The phenomenon of violence with specific reference to violence on trains in South Africa: 1992-1993

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General orientation

It is an intricate task to prove that human beings are becoming more violent or that they live in a more violent world today than that experienced by their ancestors. It is probably true, however, that this generation assumes that never has there been so much violence and, indeed, that a rising tide of violence and counter-violence has been experienced at an unprecedented rate in modern life. Besides, since the dawn of the mass media it is certainly true that more people witness portrayals of real and fantasy violence more frequently than ever before in human history.

There is no shortage of good reasons for the concept of violence being chosen as a suitable subject for study. Most commentators on the subject begin with a predictable concern about the growth of violence, and its damaging effect on individuals and their societies. Research into the causes of violence is therefore more than just an academic exercise. The authors wish to tacitly acknowledge that the world in which humans live constantly presents them with gruesome examples of 'man's inhumanity to man'. Acts of violence, it is often argued, contribute substantially to an endless catalogue of grim facts. In almost all civilised societies a common social language has been created to differentiate the concept of violence in its myriad forms, for example child abuse, terrorism, vandalism and repression. Other, potentially more catastrophic, symbols of violence confront the inhabitants of a world threatened by mass destruction. It has been asserted that much of the violence of the twentieth century has taken the form of behaviour directed and legitimised by social norms. This should be a reminder to social scientists and students of all professions that there can be no totally objective stance in violence.

There are only interpretations of the concept, which have been manufactured to represent the often conflicting interests of diverse social groups.

From the etymological angle the word 'violence' is a compound noun of Latin origin derived from the words vis meaning 'force' and latus, the past participle of the word fero meaning 'I carry'. When the two words are combined it means to carry force towards something. On this elementary level violence can then be described as the movement of carrying force towards something. In the literal and descriptive sense this meaning of violence is most evident in cases of physical violence, involving the physical movement of carrying force towards something. Violence is defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary (1992: 1370) as 'the unlawful exercise of physical force and the intimidation of the exhibition of this'. Synonyms include the following words: force, strength, severity, vehemence, ferocity, fury, destructiveness, disorder, mayhem, outrage and virulence. According to Harris (1980: 10) 'Violence becomes the monomania of the press, the core substance of politics, the mainstay of the cocktail party and the obsession of the public. Violence is promiscuously viewed and it is seen everywhere. Historically it becomes the theme of evolution; psychologically, the corollary of human nature; educationally, the enemy of learning; socially, the wrong road to change.'

Violence can broadly be defined as the use of physical force to inflict injury or death upon oneself or another. In many parts of the world today violent behaviour is at an all-time high and seems to be ever increasing. Violence permeates human existence, its vocabulary and its mentality to such an extent that it is regarded and accepted as an illness of epidemic and endemic proportions, and as in any illness – from the common cold to
Aids – there is the host, the victim, the virus or bacteria the criminal or victimiser and a suitable and supportive environment for the illness to flourish. According to the *Uniform Crime Report* (1992:4–8) homicide is the twelfth leading cause of death in the United States, and is likely to become higher. In 1988 homicide accounted for more than 22,000 deaths, more in 1990 and even more in 1992. Homicide is the sixth leading cause of premature mortality, which means years of potential life lost before the age of 65 (US Department of Justice 1991). A comparison of the international rates of homicide among males aged 15 to 24 in 21 developed countries showed that in the United States the homicide rate was not only the highest among all industrialised nations but was also 4.4 times higher than the next nation in line namely Scotland – and many times higher than the rate of any other developed country. African Americans and other minorities are at a particularly high risk of injury and death because of interpersonal and interfamilial violence. African males are seven times more likely than white males to die from homicide. Homicide rates are 'particularly' high for young black men, among whom the rates have sharply increased in recent years. The rate of spousal homicide, generally husband killing wife, among African American couples is 8.4 times higher than among white couples, and the rate among Latino couples is also higher than among white couples. Various researchers are of the opinion that poverty is the cause of the high incidence of homicide in these populations. Poverty is only one factor. Other factors include the hopelessness and the constant stress that poverty engenders (Benedek 1993:285).

Since the earliest history of South Africa violence has been rife and at present the spectre of violent crime lurks everywhere. Violence can be seen in burning townships; in corpses in the streets; in gangs committing murder, robbery and destruction; in civil war among black factions, in which vast numbers have died; in white violence, in which blacks have been massacred; in blacks making every effort to exterminate whites; and whites rebelling against whites. Even though the dividing line between the different types of violence is often vague and blurred, the role played by political violence was and still is a crucial one. However, according to Kane-Berman (1993:13) most violent deaths arise not from politics but from ordinary crime. A very bleak scenario had already been sketched in the annual report of the Commissioner of the South African Police (1993:95). It warns that 'if crime, in general, and unrest and violence, in particular, are not combated effectively, the situation will progressively deteriorate to such an extent that South Africa will eventually be faced with anarchy'.

According to South African human scientists, violence in this country has become one of the most effective ways to get and to keep power. They also express their deep concern about the effects of this widespread violence on the mental health of the generations of children, black and white, who were raised in this environment, and wonder what the future could hold for a society struggling to rebuild itself. World history shows that throughout the centuries violence has accompanied transitional politics. As soon as repressive measures are relaxed and political and social reforms get under way, the masses react with more demands and extortion through an escalation of unrest coupled to lawlessness, provocation and crime. Against this background political violence is a major and complex problem and not easily defined. Honderich (in Mommesen and Hirschfeld 1982:20) gives the following operational definition: 'Political violence is a considerable or destroying use of force against persons or things, a use of force prohibited by law, directed to a change in the policies, system, territory of jurisdiction, or personnel of a government or governments, and hence also directed to changes in the lives of individuals within societies.' While it has often been seen primarily as revolutionary, political violence can be reconceptualised to include violent acts for political purposes carried out by an established regime as well as by its opponents.

In 1993, 449,498 violent crimes were reported to the South African Police Services compared with 416,831 in 1992, an increase of 7.8 per cent based on the raw numbers. This increase is 5.8 per cent if the rate for violent crimes per 100,000 of the population is taken into account. It matches the increase in violent crime that was observed between 1991 and 1992 and is a continuation of the trend that has been evident for a number of years. Increases in serious violent crime were also noted between 1992 and 1993 in murder (5.9 per cent), attempted murder (16.3 per cent), rape (9.1 per cent), aggravated assault (4.2 per cent), common assault (1.8 per cent), aggravated robbery (8.1 per cent) and other robbery (7.7 per cent). According to Glanz (1994:3) violent crime in general increased by 27 per cent in the five-year period from 1988 to 1993. The most serious types of violent crime increased at a very high rate during this period. Murder increased by 50 per cent; rape by 27 per cent; aggravated robbery by 109 per cent and aggravated assault by 5 per cent. In addition to this, the proportion of very serious crime is steadily increasing. The rate for the six
most serious types of crime in South Africa increased by 3 per cent between 1992 and 1993 whereas all other types of crime increased by 1 per cent only. It becomes apparent that the pattern of crime in South Africa indicates not only a steady shift to crime of a violent nature but also an increase in the level of seriousness. It is also a sobering thought and a cause for grave concern that in certain types of crime South Africa, with a population of approximately 41 million, is already surpassing the United States of America, a country with one of the highest crime rates in the world and a population of approximately 250 million.

In a retrospective study of 5 600 deaths registered in Soweto from July 1990 to June 1991 the impact of trauma and violence on the overall mortality pattern was assessed and the findings indicated that trauma and violence accounted for 28.5 per cent of all deaths. The major types of injuries inflicted were gunshot wounds (33%), unspecified multiple injuries (32%) and stab wounds (27%). Furthermore young men (20–29 years) were particularly affected by trauma and violence-related deaths (38.5%) (Byarazaba & Kielkowski 1994:610).

In a study by Kilian and Mason of the Psychology Department of the University of Natal (Armstrong 1994:32–37) 300 children between the ages of 8 and 12 were helped to complete a questionnaire which included a checklist of 28 symptoms that psychologists recognised as indicative of depression and stress. Of the 300 children studied, 8 said that they had killed a person, 11 admitted being part of a group that had killed someone, 13 had witnessed assault and 47 had had their homes torched. By far the most common symptom among the schoolchildren was hypervigilance, which means constantly keeping watch for danger, which in turn is indicative of chronic anxiety. More than half the children had trouble sleeping, and 43 per cent experienced frightening dreams almost every night. Those that suffered flashbacks in which they relived distressing experiences amounted to 41 per cent, while 38 per cent had eating disorders such as loss of appetite, 23 per cent felt frightened much of the time, 12 per cent wished they were dead and 13 per cent had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition which impairs a person’s ability to work, relax and sustain close relationships.

Origin and types of violence

Six centuries before the birth of Christ the prophet Ezekiel wrote in desperation: ‘The land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence’ (Ezekiel 7:23). Throughout the ages, history appears to repeatedly convey the message that people’s hostility toward one another, and their concern about that behaviour, is as old as life itself and that violent behaviour is not something new. What is new is the dramatic increase in destructive capacity.

One of the most commonly accepted explanations of violent crime is that children who are physically abused by their parents will abuse others in turn, and will be more prone to commit violent crimes than those who enjoy a more normal upbringing.

The phenomenon of violence is classified by McKendrick and Hoffmann (1990:4) into two main categories namely:

- natural violence, which covers acts or events caused by the physical environment and cannot be attributed to the working of human beings;
- man-made violence which is perpetuated by individuals, in their personal capacity or in groups, or by people collectively. The second category of violence in turn can be subdivided into ‘accidental acts of violence’ and ‘wilful acts of violence’. Under the category ‘wilful acts of violence’ there are two additional classifications: legitimate violence and illegitimate violence. Legitimate violence refers to acts of discipline as applied within the family and school context, aggressive behaviour as manifested in various kinds of sports such as hunting, boxing and rugby, and also the state of war as used by agents of the state such as police and troops. Cook (in McKendrick & Hoffmann 1990:54–55) discusses political violence in South Africa and mentions that almost 3 500 people died in incidents of political violence between 1984 and early 1989. He then questions whether these casualties can be regarded as criminal acts, terrorism, or acts of warfare in a war of liberation. In presenting its armed struggle as a form of guerilla warfare, a ‘people’s war’, the African National Congress legitimised it as a last-resort response to state oppression. The state in turn swiftly responded over the years with increased militarisation.

Illegitimate violence is regarded as illegal acts of violence that can be directed at persons or at property. Wilful acts of violence directed at the person include acts known as violent crimes, such as murder, assault and acts of abuse and negligence. In addition to these, acts of violence directed at persons can be grouped into those directed against a person (interpersonal violence) and those directed against certain groups of persons (intergroup violence).
Theories of aggression

Human scientists often tend to associate violence with theories of aggression. Aggression is not an emotion, need or motivational factor but a spectrum of complex forms of behaviour. The word ‘aggression’ is derived from the Latin term *ad gradi*, which literally means to ‘step’ or ‘move towards’ and already includes the variety and complexity of forms of behaviour. Movement towards objects occurs in many ways and various reasons and consequently encompasses the broad semantic field covered by this word. Theories on aggression strive mainly to identify the nature and causes of aggression so that predictions are reliable and valid and also to ensure the development of effective methods of treatment. The most important theories are discussed briefly.

Biological theories

According to these theories aggressive behaviour depends on inborn structural properties of the brain. In addition to this, biological theories emphasise similarities rather than differences between humans and other animals. Lorenz (1966:15-25), an ethologist, holds the view that aggression is an inherited instinct of both humans and animals. One of its principal purposes is to enable the animal and the human being to defend and protect ‘staked-out’ territory, which ensures sufficient food, water and space to roam and reproduce.

If this space is violated, the instinctive or genetically programmed response is to attack, or at least to increase aggressive behaviour toward the intruder, thus preventing further territory violation. Ethologists thus maintain that before human aggression is correctly interpreted, it is of vital importance to understand animal aggression. In their view human beings have already outdistanced the evolutionary process of inhibiting aggression. Instead of developing natural weapons and the species – preserving function of ritualised aggression – humans have developed technological weaponry and thus through superior learning ability increased their capacity to exterminate each other. The ethological view is fascinating, partly because it enables its supporters to excuse their own aggressive behaviour by abdicating their moral responsibility because nature has endowed humans with an irresistible instinct of aggression towards his fellow beings. Empirical research has yet to prove any instinctive or invariant genetically programmed behaviour determinant in humans. Furthermore the capacity to exercise control over one’s own thought processes, motivation and action is a distinctively human characteristic.

Psychodynamic theories

Freud, regarded by many as the father of psycho-analysis, postulated that all human behaviour is caused by two groups of drives:

- Eros or the life drive and
- Thanatos or the death drive, also called the destructive drive or instinct. According to Freud’s theory, human beings are susceptible from birth to a build-up of aggressive energy, which has to be consumed in some way through action or fantasy before it reaches dangerous levels. This is known as the psychodynamic or hydraulic model in the sense that this energy is irritating to an individual and it therefore possesses an impetus which pushes or forces the person to some form of action to consume the energy. If excessive pressure accumulates in the human psyche, an explosion is bound to take place which might then give rise to violent acts.

Freud concluded that violence in all of its forms is a manifestation of this aggressive energy discharge. A process called catharsis takes place when people can be provided with the means of using their aggressive energy in innocent, harmless ways and in doing so reduce the possibility of harmful aggression. This theory was empirically rejected because it could neither be verified nor proved false.

The frustration-aggression theory of Dollard and associates (1939) (as quoted by Knutson 1973:203) assumed that aggression is an almost inevitable consequence of frustration, though frustration can lead to behaviours other than aggression, such as regression, sublimation and aggressive fantasy. The premise of the frustration-aggression hypothesis is that when people become frustrated, namely when their goals are thwarted, they respond aggressively. However, it soon became apparent that the frustration-aggression hypothesis, unmodified, was not adequate to explain all aggression. According to Berkowitz (1989:160–61) aggression is only one possible response to frustration. A person may learn responses from others, such as withdrawal, doing nothing or trying to alter the situation by compromise. The emphasis thus is also laid on the role of individual differences in responses to frustrating circumstances. The revised frustration-aggression hypothesis propounds thus the following three points:
The person is hindered from reaching an expected goal.

This results in the setting in of frustration which in turn generates anger.

Anger predisposes or prepares the person to behave aggressively. Whether the person actually engages in aggressive actions will depend in part on his or her learning background, interpretation of the event, and individual way of responding to frustration. It will also depend, however, on the presence of aggression-eliciting stimuli in the environment.

### Social learning theory

With the emphasis on an environmental learning model rather than one directed by forces within the individual, there was a push to understand aggression in terms of cues, responses, and rewards in addition or instead of innate or primary drives. Bandura (1973:57) proposed that aggressive behaviour is learned and maintained through environmental experiences either directly or vicariously, and that learning aggression is controlled by reinforcement contingencies and punishment in a similar fashion to learning any new behaviour. For instance, these behaviours may be acquired when an individual attempts a new behaviour and is rewarded with a positive outcome. New behaviours will be avoided in future if those behaviours are punished. Social-learning theory holds that new behaviours may also be acquired vicariously by watching an influential role-model engage in an action which has positive consequences. This means that external environmental consequences control the acquisition of aggression and the maintenance of aggressive behaviour is almost always subject to the principles of reinforcement by the environment. As a rule, behaviours that are reinforced will be repeated, while behaviours that are not reinforced will be extinguished. According to the social-learning model, aggression is usually seen as being controlled by positive reinforcement. In contrast, from a drive model perspective, aggression is usually mediated by negative reinforcement or the escape from an aversive situation.

### Violence on trains in South Africa

According to the Human Rights Commission's Area Repression Report quoted by the Sowetan (24 April 1992:9) a total of 97 deaths occurred in train incidents as recorded for 1990 and 1991. The number of lives lost in train incidents in the first three months of 1992 has been reported as 126, thus outstripping the combined figure for the whole of 1990 and 1991.

In an attempt to analyse violence on trains, under the title 'Township terror' and subtitles 'Commuters take train rides into hell ... while Alex burns' and 'If you've killed once, it's easier to kill again' the Sunday Tribune (5 April 1992:6) recounted the horrifying events which took place on 14 September 1990 on an ordinary Soweto commuter train between George Goch and Benrose stations: 'When it was over, 26 people were dead or dying and more than 100 others staggered around crying in pain and bewilderment or lay on the floor in pools of their own blood. It was not the first attack on a train and it wouldn't be the last, but its scale and the sheer brutality of attackers who could board a train packed with innocent commuters, and then at a signal, in complete silence, hack, stab and shoot their way through the coaches, shocked a nation.

People demanded answers. Who stands to benefit from the deaths of innocent passengers? Why have the police been unable to control it? Why does the violence appear to coincide with political developments at national level? What about the whispers of a sinister third force orchestrating the massacres?'

But the appalling body count on the death trains went on. One of the often-given reasons for the train killings was an overflow of the violent power struggle raging between rival political groupings in Reef townships. Similar sentiments are echoed by Graeme Simpson, a researcher at the University of the Witwatersrand, in the same newspaper when he referred to an element or grouping in the society that had a political interest in disrupting the negotiation process. He stated that the concept of the Third Force had been oversimplified and badly defined from the outset: 'It's not one thing, you are talking about a society that has been torn apart by war for the last 10 years, and any society going through that generates its own war-based sub-economy ... this is an internal war, a civil war, and certain people have developed a material rather than a political interest in the process – they trade in arms, they trade in assassination, they trade in protection.'

In an article entitled '2 000 - strong private force mooted to end train deaths' The Star (7 April 1992:2) reported a new effort by Soweto Community leaders to end train violence in which a large company was to be formed with a view of enlisting more than 2 000 people to police the trains independently of the South African Police. The proposed force would then man checkpoints at Soweto stations, use metal detectors, radios and television monitors, and be allowed free access to the trains. According to the then Minister of Transport, Dr Piet Welgemoed, (quoted by the
Citizen 30 April 1992:8) a strategy costing R260 million, was to be implemented. This strategy was aimed at stopping armed passengers boarding trains. It involved active police and military support and included security fencing of all stations, adequate lighting, access control and the active presence of the police. Communication between train drivers, the control room and the police had been improved to reduce the reaction time to dangerous situations. The South African Defence Force had been deployed in greater numbers at Metro stations at the request of the commuter corporation. The police and SADF travelled on commuter trains. All trains were regularly stopped and searched for dangerous weapons, tollfree telephone numbers were instituted for criminal actions to be reported, and rewards were offered for useful information. Signs forbidding the carrying of dangerous weapons were prominently displayed at all Metro stations and tests were carried out on introducing video cameras to monitor commuter behaviour.

Despite the announced measures by the authorities, on 4 May 1992 train commuters demonstrated their anger at the apparent inability of Spoornet and the police to protect them during their daily journeys. In their thousands, they refused to ride the trains to and from work. One commuter said he normally paid R42 a month for his train ticket but now he was prepared to pay R8.20 for a single trip. It was obvious that death and injury moved people to action. The Sowetan (5 May 1992:6) put it as follows: 'The extra voice this week, that of the thousands of commuters who refuse to use trains, must be heard.'

In Parliament during the Own Affairs Budget debate, Democratic Party leader Dr Zach de Beer demanded that more should be heard from the Minister of Law and Order on why police had not caught the people responsible for train massacres. He referred to some malevolent force that was at work in South Africa murdering only black citizens on a large scale for unknown purposes. He concluded by saying: 'My pleas at this critical time is that all of us, specifically the leaders of the National Party and the ANC, must keep an unwavering gaze on the absolute necessity of reaching an agreement on our new constitution and future' (Citizen, 9 May 1992:8).

During a six-day rail boycott from 4 to 9 May 1992, which cost the South African Rail Commuter Corporation more than R725 000 in lost fares, train deaths dropped dramatically and only two people were killed during the boycott period. The Sunday Star (10 May 1992:2) reported that a man's body was found between Wadeville and Katlehong stations on 8 May 1992. A second man died when he was flung from a train at Wadeville station on the same day. That day rail occupancy rates dropped to under 1 per cent in Soweto, the township which had borne the brunt of violence on trains. The train boycott steering committee, under the chairmanship of Mr Tokyo Sexwale, said the boycott, which was an integral part of the overall strategy to try to end the violence on trains, was a 'roaring success'. The Government and the SA Rail Commuter Corporation promised to take security measures which would include fencing off stations, the installation of a closed-circuit television system in all coaches and the re-deployment of more personnel at railway stations and on trains.

Despite all efforts and measures, violence on trains continued unabated. On the night of 1 July, 1992 at least five people were killed and five others seriously wounded when six men boarded a packed train from Durban to KwaMashu and shot at commuters. One person was shot dead and nine terrified commuters jumped from the moving train as it left Effingham station, near Avoca. Police had to board another train to travel along the track and pick up bodies that were lying on the main railway lines to KwaMashu. One of the victims, a man in his thirties, fell more than 25 metres to his death after he jumped from the place where the shooting started. Another person had the lower part of his body amputated when he landed on the railway lines and a Durban-bound train ran over him. The bloody scene on the train and on the railway lines left several hardened policemen shocked (The Daily News 2 July 1992:1).

The Goldstone Commission, which was appointed to investigate this macabre phenomenon, unfortunately failed to throw direct light on who or what hid behind repeated horrific massacres on Rand commuter trains. But then it served as a useful reminder that there could be no quick-fix solutions to the culture of violence that permeated South African society so deeply and in such complex ways. The Goldstone report, however, threw valuable light on several secondary causes of violence on trains. It was found that lack of control over access to stations allowed weapons into trains. Poor exit control allowed attackers to escape. There was a lack of coordination between the SAP and the SA Rail Commuter Corporation and prosecutions had been few and ineffective. Furthermore the Goldstone report urged that a special guard corps of the SARCC should be formed to control station access, and SAP officers guarding stations should be given greater search powers. These measures would then help fill the gap seemingly left by absorption of the old
Railway Police into the SAP. Where the report could identify groups of attackers, they were from hostels (although there were other unidentified groups, and no ethnic pattern). Thus the message that went out was ‘Control over hostels should be increased’ (*The Star* 30 July 1992:22).

At the end of October 1992 Witwatersrand SAP spokesman Colonel Dave Bruce announced at a press conference that 363 attacks had been reported between January and October. A total of 231 people have been killed and 434 injured in those violent attacks on commuters on Reef suburban trains. Bruce stated that the attackers were ingenious at concealing their weapons and showed how deadly knives could be hidden in dignified office folders as well as plumbing and building instruments. He rejected accusations that police were not doing enough to track down the perpetrators of violence on trains by revealing that the police had recovered 4 298 weapons during patrols and policing of the trains while 121 arrests related to violence on trains had been made since 1 April 1992. The briefing also marked the launch of the Policing of Trains Coordinating Centre run by the Police and Spoornet. The centre, which monitored all violence on trains and linked the public with the police, was established in June after the ANC, Cosatu, the SAP and Spoornet had met in May 1992 over violence on trains. Finally Bruce disclosed that 1 200 policemen in uniform and plain clothes had been deployed at strategic points to curb the violence on trains and also emphasised the absolute necessity of cooperation from commuters and the public by pointing out that 1,4 million passengers use trains daily and that during peak hours there are 600 trains in use which follow a plain clothes had been deployed at strategic points to curb the violence on trains and also emphasised the absolute necessity of cooperation from commuters and the public by pointing out that 1,4 million passengers use trains daily and that during peak hours there are 600 trains in use which follow a.

According to the *Business Day* (4 November 1992:2) seven people were killed and two others were injured in separate train attacks across the East Rand and in Johannesburg. In the worst incident a train carrying attackers passed through four East Rand stations, with gunmen killing five commuters and wounding two more as they fired on three crowded station platforms. The bodies of two more people, who had been stabbed to death in a separate attack, were found next to the Johannesburg-Soweto line. The failure of police to stop the 90-minute killing spree had been criticised by the ANC, who said police telephones were not answered as commuters tried to call them to the scene of the killings. In their reply a police spokesman said that police on the train had been unable to move to the carriage where the violence was taking place because interleading doors had been locked.

The *Sowetan* (5 November 1992:2) reported the death of a policeman and three commuters in yet another train attack in Johannesburg on the morning of 4 November 1992. The attacks took place at Johannesburg station, Cleveland, Longdale and New Canada as commuters on a train from Soweto were besieged by unknown gunmen. One of nine injured persons was a police officer. He and another policeman were shot at by a colleague who mistook them for main attackers. The other policeman was killed. Police spokespersons said that three members of the public were hit by stray bullets in the ensuing shootout between the policemen at the station. The trail of attacks started at New Canada station when two unidentified men were thrown out of a moving train. At the next station, Longdale, another man was also thrown off a moving train.

As attacks on trains appeared to be on the increase without any major breakthrough by the police, commuters on the Reef trains continued to risk their lives. The continuing attacks prompted some of the commuters to look into arranging their own safety. The idea of commuters protecting themselves from attackers seemed to have taken root in the old Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereening region where commuters have formed ‘defence units’. The idea of having defence or protective units on the trains was endorsed by various unions in the country who were concerned about the safety of their members. The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) encouraged its members to form protective units so ‘that they can be vigilant of strangers who come to coach them’ (*New Nation*: 19 November 1992:4). The defence units operated with key members who were given strict instructions of what to do to ward off attacks by would-be assassins. Police authorities were not opposed to commuters forming groups to protect themselves but cautioned them that whatever grouping they formed should be within the law and they must thus exercise discipline so that they did not exacerbate the problem.

Because security on trains was tightened when about 500 additional policemen were deployed on Reed railway stations, the African National Congress offered cautious approval of these new police measures: Soweto SAP spokesman Colonel Tienie Halgryn outlined the main points of the new strategy as: the redeployment of policemen; increased police visibility on trains and platforms; body searches of commuters entering or leaving railway stations and trains; trains to be stopped and searched at random; and the installation of video cameras at stations to monitor trouble-
A marked decrease in violence on trains was noticed in the first half of 1993. According to Business Day (15 September 1993:2) where eight people were killed in May and June 1993, 47 commuters had been killed since July and scores injured in a surge in violence on trains on the Reef. The majority of deaths occurred on East Rand trains, but an attack on a Soweto train on 14 September 1993, which left two commuters dead and ten injured, sparked fears that violence on trains was spreading to Soweto. The Inkatha Freedom Party said that the victims of the attack, which took place between New Canada and Mzimhlophe stations, were all residents of the Marafe hostel in Soweto and Inkatha supporters.

Amid accusations and counter-accusations hurled at each other by the ANC and the IFP, Witwatersrand police admitted there had been a recent upsurge in the violence on trains which had almost come to a complete halt earlier that year when railway authorities stepped up security at stations and in coaches with police assistance. Police also stated that it was difficult to determine the cause of those recent attacks but in their judgement it seemed that criminality played some part.

In a gloomy editorial City Press (3 October 1993:14) deplored the increase of violence on trains as follows: 'This week's Soweto train deaths remind us of a frightening, bloody past which was threatening to become a permanent feature on the Reef ... No wonder Reef trains got to be known as “the coffins of death” ... what could have gone wrong? ... Is this new violence saying something about the prospects of this country as it painfully inches its way towards next year's election?'

As violence on trains on the Reef had shown a huge resurgence in the second half of 1993, commuters started becoming actively involved in apprehending attackers, in some cases identifying them to the police and in others apprehending them and handing them over for arrest. The Weekly Mail and Guardian (21 October 1993:41) reported that five people were arrested after commuters on a Naledi-bound train which was attacked at Grosvenor station pointed them out to the police. On 14 September at Ekwezi station in Soweto commuters apprehended an alleged attacker and handed him over to the police after two people were killed and ten injured in the attack. In a shooting incident on 2 October taxi commuters at a Mamelodi rank caught the gunman and handed him over to the police.

On the eve of the 1993 festive season, Spoornet and the South African Police reinforced security at railway stations and on suburban trains to protect passengers after the vicious train attacks on two schoolboys and three men (Sowetan 21 December 1993:4). Spoornet announced that it was to increase security on its trains while the SAP would make extra policemen available to protect commuters from future attacks.

Analysis of data supplied by Spoornet
The following bar charts reflect the number of incidents, the number of deaths resulting from the incidents and the number of injuries resulting from the incidents. An incident is an event or occurrence on a train, track, station or asset. This includes
moveable assets, for example vehicles. In certain cases one incident could consist of several events. The nature of these events would inevitably differ to such an extent that they required different classification. The events could thus be classified, for example as assault of personnel, assault of public, and knife wounds. From the correct data made available to the Institute for Criminology by Spoornet the following can be deduced:

Bar chart 1 depicts incidents of violence on trains which occurred on national level in 1992 and 1993. The number of persons killed and injured is also available for these years. It is evident that violence on trains had decreased in 1993 by only 13,4 per cent from 807 incidents in 1992 to 699 incidents in 1993. The initial promising decrease of 48,3 per cent in the first half of 1993 compared with the same period in 1992 levelled out as violent incidents in trains kept on climbing in the second half of 1993. However, the figure of 317 persons killed in 1993 showed a decrease of 30,3 per cent to the 221 persons killed in 1992. Likewise there was a decrease of 32,2 per cent in persons injured from 568 in 1992 to 385 in 1993. Moreover the highest number of incidents namely 121 occurred in March 1992, followed by 112 incidents in August 1993. The number of persons killed in these months was 39 in March 1992 and 43 in August 1993, which also represents the highest number of persons killed in a particular month of each respective year.

Incidents of violence on trains in the region of Southern Transvaal are portrayed in bar chart 2. This includes the persons killed and injured in these incidents. Bar chart 2 indicates a decrease of 30,9 per cent in incidents from 622 in 1992 to 430 in 1993. The number of persons killed decreased by 39,6 per cent from 290 in 1992 to 175 in 1993 while the persons injured showed a decrease of 47,3 per cent from 537 in 1992 to 254 in 1993. Furthermore in 1992 the highest number of 92 incidents took place in June and in 1993 the highest number namely 76 was recorded in August. With reference to the number of persons killed in 1992, a record number of 39 casualties was registered in March. The record month for 1993 was August with 40 persons killed in various train incidents. From the persons who died in 1993 over three-quarters (76 per cent) were killed in the second half of that year.

Bar chart 3 depicts various types of incidents of violence on trains as they occurred in the four regions in 1993. It is apparent that the overwhelming majority of incidents occurred in the former Southern Transvaal followed by Southern Natal. The incidents, ‘assault of personnel’ and ‘assault of public’ represented 41,5 per cent of the total, followed by ‘shooting’ incidents (20,9 per cent) and ‘thrown out of train’ incidents (15,9 per cent).

Figure 1 features the results of the various types of violence on trains with particular reference to their occurrence from September 1992 to December 1993 by applying the statistical method of correspondence analysis. Correspondence analysis is a multivariate method for exploring cross-tabular data by converting such tables into graphical displays, called ‘maps’, and related numerical statistics. Greenacre (in Greenacre & Blasius 1994:3) states that the primary goal of correspondence analysis is to transform a table of numerical information into a graphical display, facilitating the interpretation of that information. The broad pattern exposed by this method came about by connecting the months in their sequential order drawing a line from 2S to 2O, then from 2O to 3N, and so on, until the connection from the 3V to 3D is reached. Three periods can be observed: First from 2S to 2D on the right-hand side, then 3F to 3N (3A is the only exception on top, however, the transition from 2D to 3A then to 3F is rather dramatic), and third from 3L to 3D.

The manner in which the various types of incidents are spread around the figure is important: on the right, incidents concerned with ‘thrown out of train’, on the left, those to do with ‘fighting’ and ‘assault’, and on top ‘knife wounds’ and ‘shooting’. So it seems that the ‘thrown out of train’ incidents noticeable towards the end of 1992 started to drop in the first half of 1993 and the occurrence of ‘fighting’ and ‘assault’ incidents increased. The decrease in ‘thrown out of train’ incidents to a great extent may be attributed to the various precautionary measures taken by the relevant authorities to upgrade facilities in trains. Then in the second half of 1993 ‘knife wounds’ incidents were on the increase.

Bar chart 4 depicts a representative sample of incidents in the former Southern Transvaal region with the aim of highlighting the frequency of incidents on specific days and peak times. It is evident that 37,6 per cent of all incidents occurred on Wednesdays and Thursdays. A total of 165 morning incidents took place on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, making up 41 per cent of all morning incidents, while 159 afternoon incidents occurred on Wednesdays and Thursdays, representing 38,5 per cent of all afternoon incidents.

Finally in bar chart 5 the frequency of incidents of violence on trains is compared to that of incidents of general violence for the greater part of 1992. The highest ratio of incidents of violence on trains to incidents of general violence appears in January (1:3,36) followed by March (1:5,68), June (1:7,05) and April (1:7,48).

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>INJURED 92</th>
<th>INCIDENTS 93</th>
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TOTAL INCIDENTS 92 = 807
TOTAL KILLED 92 = 317
TOTAL INJURED 92 = 568
TOTAL INCIDENTS 93 = 699
TOTAL KILLED 93 = 221
TOTAL INJURED 93 = 385

TOTAL INCIDENTS 92 = 622
TOTAL KILLED 92 = 290
TOTAL INJURED 92 = 537
TOTAL INCIDENTS 93 = 430
TOTAL KILLED 93 = 175
TOTAL INJURED 93 = 254

JAN FEB MAR APR INCIDENTS 92 KILLED 92 INJURED 92 INCIDENTS 93 KILLED 93 INJURED 93
INCIDENTS 92 82 57 81 36 21 92 54 67 42 42 47 21
KILLED 92 19 20 39 24 15 30 25 35 25 20 24 8
INJURED 92 83 31 72 43 15 44 38 67 50 45 54 15
INCIDENTS 93 17 12 15 13 29 28 82 78 48 61 40 28
KILLED 93 8 6 2 1 13 12 28 40 21 19 14 11
INJURED 93 15 8 8 5 16 5 31 37 27 47 47 10
Bar chart 3 – Incidents of violence on trains: Religions. Year 1993

A - ASSAULT : PERSONNEL
B - ASSAULT : PUBLIC
C - FIGHTING
D - KNIFE WOUNDS
E - SHOOTING INCIDENTS
F - THROWN OUT : TRAINS
G - FOUND IN CARRIAGE
H - FOUND NEXT TO TRACK
I - FOUND ON PLATFORM
J - TOTAL

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TOTAL: 114 170 10 82 143 109 7 40 10 685
Figure 1 Correspondence analysis: types of violence on trains vs periods

Horizontal axis is dimension 1 with inertia = 0.2241 (45.1%)
Vertical axis is dimension 2 with inertia = 0.0912 (18.3%)
63.4% of total inertia is represented in the above map

+1 = ASSAULT: PERSONNEL
+2 = ASSAULT: PUBLIC
+3 = FIGHTING
+4 = KNIFE WOUNDS
+5 = SHOOTING INCIDENTS
+6 = THROWN OUT OF TRAIN
+7 = FOUND IN CARRIAGE
+8 = FOUND NEXT TO TRACK
+9 = FOUND ON PLATFORM

*2S = SEPTEMBER 1992
*2O = OCTOBER 1992
*2N = NOVEMBER 1992
*2D = DECEMBER 1992
*3A = JANUARY 1993
*3F = FEBRUARY 1993
*3M = MARCH 1993
*3R = APRIL 1993
*3Y = MAY 1993
*3N = JUNE 1993
*3L = JULY 1993
*3G = AUGUST 1993
*3S = SEPTEMBER 1993
*3O = OCTOBER 1993
*3V = NOVEMBER 1993
*3D = DECEMBER 1993
Bar chart 4 - Incidents in former S.Tvl. During selected periods of 1992 and 1993: Week days and peak times
Bar chart 5 - Bar chart 1 - Incidents of violence on trains vs incidents of general violence on national level. Year - 1992

TOTAL GENERAL VIOLENCE = 6584
TOTAL VIOLENCE ON TRAINS = 765
Afterword

The ultimate disorder of violence and violent crime in particular is that it brings into question the legitimacy of the state. Any state should do its utmost to prevent the increasing public frustrations with the criminal justice system from encouraging a return to popular or vigilante justice. As various expressions of violent crimes continue to dominate affairs of the state the credibility of the state in controlling violence becomes increasingly weak. Abraham Lincoln's basic question about violence remains relevant and valid even today: 'Must a government of necessity be too strong for the liberties of its own people, or too weak to maintain its own existence?' The logical answer is that government should be sufficiently sensitive by listening to the liberties of all, and strong enough to maintain them with justice under the rule of law.

Train violence like any other form of violence has its roots in person's evil nature that needs to be changed. Leaders at all levels of society should always remember that once turned on, violence is very difficult to turn off. Any nation that forgets its past failures is bound to repeat them in the future. This country should learn from its violent past and present in order to avoid similar tragedies and future decline into chaos and anarchy. The future will undoubtedly show at what rate South Africans have learned from the hard lessons of violence. The sincere hope is also expressed that the unique challenges of transition will be successfully met and that a peaceful and just South Africa will become a reality sooner than later.

Bibliography

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