



# TRIBES

## Factional Violence in South Africa

by Robert MacKenzie

ONE of the most significant misperceptions of the American public regarding the situation in the Republic of South Africa (RSA) concerns "The Blacks."

Nearly always, that term is used to describe South Africa's majority racial group as if it were a homogeneous mass, united in its desire to live under the leadership of the African National Congress (ANC) and Nelson Mandela. To talk of "The Blacks" in that sense has as little validity as using the term "The Russians" to refer to all the people of the Soviet Union, who actually are Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Georgians, and scores of other ethnic groups.

Blacks in the RSA, numbering some 26 million, actually belong to nine different tribal groups, each with its own language,

customs, traditions, allegiances and leaders. Are Apaches the same as Seminoles? They probably would say they are not, but both are part of "The Indians" (or Native Americans). Similarly, a Sotho is not the same as a Venda, nor is a Zulu the same as a Xhosa. And, like many of our own native people, African tribes only stopped fighting each other when a dominant white society enforced its own ideas of civilization.

Until a few years ago, order in South Africa's black residential areas was enforced by policemen, and black-on-black killing resulted mainly from criminal activity. Now, as we regularly see on TV, thousands of murders are being committed for other reasons — the networks have even used the long-suppressed term "tribalism" to explain the mounting death

toll. The same networks, however, continue to talk about "The Blacks" as if there were no such thing as tribal difference.

How does one explain this apparent contradiction? People like Bishop Tutu, Ted Kennedy and Nelson Mandela usually assert that the violence is all the fault of the South African government. They say this has nothing to do with the fact that tribes in Africa have been slaughtering each other since long before the advent of white explorers and settlers. Caught in a Catch-22, President De Klerk's government is hysterically charged with "repression of the masses" if it deploys strong forces to curb violence, and with "collusion" or "instigation" if it does not send in the army to stop factional fighting.

A rational explanation can be found if

Crudely armed Zulu Inkatha supporters do mock battle as they march toward "peace rally" where they were addressed by leader Mangosuthu Buthelez, last December. Clashes between ANC members and Zulus had claimed at least 83 lives in the preceding five days. The violence continues unabated. Photo: AP/Wide World

racial issues are put in their proper perspective, and the nature of the current combatants is examined. On one side are members of the ANC, while the other are mostly from the Inkatha Freedom Party. Inkatha members perceive the ANC as being a tribal organization for their enemies of several centuries, the Xhosas. Inkatha, in turn, is a Zulu organization with overlapping political and trade union wings. Already, just by composition of the two groups, there is plenty of scope for conflict.

Exacerbating the tribal rivalry are major political differences. The ANC has long espoused "armed struggle" as the way to achieve dominance, while Inkatha's leader, a traditional chief named Gatsha Buthelezi, is an advocate of negotiation and power-sharing. Therefore, Zulus who are moderate to right-wing confront radical Xhosas, many of whose leaders are also members of the South African Communist Party.

The ANC leaders, to date, have refused to register their organization as a political party, claiming that such a move would legitimize the current government. Instead, they proudly proclaim to be a "Revolutionary Movement." They maintain their own army of some 12,000 to 15,000 trained cadres, and receive training, weapons, base facilities and organizational assistance from communist regimes worldwide. (Our own U.S. State Department is about to give them \$10 million of your taxes to pay for cars, FAX machines, office space and probably entertainment expenses.)

A political party called the United Democratic Front (UDF) is widely regarded as a proxy for the ANC. The ANC/UDF have spent years politicizing urban blacks, deliberately and successfully removing respect for authority and cultural norms from hundreds of thousands of young men and women.

Horrendous practices such as the use of the "necklace" have become commonplace with the enthusiastic, public endorsement of such people as Nelson Mandela's wife, Winnie. Maintaining the family tradition, his daughter Cassie, boastfully describing the new order in RSA's black residential areas, said:

*"Life in townships is no longer like it was before. Here collaborators and informers [ANC opponents] live in fear of petrol, either petrol bombs hurled at their home and reducing them to rack and ruin, or petrol dousing their treacherous bodies which are set alight and burned to a charred and despicable mess ... Lucrative it still is to sell out, but it carries the*

*immediate hazard of having one's flesh and bones being reduced to unidentifiable ashes."* (ANC newsletter SECHABA, Nov. '85).

Having created a climate of violence among South African black youth, ANC leaders are now watching the birth of their own Frankenstein. They removed traditional values, allegiances and respect for human life from children, and are now losing their own control over them. Younger members of the ANC no longer obey their former mentors and in recent meetings have even accused Oliver Tambo (leader of the ANC) of being a sell-out. I wonder if Nelson Mandela is someday going to wear the necklace that his wife and daughter have advocated for other South Africans?

More than 4,000 politically inspired murders took place last year alone, spreading from urban to rural areas. At least half of the dead were ANC/UDF supporters, as



Zulu Inkatha supporter burns alive after being beaten, stoned and stabbed by rival African National Congress (ANC) supporters in Soweto last September. ANC youth in background gets in one last lick with club as small boy runs from scene. Photo: AP/Wide World

formerly moderate Zulus, tired of watching a perceived Xhosa takeover, have begun to retaliate. Numbering some eight million, Zulus are by far the largest ethnic group in South Africa. Next largest is the Xhosa tribe, with six million. Then there are approximately five million white people, themselves divided into English- or Afrikaans-speaking groups.

After that are smaller tribes, people of mixed race, and Indian/Pakistani groups. A patently ridiculous argument is sometimes made that urban blacks belong to no tribe at all. Does that mean that urban Hispanics or Asian-Americans have also lost their cultural and ethnic backgrounds? Clearly not. If one-man, one-vote were instituted tomorrow, Zulus would be the new rulers of South Africa, and woe betide the Xhosas.

So far, virtually all political murders have involved either Xhosas or Zulus, although more and more policemen of all races are being gunned down — usually with AK-47s. The AK, by the way, is the

weapon of choice of the ANC, and lately policemen seem to have become the targets of choice. The political situation has the potential for becoming even more explosive. A thug named Chris Hani, who is the commander of the ANC military wing, has lately taken up residence in Transkei, a Xhosa tribal homeland run by another thug in the guise of a military dictator.

Hani is reported to be accompanied by hundreds of his Russian- and Angolan-trained "soldiers" who could use Transkei as a refuge between sorties into RSA. Soweto is only a five-hour drive from Transkei, and Kwa-Zulu only two, through an extremely porous border. The fight for political dominance in South Africa could easily escalate, with strong men dueling for ascendancy, not compromise and cooperation. The grim television images of black bodies strewn in black townships, murdered by other blacks, may well be

with us for a while.

To believe that all blacks in South Africa are united is to ensure that no understanding of present problems will ever be achieved. Most people in South Africa would like to live a peaceful life as fully participating members in a prosperous society. The majority of them still bear a large measure of goodwill toward their fellows. It is the callous manipulation of emotional issues by power-hungry politicians, black or white, Xhosa, Afrikaner, or Boston Irish, that has created today's climate of violence in South Africa.

Until all those politicians start thinking more of their constituents' welfare and less of their own offices, murders will continue. Ethnic and tribal differences are a reality all over the world, and must be recognized before they can be dealt with.

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