

SUNDAY TIMES APOLOGY AND MARY DE HAAS' RESPONSE

By Johan Booysen

In an open letter to Bongani Siqoko of the Sunday Times, Mary De Haas seeks an explanation why the Sunday Times has apologised for the Cato Manor Death Squad story. She concludes her letter to Mr Siqoko by asking if she had missed anything important regarding the reporting of the Cato Manor story.

Having read the Sunday Times' apology and the letter by Ms De Haas it is evident that she has.

Ms De Haas' letter is permeated with conjecture, inaccuracies and speculation. I agree with her that much of the blame for taxi violence can be attributed to police complicity and apathy. But that is where I part ways with Ms De Haas in her attempt to 'set the record straight', as she put it.

I do not recall Mr Siqoko 'accepting' the Cato Manor stories to be 'fake news'. My interpretation of his apology was to contextualize the SARS, Zimbabwe and Cato Manor stories in the broader context of political machinations at the time.

Ms De Haas evidently did not read my article in the same paper where I detailed some of the falsities in the stories written by Hofstatter and Wa Afrika. Whitewashing the falsehoods under the pretext that Hofstatter and Wa Afrika only sensationalized their stories, deflects from the real issue and is patently disingenuous.

Ms De Haas' revelation that she introduced the two journalists to taxi drivers, tangled in the conflict, is rather significant. It dismisses any notion of objectivity by her and the journalists, since it follows that a one sided version by individuals who are conflicted were preferred to the exclusion of others. Her masked imputation that Cato Manor was involved with the killing of two of the 'sources', Mthetwa and Sangweni is irresponsible and dangerous. According to her Sangweni was killed during 2015. She appears oblivious to the fact that Cato Manor was already closed in early 2012 because of the false Hofstatter and Wa Afrika stories in the Sunday Times.

According to Ms De Haas, members of the Durban Organised Crime Unit were involved in taxi related incidents during 2008 - 2011. She does not say which section of Organized Crime. Cato manor was one of many sections. Be-that-as-it-may, Cato Manor seized to investigate taxi violence cases in 2006. The shootouts with suspects after Colonel Chonco's murder was consequent to Cato Manor exercising their mandate to investigate police killings. It had nothing to do with taxi violence investigations *per se*. The fact that suspects in a police murder were from the taxi industry, does not *ipso facto* translate that Cato Manor now involved themselves in the taxi conflict.

She then writes of forty three guns that were stolen from a storeroom at Kwa-Maphumulu. It is unclear what relevance this has with Cato Manor.

She continues, rather incoherently and conflates unrelated incidents inferring a causal link. For instance the shooting of Xaba and his neighbour and in the next paragraph, the shooting of Bongani Mkize.

Xaba, on her own version, was shot by a different police unit. Bongani Mkize was shot by Cato Manor AND the National Intervention Unit outside Durban, during a shootout and not as she puts it '*Mkize was shot dead while travelling in the centre of Durban.*'

Ms De Haas avers that Bongani Mkize was shot because he was sought for the assassination of Colonel Chonco. This fallacious assumption is the product of engaging with individuals (sources),

who themselves are conflicted because of their involvement in taxi violence. The truth is Bongani Mkize was directly linked to the killing of a fourteen year old girl Lino Buthelezi. The eye witness, Richard Khanyile was later murdered himself. According to a statement from one Swayo Mkize, Bongani Mkize had masterminded the murder of Nkosi Zondi from Greytown because of Zondi's apparent collaboration with the police in solving the murder of Colonel Chonco. Not surprisingly, Swayo Mkize was also later killed. These are facts contained in evidence in the police dockets which contradicts what Ms De Haas wants us to believe.

For the record, five of the deceased, who were shot during shootouts with Cato Manor, were held to be responsible for the assassination of Colonel Chonco by a magistrate during an inquest into Chonco's death. Every single suspect (except two) who died in shootouts with Cato Manor were linked with evidence such as fingerprints, witness statements, CCTV footage, confessions, cell phone linkages and other evidence to ATM bombings, cash-in-transit heists and police killings. Some of them were escapees from prison.

Ms De Haas' emotional conclusion that it is poor innocent black people who are dying at the hands of Cato Manor is based on conjecture, speculation and the one sided versions of criminal elements within the taxi industry. The evidence demonstrates that they were certainly not innocent and neither were they poor. It is a cheap shot. As an academic she ought to know that hypotheses are proved or disproved by objective research be it qualitative or quantitative. Investigation is no different.