corruption-related charges (Goba, 2021a).

It is informative to compare the methods used in Pietermaritzburg with the eye-witness description given to the author by Mr M (Personal communication, July 2021–16 August 2022) – a resident in a nearby rural area, where shops run by Pakistani shopkeepers were looted but not burnt. Mr M relates how the onslaught on the mall at the entrance to Esikhaleni, a township near Richards Bay, took place. He was on his way to collect his medication at the nearby clinic when he noticed what was starting to happen outside the mall. As usual, there were taxis and women plying an informal sector trade, but there were two groups of young men, one of which was hanging around outside the mall, and the other just inside near the entrance. He saw the men in the mall signal to those outside, who then joined them, and they all started to try and break into the liquor store, with some leaving to fetch tools to break the roller security doors (personal communication with Mr M, July 2021 to 16 August 2022).²

Mr M saw the taxi drivers move away and described feeling ‘as if I am dreaming’ as he witnessed the looting begin with the liquor store. He quickly moved away to the clinic, from where he would later see people walking past carrying looted articles. When he returned to the mall area a little later, the looting was in full swing while other parts of the mall were burning. Cars and bakkies were arriving to fetch looters. The mall was razed to the ground and has still not been rebuilt (Mr M, personal communication, July 2021–16 August 2022; see also Abrahams, 2021, regarding other nearby northern areas).

In another major North Coast town, Eshowe, in which the historically white and African areas are very close to the town centre, a similar scene played out, with cars and bakkies without number plates arriving to take looters away. The local iThala bank, catering for largely African customers, was burnt, along with the looted wholesale stores. In the surrounding rural areas, farmed by small-scale cane farmers, 31 farmers (28 women and 3 men) had their cane fields burnt before the crops could be harvested (Personal communication, Ms D, 23 August 2021–23 August 2022).³

Business complexes were similarly looted, and sometimes burnt, unless successfully defended by locals, sometimes with the assistance of taxi drivers and security company personnel. In Nongoma,

² Mr M was not the only person who told the author that the mall had been burnt. There were several follow-ups with other residents in the area in July 2021. The follow-up on 16 August 2022 was to ascertain if the mall had been rebuilt.

³ This information was provided by Ms D, who works on developmental and justice issues with local women. The author has been in contact with her for several years. She spoke to her last July, and has been in touch with her since then, including in August 2022 to ascertain whether destroyed businesses had been rebuilt.

three youth leaders were shot and hospitalised trying to defend their town from looters, some of whom disappeared and returned with live ammunition to shoot at the defenders. A Community Policy Forum (CPF) member asked the police present why they were not assisting and was told they lacked crowd control resources (Khanyile, 2021).

With some exceptions, malls and businesses throughout Durban were similarly damaged and looted. This was only stalled or prevented when local civilians created street committees blocking entry to looters. According to people in different areas the author spoke to, in most cases police were either absent or not present in sufficient numbers to deal with crowds of looters, as reported by Hunter et al. (2021: 7, 11, 52, 84) and Africa et al. (2021). Malls easily accessible to large communities of potential looters were particularly vulnerable. The worst affected area was that of the large industrial park in Springfield, and the Cornubia business park not far from the elite, gated communities inland from Umhlanga Rocks (Hunter et al., 2021: 88, 92).

In the Springfield area, the large Makro complex is directly opposite the Value Centre. Hunter et al. (2021) describe how, after the start of the looting, a group of men overseeing it arrived in cars and bakkies to cart the loot away. Police, vastly outnumbered by hordes of looters, filmed a video clip of the destruction of these two complexes from their vehicle. On the other side of the major intersection, near the Umgeni River at the sprawling Springfield Park and Riverhorse Valley industrial parks, trucks and cars queued to take away the loot, especially electronic goods, while those on foot carried appliances away (Hunter et al., 2021: 104–105, 117).

On the northern side of the Umgeni River, there were noticeable differences in the way in which, compared with the vulnerability of poorer communities, upmarket residential areas inland from Umhlanga Rocks were able to defend themselves in gated communities, well-guarded by private security. However, not far away in Cornubia Industrial Park the onslaught was similar to that on Springfield businesses. Security guards were unable to stop the plunder of the R250 million television production facility, where creative criminals even commandeered forklifts to assist them to remove their ill-gotten goods (Hunter et al., 2021: 92).

According to information received by the author from a police source, at least five bodies – all by gunshot death – were found in Cornubia on 14 July (SAPS Anon 1, personal communication, 15 July 2022). A particularly serious incident was the burning of a local chemical plant, United Phosphorous Limited (UPL) at which dangerous chemicals were being stored. UPL was operating illegally and was not in possession of the necessary environmental authorisation. Had it operated legally, it would have been listed as a Major Hazard Installation, and subject to stricter emergency intervention plans (Singh, 2021; Goba, 2021b). The local guards were powerless to stop the torching. As described below, the

environmental consequences were devastating (Hunter et al., 2021: 92; Goba, 2021b). On Wednesday 14 July, the main deployment of what would eventually total around 25,000 soldiers, ordered by the President of South Africa on the night of 11 July arrived in the province (Africa et al., 2021: 45).

Also on 14 July, a huge mob overpowered guards, forced its way into a container depot in Mobeni, near Durban harbour and looted 1.5 million rounds of ammunition ordered from abroad by private gun shops. It was believed to be an 'inside' job and was being investigated by the Hawks (Hunter et al., 2021: 131). Police believed that the ammunition had been widely distributed to criminal gangs; some of it turned up in nearby Lamontville township later in July during an exchange of fire between police searching for looted goods and criminal gangs (Hunter et al., 2021: 133–134).

That the mobs of looters were described as 'black African' heightened racial tensions in the course of the looting, including in white communities. An example is provided by a description of events in coastal areas to the south of Durban, where serious damage to business occurred in several towns (Ardé, 2021). In a voice note recorded at the height of the violence on 14/15 July 2021 and forwarded to the author by a source known to her for many years (Personal communication, 15 July 2021), the stressed voice of an English-speaking man is heard describing what was happening in areas between the southern part of the eThekweni Metro and Scottburgh, a resort town further south. He refers to 'busloads' of people, presumably black African, being dispatched to towns from nearby rural areas, posing a serious threat to businesses and even police stations, and advises group members with guns to use them with live ammunition to defend themselves – for, how else could one respond in the face of such lawlessness, he argued.

In the same voice note, the man, who appears to have been involved in local civil defence groupings, claimed that he and his colleagues had to purchase ammunition for the police, who had run out of it (details of the quantity and type of ammunition, and name of the gun shop where it was purchased, were given). It has been impossible to verify what he said about the police running out of ammunition, as a senior police source at the time told the author they had 'plenty' (SAPS Anon 2, personal communication, 22 July 2022).⁴

Hunter et al. (2021: 95, 96) also refer to fears of a backlash from, and mobilisation by, ultra-conservative white groupings. This happened in Pongola, near the border of Mpumalanga province, where tensions rose when farmers set up roadblocks restricting access by Africans to the town,

⁴ The recording was sent to the author by a long-standing acquaintance who advised it was circulating in the urban suburb she lived in, sent by their own security service providers. The author checked with a resident of the area referred to in the voice note, who is well known to her. She confirmed the threats that had been made, and that the community safety groups had been very busy. She also confirmed hearing a great deal of private aircraft activity, which had also been referred to in the voice note.

without engaging with the police. The District Commissioner was informed via WhatsApp and he intervened to defuse the situation (WhatsApp communication between author and District Commissioner Zululand, 13 July 2021).

The dynamics of instigation, severe racial tensions and threat to livelihoods that brought the July 2021 events close to a point of no-return of revolt and uprising, are further illustrated through the case studies of Phoenix and Cato Crest.

Case study 1: Phoenix

The residential area of Phoenix was built in the 1970s as an apartheid township under Group Areas legislation, adjacent to land historically occupied by Africans and Indians. By the 1980s, parts of the adjacent Inanda area had been incorporated into KwaZulu, as had the nearby African townships. Other parts, including those of Indian occupation, were still to be transferred for consolidation into a so-called homeland.

In August 1985, while apartheid state-sponsored violence raged in nearby African townships, there was looting and burning of Indian houses in Inanda. Armed attackers demanded that Indians leave, saying it was Zulu land. Within days, 47 shops owned or managed by Indian people had been burnt, and 500 Indian families had fled the area. Shacks, some built with left-over materials from the properties destroyed, started springing up (Ainslie and De Haas, 1998: 244–248).

Researchers, pointing out that some African residents shielded their Indian neighbours, argued that this was yet another apartheid divide-and-rule strategy to force Indian families out of the area for purposes of consolidating the KwaZulu Bantustan (Meer, 1985). Prior to the 1994 elections, the area was badly wracked by violence. Indian Public Order Police (POP) members who were deployed to patrol the area in the weeks leading up to the elections were named in affidavits as fuelling the violence and abusing residents while shouting ‘this is for 1949’ (Ainslie and De Haas, 1998: 259).

By 2021, Phoenix had become a multi-racial residential area, adjacent to the vast INK area, comprising formal townships, informal and RDP housing. Events there during July 2021 must be understood in this spatial and historic context.

What follows is a summary of what seems to have happened in July 2021. Initially looters from INK were using Phoenix as a transit route. However, the area was also being accessed by criminals bent on destruction, including of small businesses. Roadblocks were set up and racial profiling became conspicuous. By the time the violence subsided, 36 people had died in a variety of incidents (Hunter

et al., 2021: 160, 166–181). Phoenix is notorious for criminal drug-dealing gangs, and it is likely that gang members were implicated in some of the roadblocks and vigilante attacks on Africans. Video footage of Indian men driving and firing at Africans walking in the road was sent to the author. There were also allegations, including from a police source, that well-known private security companies operating in the area were implicated (SAPS Anon 1, personal communications, 15 July 2021–9 August 2021).

On 19 July, the author sent an urgent letter to the SAPS Provincial Commissioner and his national counterpart, copied to the Police Portfolio Committee and the Private Security Industry Regulator Authority (PSIRA), requesting urgent intervention to defuse the situation. No response was received from the SAPS. PSIRA, having launched an investigation, advised the Expert Panel on the July Unrest that certain of their affiliates (names not given) had been suspended and that investigations were ongoing (Africa et al., 2021: 72). Subsequently, the author received an email communication from PSIRA in response to queries about the involvement of private security companies in the unrest. The email contained confirmation that a total of seven security companies and 11 security officers had been found to be involved in the unrest of July 2021 (PSIRA, 25 October 2022).

One of the security companies named by a police source in alleged criminal conduct, including serious abuses of African people (SAPS Anon 1, personal communication, 15 July 2021–9 August 2022), was KZN VIP Security, reportedly headed by a former Phoenix SAPS member. Residents claimed that local police were conspicuous in their absence during the worst of the violence, and there is no evidence of any attempt on their part to call for reinforcements from Operational Response Services (ORS). Amidst allegations of local police ‘moonlighting’ for this security company – which was also implicated in running the roadblocks targeting African people – the author wrote a further letter to the Provincial Commissioner on 4 August 2021 requesting a full inquiry into Phoenix SAPS. There was no response.

Following his own research in Phoenix after the violence, Emeritus Professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Paulus Zulu, situated the events within the tenuous nature of race relations in the province. He notes that some of those going to loot businesses and warehouses had also burned small Indian businesses, fuelling latent anti-African tensions which fed into what had been an understandable attempt by residents to protect themselves and their properties. Those who died were not African residents of Phoenix (Zulu, 2021). However, the most important contributing factor, he stresses, is the continuation of gross economic inequality in which the participation in government business, especially tender awards, is seen to be skewed in favour of Indian South Africans. Zulu argues that because of these structural inequalities, Phoenix is but one example of how latent racial tensions can rise to the surface in similar situations elsewhere (Zulu, 2021).

Case study 2: Cato Crest

The Cato Manor area, which lies in the valley behind the Howard College campus of UKZN, was historically occupied by both Indians and Africans, with the latter having been removed in the 1960s, as were some of the Indian families living not far from the university. These removals allowed for the old established white residential area of Manor Gardens to be expanded, including to the land where it now shares the road boundary with one side of the Cato Crest informal settlement. The other side of the settlement is adjacent to the long established Indian, and business and residential area, of Cato Manor (Makhathini, 1994; Edwards, 1994)

Before and after July 2021, lawlessness has prevailed in Cato Crest, with gunshots heard regularly at night and cartridges found in the grounds of nearby formal residences. According to local residents and a SAPS member, housing mafias with alleged links to the local government councillor threatened to displace and even kill residents to build and rent bigger structures on their plots (SAPS Anon 3, personal communication, July 2021). The councillor, who, according to local residents, was allegedly close to certain local police members (Personal communications with residents, 2013 to present), is widely feared, and informers whose identities have been leaked have been killed.⁵ The area is difficult to police at night because of the inaccessibility of many residents and illegal electricity connections. At the time of writing this piece, this councillor was in prison awaiting trial for the murder of ANC candidate, Siyabonga Mkhize and a companion, shortly before the 2021 local government elections (Goba, 2022b).

There are two police stations (Mayville and Cato Manor) not far from Cato Crest, one nearer to Manor Gardens, the other to the sprawling Cato Manor area. When sound is amplified in Cato Crest, it can be heard in nearby residential areas. On the morning of Sunday 11 July, loud voices of two speakers, a man and a woman, reminiscent of those addressing political gatherings and the ululating of women could be heard from an open-air venue often used for church services (then banned under Covid-19 regulations). Early that evening, the shooting started and carried on for most of the night. When the Mayville SAPS was telephoned, the author was told by a harassed-sounding member that businesses were burning (Telephone call to Mayville SAPS, 11 July 2021).

The next day, 12 July 2021, masses of looters from Cato Crest were photographed taking the shortest route to the top of the hill behind which the settlement is situated. They carried their looted items,

⁵ The author's ongoing work related to violence in Cato Crest since 2016 has identified cases of potentially politically motivated assaults related to allocation of housing (Ms S, personal communication, 3 March–23 May 2016; VM, personal communication, 3 March–23 May 2016), as well as fear amongst some community members of reporting crimes in which criminals may have connections to the local councillor (personal communication, VM, 4 March 2019).

gained from looting the closest of two shopping malls in Glenwood – the middle-class area extending downhill from Howard College in the direction of Durban’s centre. Early that evening, a huge pall of smoke drifted westwards from the same area and a further call to the Mayville SAPS confirmed that more businesses were burning. The shooting carried on for several hours on Monday night and people living close to the settlement reported the smell of roasting meat, as looters presumably celebrated the spoils.

On the Bellair Road side, businesses and the local mosque were burnt and badly damaged. A nearby petrol station was saved by the combined effort of local crime fighters and taxi drivers. According to a local resident involved in fighting crime in the community, who had witnessed what was happening, police were absent and the Cato Manor station was locked up (personal communication, Mr K, 16 August 2022).

Counting the cost of what happened in July 2021

The costs of July 2021 were manifold, ranging from trauma and loss of life to environmental damage, massive damage to economic infrastructure, and the destruction of or adverse impact on livelihoods. In addition, many of the prevailing deficits in state capacity – by design or default – were laid bare.

In their expert panel report, Africa et al. (2021: 35) put the death toll as over 354 people. At the height of the violence, when trauma injuries increased, road blockages made it difficult for vehicles to transport patients and for practitioners to get to work, especially as most taxis were not operating. Emergency services were targeted, including ambulances which were stoned. Clinics, some of which had been looted, had to be shut down (Hunter et al., 2021: 95, 41). In Gauteng and KZN, over 140 schools were damaged (Hunter et al., 2021: 12). Travel was also affected by the inaccessibility of petrol supplies: SAPREF, the refinery which produces just over a third of South Africa’s fuel stocks, shut down because of road closures and attacks on vehicles (Hunter et al., 2021: 120).

The consequences of the Cornubia UPL fire were described by Environmental Minister Creecy as the ‘most serious environmental catastrophe in recent times’: The whole riverine ecosystem in the area had been damaged, as had coastal environments north and south of the very affluent coastal area of Umhlanga Rocks. Marine life had died, living marine resources could not be used, and recreational fishing was banned. The toxic fumes, which had burnt for two weeks, would have a serious impact on the health of residents exposed to them (Goba, 2021b; Singh, 2021).

Banks and ATMs had R120 million stolen from them, with some of the smaller machines being dislodged from where they were situated and carried away (*Daily News*, 2021). The damage to the

country's economy is estimated to be R50 billion (Africa et al., 2021: 36). According to the KZN Provincial Member of the Executive Committee (MEC), 89 malls, 37 trucks and 89 liquor outlets were destroyed (Ndou, 2021b); 500 retail stores were badly hit (*The Mercury*, 2021) – 89 per cent of businesses damaged were small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs) (Larkin, 2021). A small business owner in the Midlands town of Richmond noted that it had taken 'many years of hard work' to build his family business and customer base 'and to serve the local and surrounding community ... [but] it required only a few hours to ruin what took decades to build up' (Saeed, 2021). The impact was devastating.

In the long term, it was the poor, including those who looted, who suffered the most. As in the rest of the world, especially the Global South, the severity of Covid-19 lockdowns has deepened inequality (Green, 2021). An unknown number of jobs were lost when businesses and malls were burnt. Hunter et al. (2021: 93) cite a figure of almost 550 out-of-work breadwinners alone after Edendale Mall was razed. The burning down of the bulk supply outlets, relied on by the poor, raises serious questions about why these stores were targeted. In the aftermath, small businesses and farmers relying on the local iThala bank at Eshowe needed to travel an additional 70 to 80 kilometres to another branch to access their savings club money. In Ndwedwe, where taxis had forced buses off the road, residents needed to pay more in travel and cartage costs to reach nearby towns following the burning of the local Boxer (*The Violence Monitor*, 2021).

Where were the security services? More questions than answers

Investigations at the time of writing into what happened in July 2021 by the Expert Panel and the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) shed little light on why the police failed in their constitutional duty to prevent and combat crime on such a massive scale. These inquiries have focused on intelligence and operational issues. The questions about the police address just one element of the South African state's security services' absences and silences as the events of July 2021 unfolded.

The missing intelligence

Africa et al. (2021: 20–25, 33) provide a useful overview of intelligence structures and co-ordinating structures nationally, and the role of the co-ordinating National Joint Operational and Intelligence Structure (NATJOINTS) in making information gathered available to the SAPS for operational purposes. Attempts to unravel the reasons for the absence of quality intelligence to SAPS adds to the confusion, with government ministers contradicting one another, and disagreeing with officials reporting to them

(Africa, et al., 2021: 51). According to Hunter et al. (2021: 58, 59, 62–82, 121), who had combed through piles of intelligence reports, there was some knowledge of what was happening, and this seems to have informed security force responses in Gauteng.

The author has been told by SAPS sources that each station should have an intelligence officer to provide information for proactive policing, and that provincially generated information should be shared with units (that need it for crime fighting), as well as with national management. These SAPS sources have also claimed that information provided is not necessarily used (SAPS Anon 1, personal communication, 9 August 2022). In her evidence to the SAHRC hearings, Ayanda Dlodlo, who was State Security Minister in July 2021 denied that her department's intelligence had not been shared with the police, but pointed out that it had no control over whether it was used by the SAPS, which also generated its own intelligence (Pillay, 2022). Dlodlo was transferred to another portfolio in the subsequent cabinet reshuffle, when the Department of State Security was relocated to the Presidency (*Defenceweb*, 2022).

Absent in the exchanges about the failure of intelligence is reference to the well documented factionalism and corruption in the State Security Agency and the SAPS Crime Intelligence. This has been detailed in reports of the Judicial Commission into State Capture (Parts V and VI) and the High-Level Review Panel, which was appointed by the President in 2018 to do a thorough investigation of the State Security Agency, with a view to its findings and recommendations being the basis for its restructuring in line with the Constitution (High-Level Review Panel Report, 2018: 16). Chaired by Dr Sydney Mufamadi, its members were selected on the basis of expertise and experience in the Intelligence field, and its investigations included interviews and documentary sources. The panel made damning findings about the damage that had been done to what was intended to be a civilian oversight body, which had been politicised, riven by factionalism, and turned into a 'private resource to serve the political and personal interests of particular individuals' (High-Level Review Panel Report, 2018: 2). The panel found that the White Paper on Intelligence, as well as the principles enshrined in the Constitution, had been violated (Report of the High-Level Review Panel on the SSA, 2018: 2, 7, 9).

Besides making its own findings about the State Security Agency, the Zondo Commission endorsed the findings and recommendations of the High-Level Review Panel (Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, Report Part V, Vol. 1: 44, 353 and Vol. 6: 105). It described the 'plethora of problems' it found as 'almost innumerable' (Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, Report Part VI, Vol. 4: 96). The Commission's findings on the state of SAPS Crime Intelligence were also damning, and included serious corruption issues, and inappropriate appointments and promotions, including to family members (2022: 39, 465, 335).

In submitting its report to the President in December 2018, the High-Level Review Panel on the State Security Agency had emphasised the urgency of taking remedial action. By July 2021, only its recommendation that a National Security Council should be established had been implemented. It had been promulgated in 2020, but had seldom met prior to July 2021 (Africa et al., 2021: 40, 106). As indicated above, the move of State Security into the Presidency happened in August 2021.

The Zondo Commission heard evidence of legal breaches, and the ready classification of documents linked to the prevailing culture of secrecy, including from former Inspector-General of Intelligence, Setlhomamaru Dintwe. These breaches are borne out by a counter-intelligence report leaked to the media in August 2021 (Mashego, 2021). The report tells of a group of operatives in KZN Crime Intelligence Services (CIS) having used the component's slush funds to operate a political hit squad that killed ANC anti-corruption activist, Sindiso Magaqa, in 2017. It was also alleged to have been implicated in fuelling previous disruptive protests.

According to the media articles, the report had been handed to the then national head of CIS, General Peter Jacobs who had handed it to Minister Bheki Cele, who had classified it. Cele denied having seen it (Mashego, 2021; Mavuso, 2021; *The Witness*, 2021). The existence of the report has been independently confirmed to the author, who approached the Parliamentary Committees on Police and Intelligence Oversight about it (see letters and emails below). There has, however, been no response and the report remains classified, despite the fact that it should form part of the evidence in the trial of Sindiso Magaqa's alleged killers, which at time of writing in late 2022 was underway (Maharaj, 2022).

Where were Operational Response units?

Even without intelligence reports, it should have been obvious by late Friday 9 July that soldiers should have been called in to assist in unblocking national roads following threats made by Zuma supporters. Why the Minister of Police – who has been the ANC's policing representative in KZN for 30 years and is known for his engagement in operational matters and serving as MEC himself – did not see the need for immediate intervention is not known.

Even without any overarching operational plan, why did station and district police heads not call for Operational Response backups, especially Public Order Policing (POP) units, to the worst affected areas, including Phoenix? A police source confirmed recently that POP units are still based at district level, so stations can call on assistance from them. Another excuse was that the police had run out of rubber bullets (Africa et al., 2021: 44), but there is no mention of the fact that less lethal weapons – especially water cannons, and even teargas – had been recommended for crowd control in the Panel

of Experts Report on Policing and Crowd Management handed to Minister Cele in May 2018. Also in 2018, the National Commissioner SAPS had announced the 'enhancement and capacitation' of human and physical resources which would include water tankers and stun grenades (*BusinessTech*, 2018). The excuses used obscure the fact that recommendations about the restructuring, training, and equipping of Public Order Policing in a 2018 report had not been implemented, and even existing equipment had not been maintained.

Despite this information being available to the Ministry for three years prior to July 2021, the Expert Panel into the July 2021 Civil Unrest made shocking findings, especially given the regularity of protest action in South Africa. Instead of the 12,779 members required for adequate performance, POP had only 5,502 members in July 2021. The Panel was informed that there was only one water cannon per province, and there was no airwing capacity (another tactic used in the past). The equipment that was available had not been maintained (Africa et al., 2021: 134).

Nepotism and the politicisation of policing

A key facilitative factor in the July 2021 anarchy was the failure of the SAPS to fulfil their constitutional duties. The Zondo Commission made important findings about security and intelligence, but it did not go into sufficient detail to make findings against the SAPS. It did, however, hear some relevant evidence, including that of former Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) head, Robert McBride who, in April 2019, described the SAPS as a patronage network, rewarding mediocrity and demoralising good police members (Sidimba, 2019).

McBride's evidence accords with a great deal of documentation, including court and arbitration papers in the possession of the author, about nepotism and the politicisation of the SAPS. The appointment of the previous national commissioner, Khehla Sithole, was a political one by then President Zuma, whose Minister of Police Fikile Mbalula, through his adviser Bo Mbindwane, attempted to use SAPS funds to acquire an interception device for the ANC's Nasrec conference of 2017 (Davies, 2021). This was but one example of what the Zondo Commission and the reports on State Security and Policing confirmed about irregular operational interference by ministers in the work of government bureaucracies.

Information, including documentary, provided by serving police members, confirms that nepotistic appointments and promotions, and ministerial interference in operational matters, continue. On 6 July 2022, Deputy National Commissioner Francinah Vuma, the first respondent in the above-mentioned matter regarding Sithole, sent a protected disclosure statement to President Ramaphosa and others detailing irregularities and ministerial interference. She avers that National SAPS

Commissioner Fannie Masemola was under pressure to suspend her for reasons she believes are linked to her refusal to authorise irregular and corrupt procurements and payments. She describes how the Minister had contacted her and complained about the awarding of a cell phone contract. She claims the Minister blamed her for failing to sign off on an unauthorised urgent payment of R8 million submitted to her by a fellow Deputy National Commissioner. Vuma refers to receiving threatening messages, and says she fears for her life. She was subsequently suspended and the deputy she had implicated in the unauthorised payment matter is, according to police sources, acting in her place (Vuma, 2022; IOL, 2022).

The politicisation of policing occurs at all levels, and the references to collusion between councillors and some local police at Mountain Rise and Cato Crest cited above are only two of many examples the author encounters in her interventions. Information provided by a credible police source that, at one Durban station, several dozen members refused to intervene in July because they supported Zuma (SAPS Anon 4, personal communication, July 2021) is probably not an isolated case.

The wheels of justice barely grind

By October 2022 there had been no convictions for incitement and crimes of violence. Within weeks of the killings, nine men had been arrested for murder and related crimes in Phoenix, and four were given bail in December 2021 (Dawood, 2021). Four men were also charged for murder and other crimes in Khan Road Pietermaritzburg (Oelleman, 2021).

As indicated, alleged inciters Khanyile and Mchunu were also charged in 2021, as was a suspect accused of instigating the Brookside mall burning (Xulu, 2021). In August and September 2022, flurries of arrests reportedly resulted in up to 80 people being charged with crimes relating to incitement and instigation (for example, Gumede, 2022; Guy, 2022). Three of those arrested seem to be among the inciters featuring in the statement by Herron (2021). The most prominent is a known ANC North Coast activist, who sent messages about road blocking. Another of those arrested associates himself with MKMVA. The messages of the third, said to be from Pietermaritzburg, are about burning businesses and factories. It is inexplicable that it has taken the SAPS a year to bring so few charges, given the track and trace powers they possess (Right2Know, 2020).

Conclusions

The events of July 2021 can be described as a challenge to the authority of the state, for reasons that remain in the domain of the speculative, while the narrative of how they unfolded shows a high degree

of organisation. Independently, the Expert Panel appointed to investigate it notes that it ‘was obvious that the violence had been orchestrated’ and that those behind it made use of technology in organising and implementing it (Africa et al., 2021: 89). It was certainly not a spontaneous uprising of the poor, who suffered longer-term deprivation. They were pawns of ‘faceless’ organisers who, as Africa et al. (2021: 37, 48) note, may have been aware of the weaknesses of what they term hollowed state institutions.

While the Zondo Commission’s findings have laid much emphasis on corruption, these and other expert reports show the extent to which the South African state has been criminalised. High levels of corruption can exist alongside functional states (Ellis, 1999: 67–68). However, the state capture years saw the development of power blocs of criminals operating with secret service members and senior officials, and ‘politicians combining tenure of office with personal enrichment’ (Ellis, 1999: 48).

The core recommendations in December 2018 of the High-Level Review Panel on State Security regarding legislation and remedial action are the exact factors that rose to prominence in July 2021 – yet they have not been addressed, and this is inexcusable. Central to blame for what happened is the complete failure of the state to implement the findings of the May 2018 Panel of Experts Report on policing. These findings dealt, in great detail, not only with the reform and equipping of POP, but with the need to de-militarise and de-politicise the police and ensure that appointments and promotions are based on competency and experience (Panel of Experts Report on Policing and Crowd Management, 2018). There is currently no independent oversight into policing: the heads of IPID, the Civilian Secretariat, and even PSIRA, are appointed by the Minister.

Although what happened in July 2021 was of a different nature and scale to what has become routine protest, the fact that the national roads could remain blocked for days without soldiers being deployed to clear them raises questions about whether lawlessness of this magnitude has become normalised. The police’s failure to act lies primarily with the Minister who is responsible for preventing and combating crime, but, in terms of Section 92 of the Constitution there is also collective responsibility on the part of the national executive, along with the national legislature. Ultimately, it is Parliament that is to blame for not fulfilling its oversight function regarding policing and intelligence, and for failing to ensure that constitutional principles such as transparency and accountability are adhered to. Parliament has even failed to implement instructions from the Constitutional Court, in 2017, to give IPID independence from the Ministry of Police (Letter from Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee, 30 November 2021; Letter from author to Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee, 22 September 2022).

Over a year after the events of July 2021 there is still no evidence of the urgent and clearcut steps detailed in 2018 reports by the High-Level Review Panel on State Security and the Panel of Experts Report on Policing and Crowd Management being taken. Posing a further threat to stability in a severely weakened state are the high numbers of well-armed, illegally operating private security companies, due to poor regulation by PSIRA (Africa et al., 2021: 63)

South Africa's gross socio-economic disparities, with their racial overtones, with associated appalling living conditions which are an insult to humans, remain, like the proverbial tinderbox, open to exploitation by those with an 'appetite for lawlessness' (Africa et al., 2021: 4).

The way forward has been well charted in recommendations of the reports cited above. However, without a demonstrated political will to implement them, the threat of widespread, large-scale, lawlessness remains.

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Emails from author

Email to District Commissioner SAPS Umgungundlovu District attaching video of man breaking into ATM and removing cash at Edendale Mall, 22 July 2022. (Video also sent via WhatsApp, 13 July 2022).

Email to Provincial Commissioner re: Phoenix follow-up, attaching a picture of a man with a gun standing in front of a vehicle with a municipal (NDM) registration, 20 July 2022.

Emails to PSIRA management requesting feedback on material sent to investigators in July 2021, 16 August 2022 and 19 August 2022. Acknowledgement received from management on 23 August 2022.