

# THE DEAD ZONE

By Greg Marinovich



Greg Marinovich, *Somersault, Soweto*, 1993

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# ***THE DEAD ZONE by Greg Marinovich***

## ***A portfolio of 41 colour photographs***

***The Dead Zone portfolio, compiled in association with Strauss & Co's founding director Stephan Welz, offers a wide-ranging visual history of the internecine conflicts and violent strife that engulfed large parts of South Africa in the 1990s, showing the transition from apartheid to democracy.***

Following the unbanning of 33 political parties and release of political prisoners in 1990, in the protracted lead-up to non-racial elections in 1994, South Africa teetered on the brink. The topography of war in this portfolio includes a cramped Thokoza hostel, a rain-soaked street in Duduza west of Nigel, a Bantustan capital in the Eastern Cape, a rural valley north of Durban, and Shell House in Jeppe Street, Johannesburg. In a 1994 article for *Leadership* magazine, Marinovich collectively described these places as the “dead zone”.

By his reckoning, Marinovich covered a dozen massacres during the 1990s, being an event marked by the indiscriminate and brutal slaughter of many people. Marinovich later discovered a Truth and Reconciliation Commission report that spoke of 122 massacres in the Pretoria, Greater Johannesburg and Vaal Triangle area between 1990 and 1992 alone. “There is so much that wasn’t covered,” he says. While Thokoza, a working-class settlement southeast of Johannesburg, may well be a “forgotten battlefield from a forgotten conflict” – as Marinovich proposes in a caption – his photographs offer unflinching witness to the painful becoming of a nation. They are a reminder of what was sacrificed by ordinary people to achieve liberation.

This work extended into our current time, with Marinovich’s investigative coverage of the Marikana Massacre and the subsequent book, *Murder at Small Koppie* that won the Alan Paton Award for non-fiction in 2017.

*The portfolio was donated to the Constitutional Court Trust by the Dippenaar Family Trust in 2018.*

## **About the artist**

Greg Marinovich (South African, 1962 - ) is a photojournalist, filmmaker, photo editor and author. He distinguished himself as a member of the so-called Bang-Bang Club, a group of four photo-journalists who documented the deadly conflicts that preceded the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994.

He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Spot News Photography in 1991 for a series of photographs of African National Congress supporters murdering a man they suspected of being an Inkatha Freedom Party spy.

## **Artist statement**

The Nineties were a really strange and dislocated time in our recent history – years of great hope and fear, of confusion and new beginnings.

The great epoch of Apartheid was slipping away, most of the so-called petty apartheid laws had disappeared. Those ridiculous European versus non-European signs had disappeared, as if by magic. All those park benches were repainted, suddenly without racial currency.

The *Dompas* had lost its cruel power over people. It was a time of almost rapturous joy and hope. Yet it was laced with a poison unlike any we had seen. It was a toxin that was a noxious mix of political rivalry, racial hatred, ethnic animosities and greed masquerading as principle. It played itself out in an extended spasm of death. The Nineties was a decade of massacres, some infamous, others well-nigh unrecorded.

A Wikipedia search some years ago tells us just four massacres that took place during the Nineties in SA: Boipatong June 17, 1992; Bisho Sept 7, 1992 (41), St James Church 25 July 1993 (11); and Shell House 28 March 1994 (19).

I can recall photographing the aftermath of many more. In Sebokeng, the night vigil for ANC leader Chris Nangalembe was attacked and 38 mourners killed. That was January of 1991, not a day etched into our collective memory. In the same area, same year, 14 people were killed at a protest march. Swanieville in 1991 – 28 people killed. I recall going to two mass funerals that took place on consecutive weekend in the KZN midlands, at Table Mountain in 1993. The victims of one were all IFP supporters and the others all ANC supporters. Let us not forget the Christmas Day massacre at Shobashobane when 18 people were killed.

There was a morning in Vosloorus, on the East Rand, when I drove in alone in my quite inappropriate Ford Capri. It was a cold morning in Spring, and I drove right into a massive crowd of residents. Holding my camera up to the windscreen, I eased forward; confident I would be allowed to pass.

Quite what that confidence was based on was unclear then, and even more so now. Within a minute, the crowd had turned on me and began to rock the car, calling for me to be killed, until one man caught my eye and he began to call on the mob to back down, that I was a journalist. The attack ceased and the crowd parted for me to continue through.

The streets were deserted and as I made my way towards the complex of hostels. I saw two men standing over a dead man lying on his back. I pulled the car over and one man leaned down with a knife and began to castrate him. I got out and lifted my camera. The second man pointed a handgun at me and told me to put down the camera. The other man continued with his grisly work. When he was done, he lowered handgun and told me that now I could take pictures.

At the hostel itself, the street surrounding the fortress-like walls were littered with bodies. Police were going from one to the next, covering them and groups of residents watched. A woman in her dressing gown swept her section of sidewalk, sending up little puffs of dust as men with red headbands peered out from the hostel entrances across the way.

Despite more than a dozen people having died, there is no record of a Vosloorus massacre, or even a battle, in any record I can find. Except for a handful of negatives, and the memories of a small township, it is as if it never happened. This was the reality of the Nineties, of that so-called Hostel War. It was a parade of death. To many, we were in a descent into a more widespread civil war, anarchy.

Let me quote a figure from the Truth & Reconciliation Commission's findings: from 1990 to 1992, there were 122 massacres in the Transvaal alone.

We managed to move away from the politics of violence to that of the ballot box, yet we cannot forget the cost so many paid – memory is a vital part of our humanity.

## Welcome to Hell Park

Thokoza, 1990–1994

A space in the no-man's-land where the war between African National Congress supporters and the Inkatha Freedom Party was waged for several years from 1990 to 1996. The poem expresses the hatred of the paternalistic racism that pervaded South Africa, as well as the economic disparities wrought by hundreds of years of political and economic subjugation.



## Teargas

Thokoza, 1990

African National Congress supporting mourners and activists are teargassed by police during a funeral procession through the streets of Thokoza.

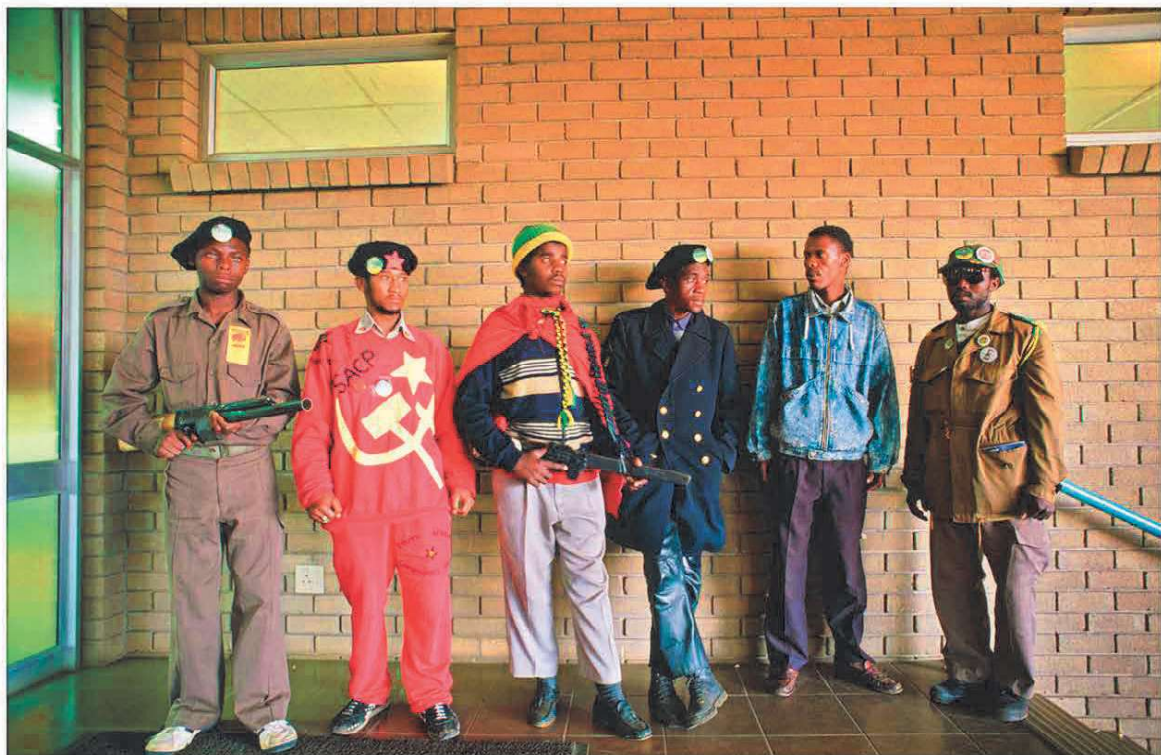




## The Party

Soweto, 1990

Supporters of the South African Communist Party pose in various homemade Party apparels, at the football stadium outside Soweto, where its first public meeting was held after they had been banned for decades. Many of the participants were still nervous of being seen to be publicly supporting the Party.



## Hostel Room

Thokoza, 1990

A Zulu man in his shared migrant workers' room at the Mshaya'zafe municipal hostel. *Mshaya'zafe* is a Zulu phrase meaning 'beat him to death'. He fought with Inkatha Freedom Party militants in Thokoza Township against African National Congress supporters, despite professing not to be an IFP supporter. The hostels were 'ethnically cleansed' of non-Zulu denizens before that phrase gained international coinage. It was these forces that were harnessed by the Inkatha political leadership and unleashed repeatedly in 1990 and 1991, in an attempt to ensure that it became a national political player. Tens of thousands of Zulus wearing red headbands and carrying spears, shields, machetes and the occasional rifle would surge out of the hostels and down Khumalo Street. At first they inflicted heavy casualties, until the formation of neighbourhood self-defence units evened the odds.





## Khalanyoni Hostel

Thokoza, 1990

African National Congress supporters push over a breeze-block wall, part of Khalanyoni hostel at the southern end of Khumalo Street. Khalanyoni hostel was overrun early in the war by ANC fighters, most of whom were Xhosa tribesmen from the adjacent Phola Park shantytown. These warriors were called 'blanket men' by the police as they wore their blankets to fight, hiding sticks, spears and guns under the heavy wool folds. They dismantled the buildings, brick by multi-coloured brick, and used them to rebuild their shacks that were destroyed in the fighting. From day to day, the shantytown transformed itself from a maze of drab corrugated iron into a bizarrely colourful place. The surviving Zulu hostel-dwellers from Khalanyoni hostel retreated to the hostels at the northern end of Khumalo Street.



## Work

Khumalo Street, 1990

A man and a woman walk through burning barricades to get to work. Thokoza is a small, nondescript township; the main road, Khumalo Street, runs north-south for four kilometres through an elongated triangle from one set of migrant workers' hostels to another. As the Hostel War cemented frontlines, Khumalo Street became a no-go area, though occasionally we would brave a run along it, sinking low into the car seats while racing through the stop signs and hoping no one would shoot.



## SDU Funeral

Thokoza, 1990

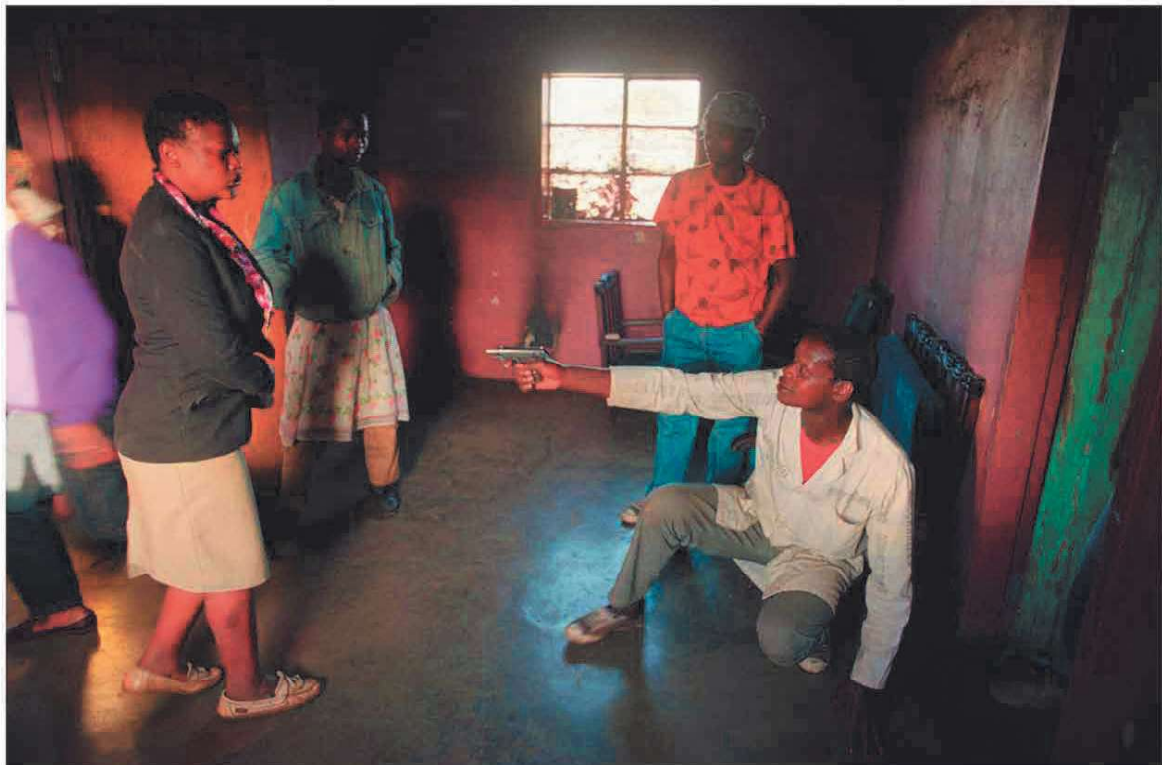
Young African National Congress militants hide their faces as they ride atop a bus filled with mourners en route to the funeral of a fellow child soldier killed in clashes in Thokoza. These Young Lions, who were at the forefront of the war, are now largely forgotten and ignored.



## Search

Dobsonville, 1992

An Inkatha Freedom Party supporter brandishes a handgun and fools around in Dobsonville hostel, Soweto, during a police raid to search for illegal weapons.





## Shooting

Boipatong, 1992

South African President and National Party leader, FW de Klerk, tried to visit the scene of the Boipatong massacre four days after it occurred. People greeted him with signs accusing him of being a killer. De Klerk smiled and waved from behind bullet-proofed glass. Despite a massive police presence, the enraged residents cursed and stoned his limousine. After he left, police shot and killed a man during a confrontation I did not witness. By the time I got to the open field, a crowd gathered wanting to identify the body but a ring of riot unit policemen refused to allow them near the body. The angriest and bravest among the residents stood face to face with the heavily armed white policemen, screaming insults and spitting at them. Then the inevitable happened – the cops opened fire at point-blank range. I had stupidly been on the wrong side but I somehow managed to get behind the police line and photographed them firing at the fleeing people. Several people were killed and many were injured.





## Doll's Head

Boipatong, 1992

A man holds a white doll's head on a spear in the angry aftermath of the Boipatong Massacre of June 1992. Forty-five people were killed by Inkatha Freedom Party members, allegedly supported by police, which nearly derailed the negotiations towards a democratic solution to South Africa's dilemma.



## Aaron

Boipatong, 1992

On a winter's night in the Vaal, 45 people were killed when a large group of men rampaged through Boipatong Township. Klaas Mathope and many other survivors maintained that it had not been just Zulus who had attacked them, but white policemen too. When Klaas had run from the armed group, known in Zulu as an *impi*, he had heard a white man's voice saying in Afrikaans: 'Zulu, catch him.' Several shots were fired at him but he managed to hide in some bushes. From his hiding place, he listened to the attackers killing people. When it was all over, he returned home to find his wife lying on the ground with her intestines hanging out – she had been stabbed and shot repeatedly. She was near death, but told him to leave her and to go to find their son Aaron instead. Klaas left his mortally wounded wife and went to look for the infant, but his child Aaron, nine months old, was already dead, murdered in the attack.



## Soccer Field

Boipatong, 1992

There were dozens of coffins side by side and a sad, embittered crowd filled the local soccer field. Clergymen of every conceivable denomination, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, came to pray for the 45 dead. Years later, when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission asked local Inkatha youth leader, Victor Mthembu, why the nine-month-old infant, Aaron Mathope, had been killed, his answer was: 'You must remember, a snake gives birth to a snake.'





## Homeland #1

Bisho, 1992

African National Congress supporters flee back towards the South African side of the border with Ciskei after 29 marchers were killed and dozens more wounded by Ciskeien soldiers. The ANC supporters, led by ANC and Communist Party leaders like Ronnie Kasrils, broke through razor-wire barricades erected at the border between South Africa and Ciskei. It was a reckless attempt to force the Ciskeien military leader, Brigadier Oupa Gqozo, to allow free political activity in the Bantustan. Kasrils led the crowd through the barricades and they were met by a hail of bullets.



## Homeland #2

Bisho, 1992

African National Congress supporters take cover as others flee when Ciskeien soldiers keep up sustained automatic fire. A hundred thousand people marched on the Bantustan capital, Bisho. The sound of the bullets just above me was like that of thousands of angry bees. It seemed to last for an unbearably long time.





## Soccer Grave

Ratanda, 1993

A football team buries their team-mate who was killed in crossfire between ANC and IFP fighters while playing soccer in Heidelberg's Ratanda Township. The political rivalry in Ratanda combined with politically aligned unions vying for jobs in local meat-processing factories resulted in several people being killed in confrontations.



## Somersault

Soweto, 1993

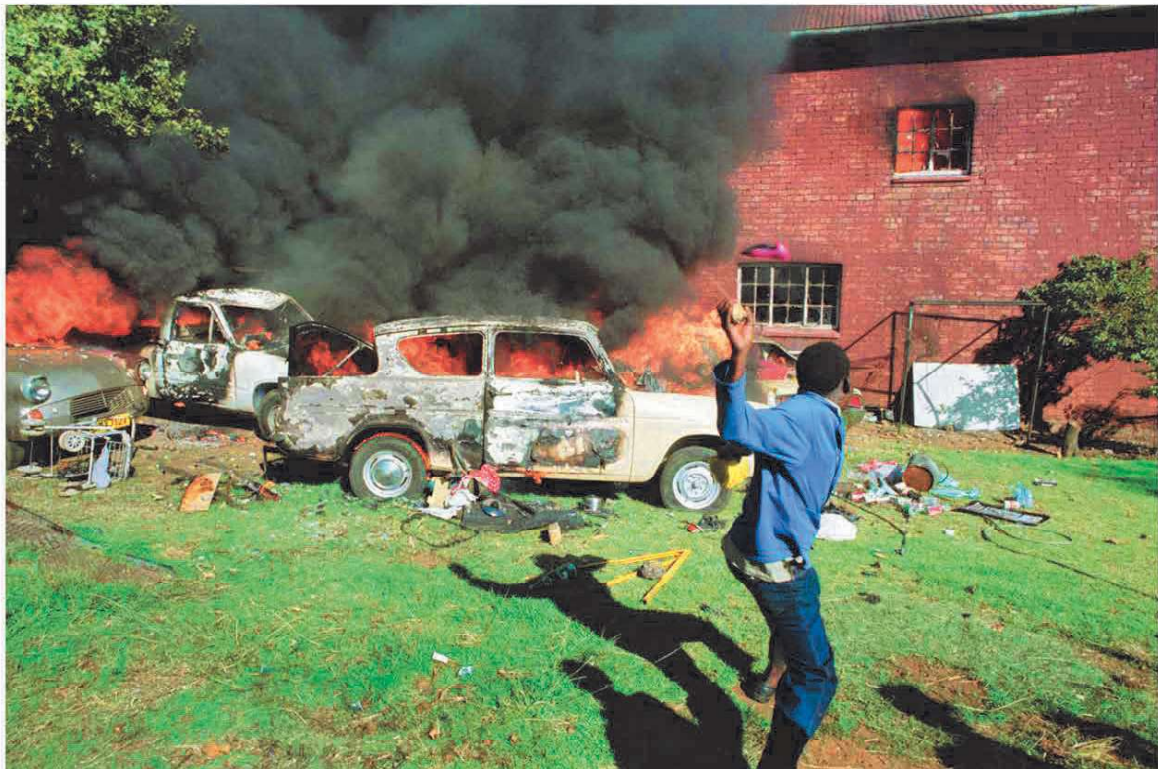
African National Congress and Communist Party supporters scatter as police fire teargas and live rounds outside the Soweto soccer stadium where the funeral of ANC and CP leader Chris Hani was attended by hundreds of thousands of mourners on 19 April.



## **Pink Shoe**

Soweto, 1993

Mourners burn cars and a house near the football stadium where assassinated ANC and SACP leader Chris Hani lay in state, 19 April 1993. Hani was shot by a Polish national, Janusz Walus, and the murder was planned with Conservative Party parliamentarian Clive Derby-Lewis. Both were jailed for life.





## Sunday

Machadodorp, 1992

A policeman and his friend try to arrest a man who was walking drunk along the main road in this small escarpment town.



## Storm

Duduza, 1993

A group of African National Congress supporting Xhosa men wait out a summer storm during a battle with Inkatha Freedom Party supporters.

Before the storm, the wide boulevard had been filled with tens of thousands of people wanting to chase the IFP supporters out of their hostel stronghold – only these men stayed through the rain.





## Shoes #1

Johannesburg, 1994

Soldiers look to the roofs after a Zulu supporter of the Inkatha Freedom Party was shot dead by gunmen at the Library Gardens. Several people were shot from the rooftops by unidentified snipers who may have been policemen. The man's shoes were taken off to allow his soul to enter the afterlife unpolluted by dirt. Several blocks further east, Inkatha Freedom Party supporters tried to storm the ANC's headquarters at Shell House. Several of the attackers were killed by ANC security guards armed with automatic weapons – this became known as the Shell House Massacre.



## The Corner

Bekkersdal, 1994

AZAPO supporters fire at African National Congress supporters in three-way clashes between the police, AZAPO and the ANC in Bekkersdal Township, February 1994. The tensions ahead of the first democratic elections reached fever pitch in the months leading up to 27 April.



## **The Riot Policeman**

Bekkersdal, 1994

Riot Police help a colleague injured by a grenade during clashes between security forces, ANC and AZAPO supporters in the far West Rand township of Bekkersdal in February of 1994, two months before the first democratic elections.





## War Potion

KwaMashu, 1994

An Inkatha Freedom Party member sprays *inthelezi* or war potion over warriors before a march through the volatile KwaMashu Township, north of Durban, that was divided between Inkatha Freedom Party and African National Congress supporters. The *inthelezi* is used to make the men invulnerable to harm as long as they obey the instructions of the traditional doctor who made the potion. Many fighters, on both sides, did not do a proper cleansing after using *inthelezi* repeatedly over the years. This has been seen as a cause of mental health problems that could also be put down to post-traumatic stress disorder.



## Kwash

KwaMashu, 1994

African National Congress supporters with a homemade gun or *kwash* do battle with Inkatha Freedom party supporters across the valley.

Richmond Farm, KwaZulu-Natal.





## Cover

KwaMashu, 1994

An African National Congress supporter takes cover behind a mud house during clashes with Inkatha Freedom Party supporters across the valley in Richmond Farm, north of Durban. Local warlords held sway over vast parts of KwaZulu-Natal during the years of conflict. Their power often came initially from controlling access to stands in the densely populated areas around the city.



## **The Return #1**

Sonkombo, 1994

A family carries home their belongings after months spent in a tented refugee camp for African National Congress supporting families from the Sonkombo area from which they had fled months earlier because of attacks by rival Inkatha Freedom Party supporters.



## **The Return #2**

Sonkombo, 1994

A young girl carries a bucket with her belongings as African National Congress supporting villagers return to the Sonkombo area from which they had fled months earlier because of attacks. Upon their return, most found that their mud rondavels had been looted and torched.





## Rapture

Ezakheni, 1994

African National Congress marshals try to restrain an adoring crowd of supporters ahead of a storm as ANC president, Nelson Mandela, arrives for a pre-election rally in KwaZulu-Natal. The people's adoration for this icon was unrestrained, real and overwhelming. He always responded in kind.





## **Madiba #1**

South Africa, 1994

Nelson Mandela on the campaign trail ahead of the 1994 elections.

The months before the first freely contested elections in our history was a flurry of chasing speeding cavalcades, and trying to beat planes to far-flung locations. It all blurs and renders me incapable of telling one venue from the next, other than from my captions at the time.



## **Madiba #2**

Richmond, 1999

President Nelson Mandela goes to strife-torn Richmond in an attempt to quell deadly fighting between supporters of his African National Congress and the United Democratic Movement in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands.

Mandela angry, as he was on that day, was a far cry from the genial bonhomie that he usually displayed. He was not a man to trifle with. This image was from cross-processed slide film as I had to unexpectedly file images the night I returned from Richmond.



## Amabutho

KwaZulu-Natal, 1992/3

The warriors of IFP warlord Sgoloso Xolo march at a funeral for a fighter killed in political violence in KwaZulu-Natal. Xolo's fighters had the most amazing songs, which I imagined them making up around fires late at night before battles. He was himself a charismatic and idiosyncratic warlord who annoyed the IFP leadership. He was eventually assassinated by an IFP rival.



## Skin

KwaZulu-Natal, 1994/5

Inkatha Freedom Party supporting *amabutho*, or warriors, on their way to a rally on a misty morning. At times like these the very contemporary conflict seemed to have pulled one into a time warp, to a time before, back in time.





## Scar

Shobashobane, 1996

A young African National Congress supporter, who was shot through the face during the Christmas Day massacre in 1995, returns to his home which was torched when some 600 men attacked the area, killing 18 people and wounding many more. A lot of the bodies were mutilated for *imuthi* – traditional medicine, often *inthelezi*. Survivors said police raided the area the day before to search for weapons. Despite being repeatedly warned of an impending attack, the police were absent. This was a clear-cut case of the security forces assisting the IFP in their battle with the ANC.



## Protection

KwaZulu-Natal, 1996

Bodyguards spray mourners with protective *inthelezi* before attending the funeral of assassinated Inkatha Freedom Party warlord Sqoloso Xolo near Port Shepstone. Xolo was killed by rivals within Inkatha and mourners feared an attack during the funeral which took place in a sugar cane field.



## Chief, Umlazi

KwaZulu-Natal, 1995

An Inkatha Freedom Party supporting chief fires a handgun into houses during a rally in Umlazi Township south of Durban. When he noticed me taking pictures, he turned on me and I had to beg him not to shoot. The march continued.



## **Warrior, Umlazi**

KwaZulu-Natal, 1995

An Inkatha Freedom Party supporter runs back from the dividing line between political factions after emptying his AK-47 ammunition clip towards the homes of African National Congress supporters in Umlazi Township. Eight thousand IFP fighters received training in the Caprivi Strip from elements of the South African police and military. There are still arms caches buried across KwaZulu-Natal that have not yet been unearthed despite a massive one discovered and destroyed in 1999.





## Look-out

Thokoza, 1995

Child soldiers fighting in Mandela Section Self Defence Unit peer towards where their Inkatha enemies hold territory in Thokoza Township.

Mandela Section, led by commander Bonga, was one of the most isolated areas of ANC turf abutting Thokoza's no-man's-land.



## Clash

Thokoza, 1994/5

Young militants and fans run for cover, or prepare to fight, as rival African National Congress Self Defence Units take each other on during a football match after the first democratic elections. Rival Self Defence Units based in neighbouring sections often fought against each other instead of their purported enemies – Inkatha and the police.



## Smoking Hat

Thokoza, 1996

African National Congress supporting activists stand above a cap, still smoking from a point-blank range gunshot of a fellow Self Defence Unit comrade killed by Inkatha Freedom Party members while watching the FIFA football World Cup played in Atlanta, USA. Four were killed and two survived. One young fighter – Small Jack – was badly wounded but recovered, and the other – Koto Koto (from the sound of an automatic rifle) – hid in his comrade's gore and pretended to be dead. Koto Koto, one of the youngest combatants, starting when he was 14, is now in jail for assault and rape, which his former comrades say is a miscarriage of justice.





## Shoes #2

Thokoza, 1996

Fellow combatants stand over the covered body of a young ANC Self Defence Unit member who was killed by Inkatha supporters. The young man's mother sat wrapped in a blanket on a chair watching over her son's body. Her face was set in a mask of anger and hatred. When a police detective came to the scene – a rare occurrence – she turned her venom on him, refusing to answer his questions. The SDU members also insulted him and told him to leave – no one expected any real policing to be done.



## Fence

Thokoza, 1995/6

A young ANC Self Defence Unit member cautiously looks across no-man's-land towards Inkatha Freedom Party members on a winter's morning. The war in Thokoza claimed many, many lives of both combatants and innocents. Thokoza is a forgotten battlefield from a forgotten conflict that probably meant nothing in the greater political picture.



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