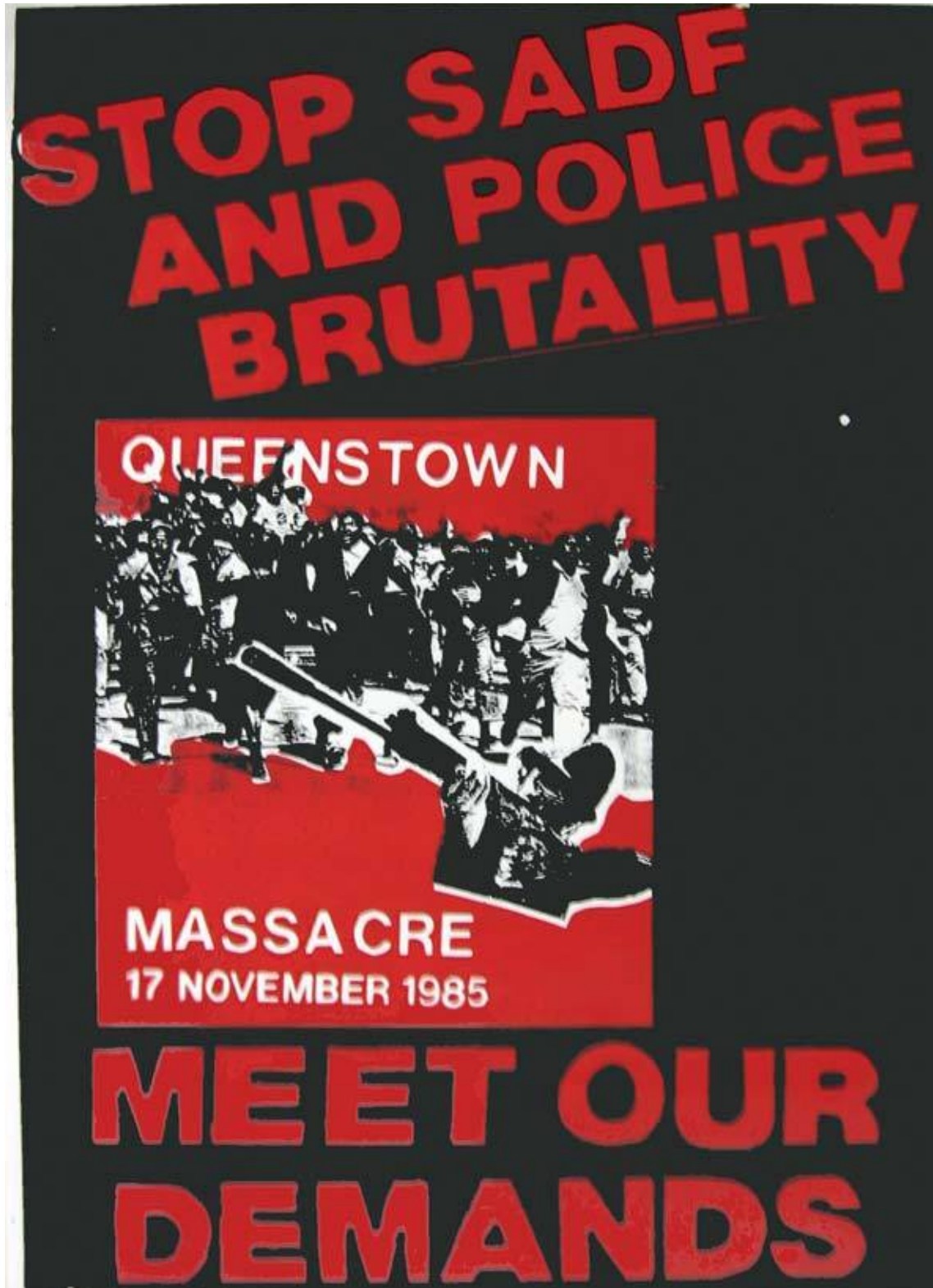


Uprising and repression: into the State of Emergency



Stop SADF and Police Brutality. Queenstown, in the Eastern Cape, was one of the many massacres of anti-apartheid demonstrations with the army and police. Artist and organisation unknown, 1985. No. 67

Within a year of the launch of the UDF, the balance of forces that held in the early 1980s shattered. The government forged ahead with implementing the new constitution — the tricameral parliament, the 'new deal', the Bantustans. In August 1984, the government tried to hold elections for the (coloured) 'House of Representatives' and the (Indian) 'House of Delegates' — and people organised massive boycotts. Less than 10% of the eligible people voted. In the African areas, resistance grew against the exercise of power by the local authorities, who were to be 'elected' at local level, but functioned as the local mouthpieces of white authorities, appointed by the white-elected national government. In particular, people opposed increasing rents and rates in the townships. At the same time, the white authorities pushed removals of people classified 'African' from urban areas to the so-called 'independent homelands'.¹

In Sharpeville in the Vaal Triangle, on 3 September 1984, police opened fire on a march organised by the UDF-linked Vaal Civics Association. The violence spread across the Reef.

Later that month, despite the township unrest and the almost total boycott of the coloured and Indian elections, President PW Botha imposed the new constitution.

In November, the UDF in the Transvaal organised the biggest work stay-away in 35 years. Violence erupted again; it spread yet further. Police and military personnel were deployed in townships throughout the country. Police and the army fired on crowds, even on people gathered to bury the dead from earlier shootings. Leaders and activists were detained. Communities — both in urban and in rural areas — turned on those people seen as working for the government or collaborating for the government: policemen, 'community councilors'. Some were killed; others fled.

Photo by Paul Weinberg



In June 1985, the state charged UDF leaders in the Vaal with treason and murder, with responsibility for the violence, and for working with the ANC. These charges were dismissed a year later, in June 1986.

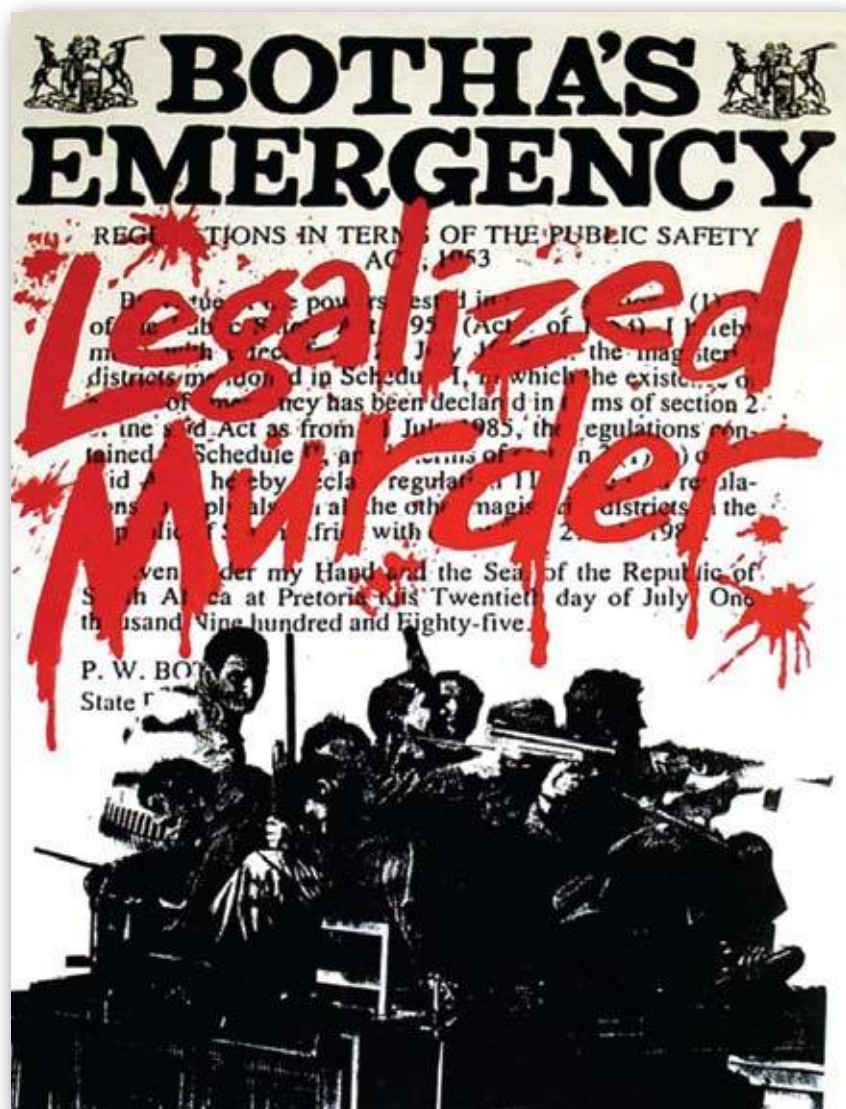
State of Emergency

In July 1985, President PW Botha declared a State of Emergency, which 'regularised' troops in the townships, and banned numerous community organisations. The Emergency gave police and military powers to arrest people at will, and hold them indefinitely, and the police did not have to give out the names of those they held. More leaders and activists were detained. Some disappeared. Some were found dead.

In August, PW Botha delivered his 'Rubicon' speech — a tirade against foreign interference in local affairs, the communist conspiracy, and the media; in which he announced that he was not prepared to take 'white South Africans, and other minority groups, on a road to abdication and suicide.'² There would be no turning back from the road apartheid had taken; and no compromise with the democratic forces.

When the first State of Emergency reached the end of its one-year run, it was replaced by another, and then another.

Botha's Emergency: Legalized Murder, artist unknown, 1985.
No. 2593





Matthew Goniwe was a school headmaster in Cradock, one of the founders of the movement for grassroots democracy that became the UDF. In 1985 he was assassinated, along with three of his colleagues, Fort Calata, Sicelo Mhlawuli and Sparrow Mkhonto, officials of the Cradock residents' association.

Stop Apartheid Killings, Matthew Goniwe photo by Julian Cobbings, poster produced by SASPU National, Johannesburg, 1985. No. 1359

No to apartheid death squads, artist unknown, produced for: JODACC, ECC, NEUSA, DESCOM and DPSC, 1985. No. 1027

Violence and repression

In concert with the 'legal' repression of the State of Emergency, a wave of violence and killings, nominally perpetrated by 'persons unknown', took the lives of community activists and leaders.

Hit squads abducted and assassinated the Cradock Four, the PEBCO Three, the lawyer Victoria Mxenge (her husband had been assassinated in 1981, in one of the first 'hits' of this kind), Dr Fabian Ribeiro and his wife Florence.

'Vigilante' groups also wreaked havoc in the solidly organised communities – armed gangs with names like the 'A-Team' (in Chesterfield, Durban, and another 'A-Team' in the Orange Free State), the 'Eagles' in the Orange Free State, the 'Witdoeke' in the Cape Town townships. Increasingly, they were joined by people aligned to the (self-proclaimed) 'Zulu-nationalist' organisation, Inkatha. These groups targeted grassroots community activists and the people who supported them; many of the most resistant communities were devastated.

Over a decade later, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) confirmed the direct links between these vigilante groups and the state security system: the apartheid forces organised, armed, and paid for this violence.



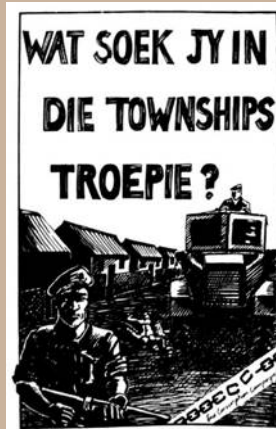
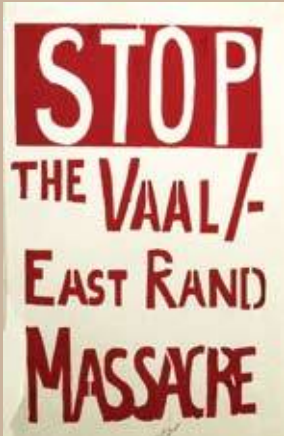
Chronology in images:

1984

- In August, elections are held for the House of Representatives and the House of Delegates.
- Vaal uprising: Police in Sharpeville shoot dead nine people protesting a rent increase, followed by spreading protests and more deaths. SADF troops join the SAP to suppress unrest in the Vaal, and then in other townships around the country.
- In September, the new constitution is enacted. PW Botha becomes State President.
- In November, the biggest stay-away in 35 years takes place in the Transvaal.
- In the first UDF treason trial, 15 UDF and union leaders are charged with treason in Pietermaritzburg. (These charges are dismissed two years later, in June 1986).
- The UDF launches the 'Million Signature Campaign' against apartheid.
- Mass student protests and disruptions reinforce community protest against, and conflict with, black local authorities.

1985

- Residents throughout the country attack people identified as collaborators with the apartheid regime — especially police and community councillors. The state responds by arresting activists and charging them with 'common purpose' in causing these deaths of collaborators. Many of these activists are sentenced to death.
- Vigilante groups form to attack activists and protesting communities: including the A-Team and the Phakathis in the Orange Free State; the A-Team in Chesterville, Durban; the Eagles youth club in the OFS. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 10 years later, identified military intelligence as the instigators in many of these vigilante groups.



Stop the Vaal/East Rand massacre, silkscreen, STP, Johannesburg, 1984. No. 1507

Wat soek jy in die townships troepei?, ECC, Johannesburg, 1987. No. 1352

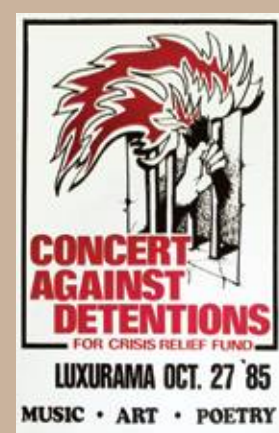
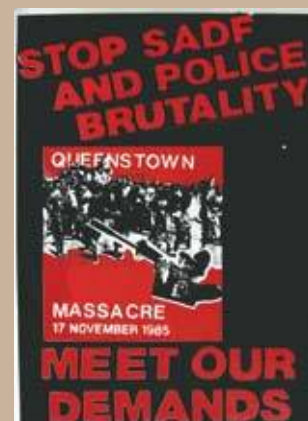
Remember Victims of Apartheid Christmas 1984, source unknown, Johannesburg, 1984. No. 1505

Release our People Rally, source unknown, East Rand, 1985. No. 186

Remember Sharpeville, remember Uitenhage, STP, Johannesburg, 1985. No. 1470

Stop Tearing Us Apart, STP, Johannesburg, 1984. No. 1508

- Conflict between black consciousness organisation AZAPO and the UDF erupts and spreads. Many activists are killed, especially in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage.
- In February, at the Crossroads informal settlement in Cape Town, police clash with protesters resisting removals to Khayalitsha: 18 people are killed and 200 injured.
- On 21 March, police open fire on a march to a funeral at Langa near Uitenhage, killing at least 21 people.
- On 23 March, in Port Elizabeth, a crowd kills Councillor Benjamin Kinikini and four of his relatives, in the first widely-publicised 'necklace' killing. Police claim there were 406 'necklacings' and 395 deaths by burning in the five years between September 1984 and December 1989.
- In May, security police abduct and kill UDF and PEBCO activists Sipho Hashe, Champion Galela and Qaqawuli Godolozzi — the 'PEBCO three'.
- On 14 June, the SADF raids Gaborone in Botswana, killing 12 people, including leading graphic artist Thami Mnye.
- In June, MK members blow up the Umtata fuel depot, water pipelines and an electricity sub-station.
- In June 1985, the Delmas treason trial: 22 UDF leaders are arrested and charged with treason. In December 1988, 11 of these are sentenced to from five to eleven years in prison; these sentences were overturned in 1989.
- On 27 June, Security police in Port Elizabeth abduct and kill the 'Cradock Four': UDF activists Matthew Goniwe, Sparrow Mkhonto, Sicelo Mhlawuli and Fort Calata. 60 000 people from all over the country come to the funeral under ANC and SACP flags.
- On 21 July 1985, the first State of Emergency is declared in 36 magisterial districts. In October 1985, this is extended to additional areas, including the Western Cape. The State of Emergency gives every member of the police, railways police, prison officials and army members the power to detain; and it becomes a crime to disclose the identity of any detainee without permission from the Minister of Law and Order. The Commissioner of Police has the power to censor any press coverage of the Emergency. Thousands of people are detained; many organisations are banned or restricted.
- On 25 July, Maki Skosana is necklaced at the funeral of several people killed by police.
- On 1 August, Victoria Mxenge, a Durban attorney, is assassinated in Umlazi. In Natal, UDF and Inkatha violence in opposition to each other spreads.



Uitenhage, Good Friday, source unknown, 1985.
No. 82

Queenstown Massacre, source unknown, 1985.
No. 67

June 16: COSAS Says SADF out of our schools and townships, printed at STP, Johannesburg, 1985.
No. 1198

Concert Against Detentions, Crisis Relief Fund, Johannesburg, 1985.
No. 1789

Delmas Treason Trial, Release Mandela Campaign, UDF, Johannesburg, 1988. No. 1812



Mass Meeting: It is not apartheid that is dying, unsourced, circa 1985. No. 271

No Apartheid War Hands Off Crossroads, ECC Cape Town, 1985. No. 1962

Ekapa commemorates the Trojan Horse, source unknown, Cape Town, 1985. No. 2578



Crossroads Under Fire, unsourced, 1985. No. 247

Guguletu Langa, unsourced, 1985. No. 1506

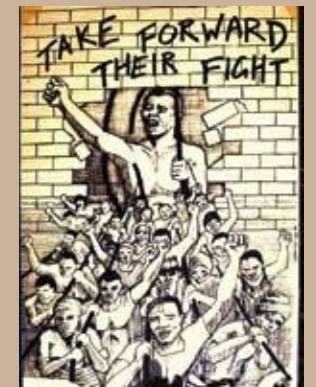
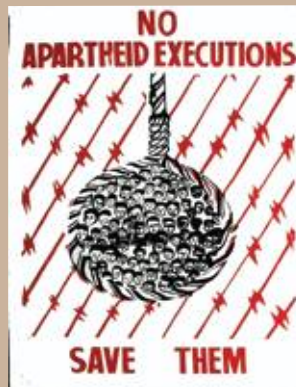
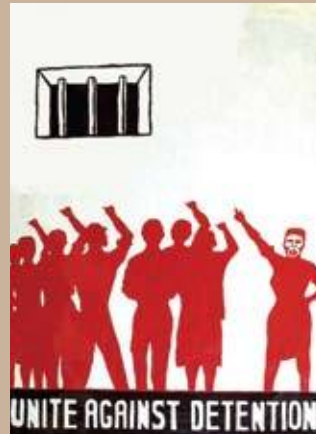


COSAS Banned, unsourced, 1985. No. 2325

- On 8 August, Inkatha supporters armed with traditional weapons and firearms raid a memorial service held for Victoria Mxenge, killing 17 people. The Gandhi settlement at Phoenix near Durban is attacked and destroyed; 70 people die (43 at the hands of police) and more than 200 are injured.
- In August, COSAS is banned.
- In August, PW Botha delivers his 'Rubicon' speech, in which he retreats from talk of reform.
- In August, Cape Town police attack UDF marchers who are demanding the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners; 31 people are killed in the next few days; street clashes and protests continue through the year.
- In October, in a security force operation, known as the 'Trojan Horse' incident, police kill three youths in Athlone, Cape Town. Two more youths are killed in an identical operation the next day near Crossroads.
- In November, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) is launched.
- In November, in Mamelodi near Pretoria, police open fire on 50 000 protesters demonstrating against rent rises, funeral restrictions and the presence of the SADF in the township; 12 people die.
- In November, the Queenstown shootings: police open fire on a meeting in a church hall; at least 11 people die.

1986

- The attempted incorporation of Moutse into KwaNdebele leads to widespread resistance and violence accompanying the emergence of a pro-incorporation vigilante grouping, Mbokodo.
- In February, in Alexandra north of Johannesburg, police fight residents, killing at least 17 people – called the 'Six Day War'.
- On 3 March, in the 'Gugulethu Seven' killing, seven MK operatives are shot dead by security forces in an ambush.
- On 26 March, in Winterveld north of Pretoria, police fire on a 1000-strong crowd, killing 11 people and wounding 200.
- Between April and October, paramilitary training of 200 Inkatha supporters by SADF Special Forces takes place on the Caprivi Strip, South West Africa/Namibia.
- On 19 May, South African Air Force raids Harare, Lusaka and Gabarone, resulting in the termination of the Commonwealth Secretariat peace mission, the Eminent Persons' Group.
- May Day: Over 1.5 million people join the largest May Day stay-away in South Africa's history.
- In May, vigilantes called the 'witdoeke' attack and destroy the UDF-aligned areas near Crossroads, Cape Town. In June, they again attacked in KTC, near Cape Town. Over 60 people are killed, with tens of thousands left homeless.
- On 12 June, government re-imposes the nationwide State of Emergency (the previous Emergency expired on 5 June), accompanied by mass detentions. By the end of this state of emergency on 11 June 1987, over 25 000 people had been detained; the emergency is re-imposed each year, until 1990.
- In August, in White City, Jabavu, in Soweto, police attack a crowd demonstrating against municipal rent raids: at least 24 people are killed.
- In December, security forces kill Drs Fabian and Florence Ribeiro in Mamelodi.
- The UDF campaign, 'Forward to People's Power', is launched involving the establishment of street committees and people's courts.
- In December, new media regulations for the Emergency impose a news blackout on reporting any unrest incidents or actions of the security forces.



Unite Against Detentions, unsourced, circa 1988. No. 1712

Alex Six Day War, Johannesburg 1986. No. 1980

Hands off our students and our teachers, National Education Crisis Committee and Save the Children Alliance, Johannesburg, circa 1986. No. 736

No Apartheid War: Troops Out of Alex, Johannesburg, 1986. No. 338

No apartheid executions, unsourced, circa 1987. No. 1675

Take forward their fight, unsourced, circa 1987. No. 242



How long must we keep dying this way, STP workshop, Johannesburg, 1985. No. 1059

Poster making under the State of Emergency

Graphics organisations, and personnel working with the mass democratic movement felt the weight of the State of Emergency directly.

Six months after it was formed in 1984, 'persons unknown' vandalised STP, smashing its new photostat machine and wrecking its equipment. Late that year, the police confiscated posters they had produced (particularly, those in support of the Vaal Uprising).

STP had generated an 'off-spring' graphics print shop in the small Free State town of Huhudi, located in a township garage (donated by a sympathetic business person). The Huhudi poster workshop was fire-bombed in 1985, and never restarted.

At the start of the first State of Emergency in 1985, Morris Smithers was detained for four months. In November 1986, police came to arrest STP staff, but the staff went into hiding. Smithers was detained a second time two months later; and another five STP members were detained over subsequent months.³

CAP was harassed by the police, but not closed down. *Grassroots* newspaper was banned and its offices closed; a number of its workers were detained.

Other individual activists known as printers and graphic artists in the townships were detained and jailed; these stories have not been documented, to this day. Razia Saleh mentions one person's story:

'In the 1980s, there was a commercial printer, who worked at home in Lenz — a one-man show, named Hussain. He would print anything, anytime. He was detained in the 80s. He is still alive and printing now' (in 2004).⁴

Lionel Davis points out:

'It needed defiance for people to print these [in 1986] A young man named Bathandwa [Ndondo] came back to the Transkei from CAP, wearing a t-shirt: he was shot dead in the street.'⁵



The impact of banning on production

In 1985, as well as the attacks and killings, the imposition of the States of Emergency itself hit hard at graphics production. Work for newly-banned organisations became illegal, and people who possessed or produced work for those organisations became subject to police attention.

As Kevin Humphrey put it:

'The States of Emergency were big. We did a lot of work for Taffy Adler [trade unionist, FOSATU] – banners and stuff. We'd spend all night finishing the banners, in the morning he would come in and say, "We can't use it. It's been banned." By the end of the 80s, we were crazy.'⁶

Razia Saleh commented:

'We had produced a special pamphlet on 30 years of the Freedom Charter when the State of Emergency was declared. In Laudium, we just dumped them. I felt bad about that – but it was the only time we did that.'

For the most part, though, she felt that the Emergency did not stop them producing, or distributing, their material:

'With pamphlets we might have been a bit more careful (about using banned material), but we never took them to a lawyer and asked. It never really stopped us from doing things.'⁷

Activists and workers putting posters up at night had trouble with the police. Razia Saleh describes putting up UDF posters to celebrate June 16th in Marabastad, near Pretoria (a designated Indian township):

'It was freezing cold. It was Eid [one of the largest Muslim celebrations]. I was all dressed up. We had all these posters in the car. We were stopped by the cops. They looked in the windows, then they waved us on, thank goodness. We were sitting on the posters ...'⁸

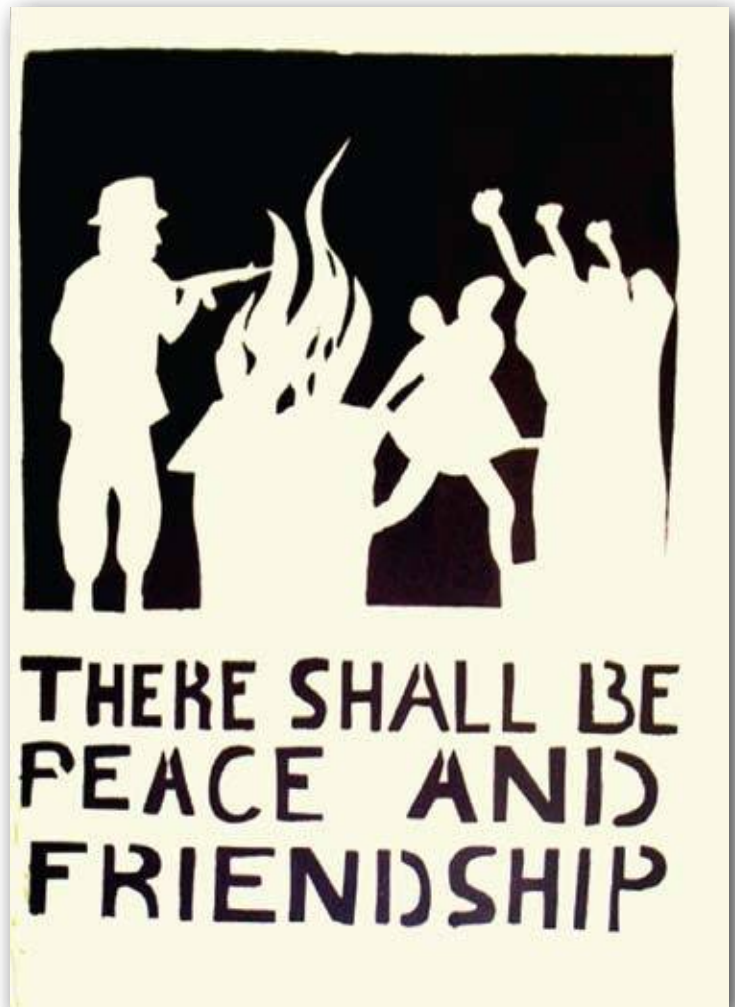
'Restrictions made things much more difficult. But it did not stop us. Instead of doing things in daylight, you did them in the dark; put it up and rush away. Posters – you stick them up and disappear.'⁹

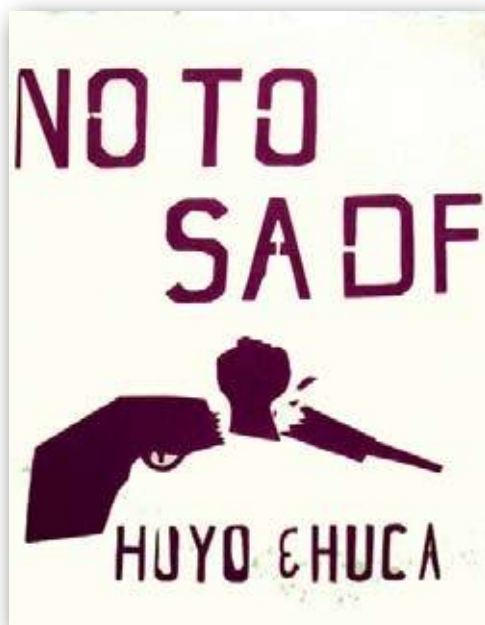
Jayesh Bhana remembers similar times:

'The State of Emergency was a dark time – a hard time, 85 to 89. In 86–87, I went back to college. I wore black armbands throughout, as a symbol of protest, as a reminder.

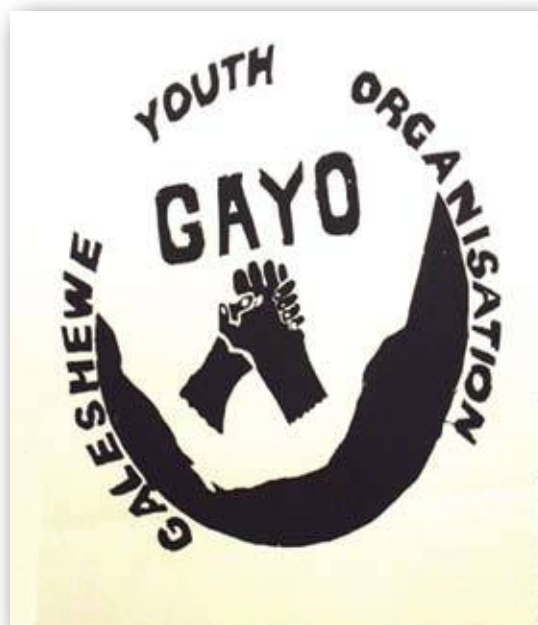
'The security laws definitely affected us – the fear was there. People were arrested and their nails were pulled out. You could never get away from it – it was dangerous. But whatever we had to do, we did.'¹⁰

There shall be peace and friendship, designed by Jonny Campbell after STP workshop. silkscreen, Johannesburg, 1985, No. 1979





No to SADF, HUYA & HUCA, printed by Huhudi Youth Organisation (HUYO) with STP. Silkscreen, Huhudi, Free State, 1985. No. 405



Galeshewe Youth Organisation, STP workshop with GAYO, 1984. No. 2250

The impact on 'art'

The artists doing protest art felt they were run ragged — reduced to making 'not art but propaganda' — too hurried, not thought through, thrown together, then not really even used effectively.

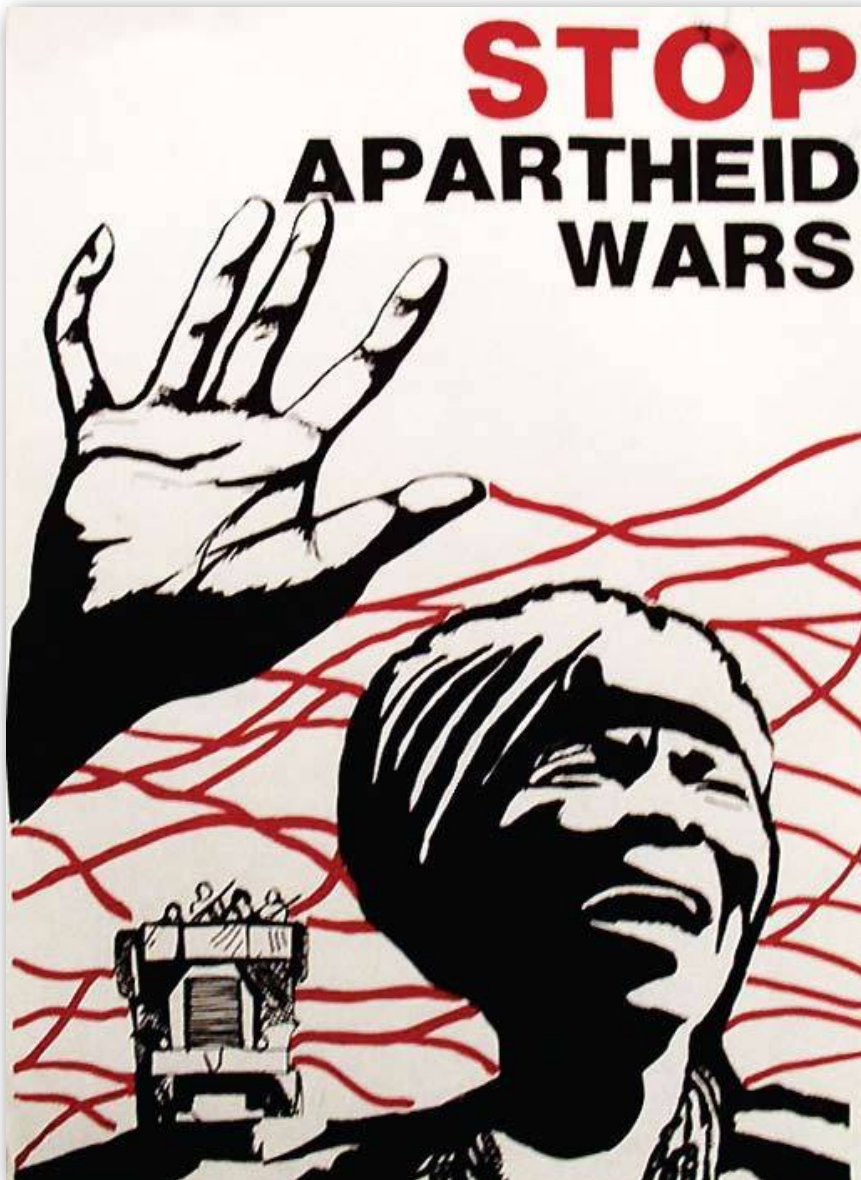
Morris Smithers talks of the effects of this pressure:

'At STP, the system fell into the trap of being caught up in frenzy — poster production became a conveyor belt situation, with no time for reflection, planning, it was hands on. Organisations sent different people each time, with no continuity and heavy turn-over of people working on the posters ...

'Sometimes posters were made by just putting down the factual information — it was not worth the effort of major art on something which was just advertising a meeting. Images were workshoped, but mostly people would 'take what was current' — notably photographs, and fists in the air.'¹¹

But graphic production — even an awareness of making art — did continue. Many of these stories of repression and resistance — even in the times of heaviest violence — are told in posters. Small, and not-so-small, organisations, legal or banned, threatened or devastated, still came together to print protests, demands, and even to develop plans for action. Often people would not put the names of the organisations involved on the graphics — this might only provide another target for repression. In time, people learned to make posters illegally, using whatever facilities they had to hand. Razia Saleh describes:

'In Laudium by 1987 we developed silk screening. We used our own silk screens, in garages or backyards; we were using red or green film [photosensitive film processes]. Once the police confiscated the whole lot [of a print-run]; but mostly we printed them overnight and put them up the next day.'¹²



Stop apartheid wars, based on ECC poster by Patrick Cockayne, ECC, 1984; original slogan "Troops out of townships". No. 296

Patrick Cockayne

From 1984, Patrick Cockayne was working as an educator and making media within the townships — first with Turret College, at the Sebokeng Centre in the Vaal, initially teaching teachers through their Teacher Opportunities Programme. He also taught school pupils in several townships, many of whom were boycotting school. 'I taught in Alex, Kagiso, Tembisa, Soweto, Thokoza ...' By 1987, he was working on the educational magazine *Learn and Teach*. During this time, he did posters for the ECC, for the newly formed COSATU, and for other movements. He comments on the imagery:

'People were more comfortable with the real — not abstract. I felt this was a bit of a lack: it imposed limits on the visuals of the poster. That cut across all media. But I reached for the nearest useful tools to do the job.

'The military was in the townships. I was seeing the Casspirs, and the fists, and the teargas and bullets, every day. These were fresh and current images. It became a very direct and immediate process: they were at it again. The images chose themselves.'¹⁴



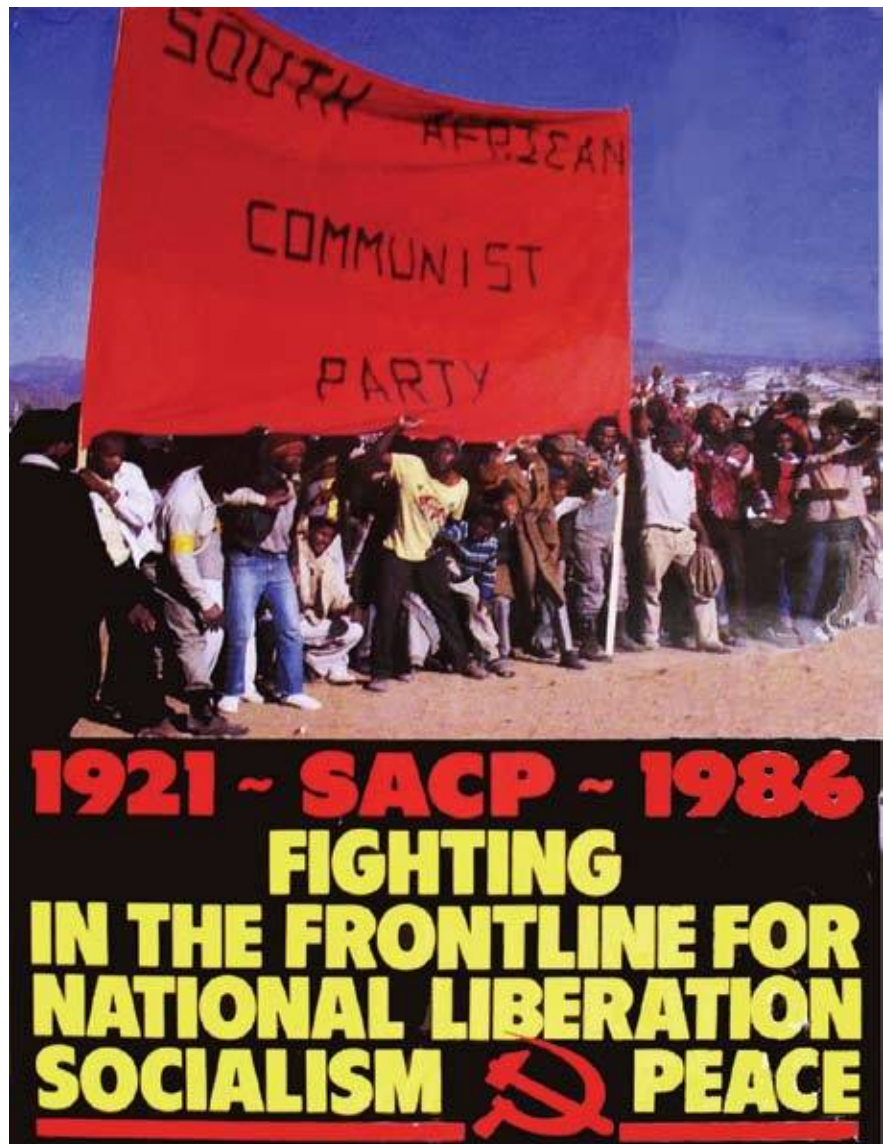
June 16th the bitter lessons of yesterday. The origins of this poster remain unknown. The image of MK made it illegal to draw, print or distribute, there is no attribution on the poster itself. No. 1723

Organising in the townships/liberated zones: A luta continua

Community organisations reeled under these hammer blows. People responded to the bannings, detentions, and violence as best they could. Often, this meant organising and mobilising from street to street, rebuilding the cohesion of the community after hard-won local organisations and structures were destroyed. Old organisations reformed; new organisations found their feet, and mounted campaigns.

In many townships, violence from police and the military, clashes with demonstrators, vigilante destruction, and mass resistance, led to the breakdown of municipal services. In some areas, people called their townships 'liberated zones'; they became no-go areas for government-appointed officials, spies, informers, police, or people seen as representatives of the authorities. Street committees took over basic functions of local government, from street cleaning to justice and 'people's courts'. The security forces entered these areas in force, and at risk. One person described it:

'... we know that the purpose is to enable people to take their lives in hand. Local government has collapsed. The state's version of local government was corrupt and inefficient in any case, but local government is necessary for people to channel their grievances. The street committees fill the vacuum. They give people an avenue to express views and come up with solutions.'¹³



SACP poster, 1986, unsourced; photo from *Inside SA*, No. 299

Graphics of the liberation war

The rebirth of the mass democratic movement in the 1980s generated debates and produced graphics that spoke to the unrest and mobilisation within the country. But this internal movement, as it grew, maintained links with the banned ANC, despite the repression, the bannings, and the continued attacks aimed at breaking these links.

In the early 1980s, one of these links was undoubtedly through Medu Art Ensemble, which was destroyed in 1985. Medu was not an isolated effort, either in terms of links to people working within the country, or in terms of the graphic production of members of the liberation movement outside.

By the 1980s, the African nationalist movement in exile had developed its own media capacity. The ANC owned printing presses in Lusaka, Angola, and Tanzania, as well as having material printed through supporting organisations in England, Europe, the Soviet bloc, and in the United States.

In the early 1980s, Thami Mnyele spent some time in MK camps in Angola, and later in Lusaka. During these trips he worked with ANC printers in both places, designing posters, mastheads, and even stickers under the ANC's name.

In 1982, Miles Pelo moved to Lusaka after a brief period in Medu Art Ensemble. He then studied graphics in Cuba, later returning to head the ANC printing press in Tanzania, and still later, studying graphic design in England.

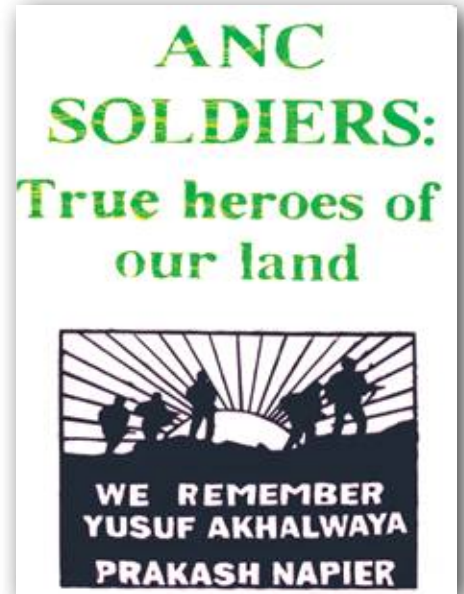
After 1984, with the assistance of Swedish aid, the ANC school at Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (Somafo) established a silk screening unit.

Images from exile were sent into the country, and became integrated into the mass of imagery developing around the struggle inside. It is, perhaps, a tribute to the effectiveness of these smuggling routes that so many designs and graphics made in exile found their way into new posters and print material produced inside the country.

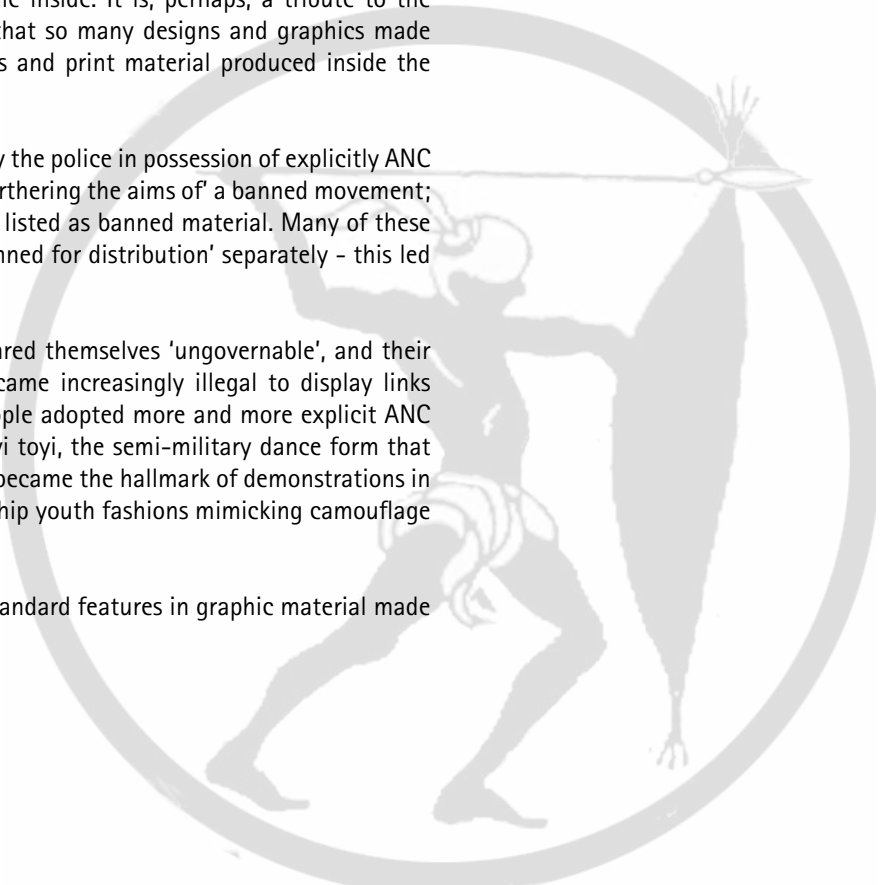
It should be stressed that a person taken by the police in possession of explicitly ANC graphic material could be charged with 'furthering the aims of' a banned movement; these works did not have to be separately listed as banned material. Many of these were also 'banned for possession' and 'banned for distribution' separately - this led to additional charges if it came to court.

But, as the youths in the townships declared themselves 'ungovernable', and their streets as 'liberated zones', and as it became increasingly illegal to display links with the mass democratic movement, people adopted more and more explicit ANC 'culture'. This was most obvious in the *toyi toyi*, the semi-military dance form that originated in guerilla training camps, and became the hallmark of demonstrations in the later 1980s. It was also clear in township youth fashions mimicking camouflage uniforms.

ANC logos, images, and colours became standard features in graphic material made and distributed within South Africa.



ANC soldiers: True heroes, drawing from MK publication *Dawn*, unsourced, circa 1989, No. 808





Photographs of People's Parks
artwork, exhibition by Steven
Sack, 1988

Art from street to street: People's parks in the townships

On the ground — literally — the inventiveness of people denied so many avenues of expression during the State of Emergency found outlets in what became called People's Parks. They can perhaps be best understood in the context of 'liberated zones' — people taking over direct control of their own environment.

This is a description of their flowering (from an exhibition about the People's Parks in the late 1980s):

'During 1985 and 1986, in a number of townships in the Transvaal, communities participated in a widespread series of events that came to



be known as "people's parks". Youths and parents, concerned at the dreadful state of the township environment, volunteered to clean up and transform the townships.

'This campaign quickly spread. Most of the children were not attending school, as a result of the political turmoil, and many people were unemployed. The townships were increasingly under surveillance by police and army personnel, and had become the focus of world media attention. People were protesting at increased rentals, and had rejected the state council structure. The strategy of making the townships "ungovernable" led to (amongst other things) the complete breakdown of municipal services. The people's parks formed an important part of the attempt by community groups to take control of the townships.

'Youths (often assisted by their parents) used junk and whatever they could find, to build monuments and makeshift playgrounds; artists created "art parks" hoping to build more permanent art centres; youth leaders constructed rudimentary club houses; comrades built monuments to those who had died in the struggle; parents planted gardens.

'The parks reflected the diverse concerns and ideologies that permeated the townships - Unity Park, Sisulu Park, Biko Park, Casablanca Park, Kissing Park, were some of the names given to these attempts to transform scraps of urban wasteland into places of peace, recreation and creativity.

'The parks were destroyed during the State of Emergency. Along with other forms of resistance this popular movement towards environmental transformation and community creativity was, for the moment, suppressed.' (COSAW)¹⁵





Security policeman Major Craig Williamson displays what he described as ANC propaganda retrieved from houses and offices attacked by South African commandos in Gaborone last Friday. The documents and posters were displayed at a Press conference in Pretoria yesterday.

Picture: Clive Lloyd

The Gaborone raid

Across the border in Botswana, on 14 June 1985, the SADF attacked houses belonging to South African exiles, many of whom were members of Medu. Twelve people were killed, of whom eight were South Africans. Artist Thami Mnyele was shot dead. The soldiers also killed Mike Hamlyn (an exiled draft resister, who was treasurer for Medu, a student at the university, and an ANC member). They also attacked the homes of other Medu members — musician Jonas Gwangwa (not at home at the time); musician Hugh Masekela (killing several people in the house, though Masekela was away); photographer Tim Williams (who escaped); two Botswana women who were killed in a back room where Wally Serote had previously lived; and Achmed Geer, a Dutch-Somali man, who was killed in a house where Uriel Abrahams once stayed. Medu as an organisation abruptly ceased to exist.

A week later, security police officer Craig Williamson appeared on South African television news, holding up graphics from Thami's portfolio, taken from his house by the SADF team who killed him. Williamson displayed these drawings as proof of Thami's terrorist activities.

The Botswana government told surviving members of Medu that they would not be allowed to print posters for the mass funeral in Gaborone. However, buses from Johannesburg brought mourners to the burial: they wore t-shirts printed at STP, with pictures and slogans commemorating the death of Thami Mnyele.¹⁶

News clipping, *Sunday Times*, 24 June 1985



Stop SADF Terror, Drawn by Patrick Cockayne for the ECC, silkscreen, Johannesburg, 1987. No. 358

Patrick Cockayne designed this poster after the 1987 SADF raid into the frontline states. It featured helicopters bombing ANC houses. He commented,

'I did it very quickly — in an hour. It was printed the same night, and posted up within hours. ECC and other UDF members put it up all over the place — the police then took it down very quickly, all over the place.'¹⁷

During the interview with Patrick about this poster, Judy Seidman recalled an incident that tells of the evocative nature of this image:

'Once I was walking with Thami [Mnyele] in a field outside the University of Botswana; I think it was in 1984, some time after the Lesotho raid. A helicopter went over and he literally dived into the waist-high grass. He apologised, and said then, "Sorry, but I expect I'm going to be killed by troops in a helicopter someday." Of course, the troops that killed him did not come in helicopters. But the image was clearly a part of our awareness.'¹⁸



Thupelo workshops: towards re-joining international art, or muzzling our cultural weapons?

In the beginning of 1985 — a time of severe disruption in the townships, and massive state repression — a new factor appeared in South Africa's visual arts circles: the Thupelo workshops.

The Thupelo workshops grew out of the 1982 Triangle Workshops concept, a British-American-Canadian plus 'third world' project promoted by well-established ('first world') artists such as British sculptor (Sir) Anthony Caro. The South African side of Thupelo was organised through Bill Ainslie's Johannesburg Art Foundation, working with David Koloane from the Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA). The intention was to provide resources, venue, and space to South African artists, particularly those seen as 'disadvantaged' by apartheid, bringing them into the sphere of 'modern' and 'world-class' art. 'Modern' and 'world-class', inevitably, were defined as attributes of the abstract art which in the mid-1980s was hegemonic throughout the Western art world.

Just how explicit this intention was is evident in the following comment, by an American guest artist at the 1986 Thupelo workshop held in Broederstroom (north of Pretoria):

'With abstract art, South African art ... can for the first time become major. South Africa is being offered a place in the development of painting and sculpture. It only needs to continue in its present track and it will produce a real movement. It will become like one of those centres for abstraction like New York, Edmonton, or Toronto...Given the overcrowding, desperate poverty and terror that exists in the townships it is incredible that a sophisticated, ambitious abstract art should be coming from there - an art that is wholly life affirming and that doesn't indulge in self-pity.' (Kenworth Moffett)¹⁹

To some 'struggle artists', as well as promoting an underlying abstract and indeed 'art-for-art's-sake' agenda, the Thupelo workshops also appeared to contradict the principles of the cultural boycott. Their very formation, at that time, suggested that apartheid society could after all support 'normal' and 'non-racial' development within the visual arts.

Arts writer Mario Pissara describes the ensuing debate:

'That many black artists abandoned (at least temporarily) more realist modes of working in favour of a painting style and approach that some radical

critiques saw as an expression of American cultural imperialism, meant that Thupelo received a mixed reception on the left, whilst being welcomed by establishment voices such as the SA National Gallery's Marilyn Martin.²⁰

Whether or not they promoted an ideological agenda, the Thupelo workshops proved extremely successful through the late 1980s and early 1990s. David Koloane and Lionel Davis have both pointed out that the workshops provided many participants with unlimited paints, space, and time to explore their art, for the first time in their lives; and that access to these resources did not necessarily lead to fundamental changes in their political perceptions of the society around them.

The workshops did provide artists with an alternative to the pressure-cooker of the townships, to the demands of 'struggle art'. Moreover, this alternative was proffered at a time when some artists were tempted to argue that it was unfair for political activists who were 'safely in exile' to demand that artists living under the heel of apartheid should risk their lives by producing struggle art.

When the organisers circulated a questionnaire among the 1987 participants of a workshop, asking for their feelings about Thupelo, the reported response was:

'It was seen and accepted as a forum where artists can meet, work together and discuss matters of common interest on a national level. Thupelo's main thrust is that of adopting a non-racial character with the affirmative action towards those artists disadvantaged by apartheid.'²¹

ENDNOTES

1 Timeline information from Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2003/trc/7acro.pdf. For a fuller history at SouthAfricanHistory Online www.sahistory.org.za/;

Also, see: SASPU National: State of the Nation; Feb–March 1985: Rural review: Apartheid's bitter harvest; Eastern Cape supplement, Building People's Power, Oct/Nov 1985: In a State of Emergency

2 PW Botha Rubicon speech quoted in http://africanhistory.about.com/od/biography/a/BioPWBotha_3.htm (Accessed 22 April 2007).

3 Maurice Smithers interview.

4 Razia Saleh interview

5 Lionel Davis interview.

6 Kevin Humphrey interview.

7 Razia Saleh interview.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid

10 Jayesh Bhana interview.

11 Maurice Smithers interview.

12 Razia Saleh interview.

13 Quoted from Mathiane 1986:13, in 'From people's politics to state politics aspects of national liberation in South Africa 1984–1994', Michael Neocosmos <http://www.unisa.ac.za/> (Accessed 2005).

14 Patrick Cockayne interview.

15 COSAW Publication' from text on People's parks exhibition, curated by Steven Sack in 1988) Text notes for People's Parks exhibition, Steven Sack 1988, SAHA history archives at Wits.

16 Judy Seidman personal reminiscence.

17 Patrick Cockayne interview 11 April 2005.

18 Judy Seidman personal reminiscence.

19 Extract from Moffett's Art Letter by Kenworth Moffett Ph.D Harvard, guest artist at Thupelo 1986; in Thupelo Workshops / Past Workshops at www.greatmoreart.org/past_workshops.htm

20 Mario Pissaro, profile of Lionel Davis, at people.africadatabase.org/en/profile/11126.html

21 Thupelo Workshops / Past Workshops, at www.greatmoreart.org/past_workshops.htm

