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Family, Crime And Political Consciousness
On The East Rand 1939-1955

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FAMILY, CRIME AND POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS ON THE EAST RAND
1939-1955

P.L. BONNER

The decade and a half between 1935 and 1950 have long been regarded as watershed years for the South African economy. Following South Africa's departure from the gold standard in 1933, South African gold-production rocketed, which in turn provided the revenue and demand for sustained industrial growth. The commissioning of ISCOR in 1934 further hastened this process furnishing the basic metal inputs for an increasingly diversified engineering sector. From this solid base South Africa was catapulted into the industrial era during and after the second world war. Import substitution and the equipping of the allied forces during the war along with substantial direct foreign investment thereafter ensured sustained industrial growth. In 1943 manufacturing, which had earlier outstripped agriculture in terms of gross national product, finally overhauled mining as well.¹

At the centre of this industrial revolution was the Rand. Here the change was even more stark. While manufacturing surged forward, checked only briefly by the depression of 1948-1949, gold mining went into a protracted period of decline. In the Benoni-Germiston area, which is the main focus of this paper a spate of mine closures took place, in which such solid and well respected names as New Modder, Van Ryn, Witwatersrand Deep and Modder Deep disappeared from view. The one development (that of manufacturing) partly took place in inverse proportion to the other, as an ailing mining sector provided successive transfusions of water, electricity, labour and land, to satisfy a voracious industrial demand.²

These shifts in the economy profoundly reshaped the contours of class on the Rand. In the decade 1939-49, for example, the composition of Benoni's African population underwent radical change. From being a

predominantly mine-based and mine-housed population in the late 1930's (30 278 African mine workers, 23 200 non-mine in 1939) these proportions were reversed during the war (17 927 mine workers, 28 593 non-mine in 1949). Age and sex ratios were likewise transformed with the black urban population being divided by 1950 into approximately 1/3 children, 1/3 men and 1/3 women.³ An increasingly large proportion of the East Rand's African population were living, to use the official language of the time, 'in family circumstances'. To all outward appearances a more stable and settled black proletariat based on manufacturing was in the process of being formed.

This new era was nevertheless far more marked than is commonly supposed, by the legacy of gold. Family life, wage employment, social interaction, popular protest and political organisation were all carried out in its shadow. This paper focuses on a number of areas in which this legacy was most pronounced - family life, employment and youth culture - and then seeks to relate these to some of the characteristic forms of political consciousness and political action of the times.

1. MIGRANCY, POVERTY AND FAMILY LIFE

During the 1920's and 1930's a steady stream of African women made their way from the countryside to the towns. A significant proportion of these were made up of women joining their husbands in town. Prior to 1939 there were no effective restrictions on women entering the towns, and even after the amendment of the Urban Areas Act of that year, a man was entitled to bring his wife and family to the urban areas once he had worked there continuously for two years.⁴ By the mid 1930's this flow of families was attaining significant proportions, and prompted G. Ballenden, the Non-European Affairs Manager of Johannesburg City Council to complain on several occasions of the strain this placed on the available family accommodation.⁵

From the late 1930's it seems possible to detect a change in this pattern of migration. Previously a substantial slice had come from white farms. Now more and more labour was being drawn from the reserves, while the movement of women was taking place on a far more individual basis.⁶ The most proletarianised areas of the reserves were in the vanguard of this trend. The Keiskammahoek Rural Survey, for example, revealed that many men in the Ciskei were simply abandoning their families and moving to town. In Keiskammahoek one quarter of the children born after the war were illegitimate, while the rate of single female migrancy also registered a sharp rise.⁷ Basutoland exhibited these patterns in their most extreme form. From the 1920's at least, a steady stream of women made their way into the Union. From the late 1930's this stream became a flood. It has long been recognised that the population of Basutoland actually dropped during the decade 1935-1946 by 6 883. What these figures conceal nevertheless is an even more startling drop in the female population which registered a decrease of 8 500.⁸ A massive haemorrhage of women was occurring from the labour reserves to the towns.

A variety of motives prompted this exodus of women to the towns. Female infertility, the exactions of chiefs, harsh and unsympathetic in-laws (with whom newly married women had to live), inadequate maintenance by migrant husbands, and desertion were all common causes of departure, but with the exception of infertility, they all shared one common theme - the ravages of migrant labour. Extended periods of migrancy left young women defenceless against in-laws, chiefs and the onslaught of poverty. As the incidence and duration of migrancy increased in the late 1930's and 1940's many women abandoned their homesteads and went in search of their men. Sometimes they were fortunate and reconstituted their families in Natal or on the Rand.⁹ All too often, however, their husbands had entered into unions with other women in the towns whom they refused to give up. Faced

with rejection and the prospect of a return to rural poverty migrant wives often chose to remain in the towns and establish new relationships of their own.¹⁰

The damage inflicted on rural society by migrancy was mirrored in the urban family on the Rand. One of the features of the Witwatersrand urban society which evinced most persistent concern in the 1940's and 1950's was the apparent instability of the black urban family. Contributor after contributor to the Johannesburg Urban Native Juvenile Delinquency Conference held in October 1938, spoke of the transient and 'casual' nature of black marriage unions on the Rand and of the problems this caused.¹¹ Men and women, it was claimed, were increasingly coming to town by themselves, and establishing 'irregular' family unions with previously unrelated partners. Housing regulations encouraged this trend. Neither men nor women could secure houses without being married, yet no serious test was applied to establish a bona fide customary union. According to Graham Ballenden, the Non-European Affairs Manager of Johannesburg, more than a half of marriages in the Johannesburg township of Orlando were 'irregular'. Other evidence confirmed the same trend.¹² Surveying the townships of Pinville, Orlando and Alexandra in 1940, Ellen Hellman found marriages of both recognised and unrecognised varieties to be unstable and spoke of a 'veritable progression of fathers' in some homes.¹³ In Germiston, in 1949, 336 births out of a total of 834 African children born in the locations were found to be illegitimate.¹⁴ Again in Benoni, in the same year, 50% of marriages were "irregular", and 73% of births occurred outside of any recognised form of wedlock. "The family unit" the Non-European Affairs Manager commented was "fast losing its significance".¹⁵ The Inter-departmental committee on Juvenile Unemployment which sat in 1951 echoed his view. "Loose family unions" it lamented were producing full scale "social disintegration".

Many blamed the situation on high levels of labour migrancy. The South

African Institute of Race Relations evidence to the Inter Departmental Juvenile Unemployment Committee saw the "Migratory labour system" as one of "the major contributory causes" along with a "catastrophic shortage of housing".¹⁶ Similarly, the most systematic study of black family life conducted through this period (Laura Longmore's The Dispossessed) concluded:

"the urban Bantu male, under present conditions, seems to have neither the opportunity nor the inclination to cultivate an intimate attachment to places or persons or to indulge in early marriage or family life; his is the characteristic of the mobile group, a mobility fostered by the migrant character of native employment."¹⁷

"The mentality of the migrant" she later noted "is incompatible with settled marriage or stability".¹⁸

While Longmore was one of the more sensitive commentators of this period her language in this instance gives one pause for thought. What exactly is "the mentality of the migrant"? And going further, how far do "irregular" marriage unions (i.e. those not sanctioned by civil or customary ceremonies) and consequent illegitimacy necessarily connote family instability? How far are these expressions of shock a product of a prim middle-class morality shrinking from some of the seamier sides of working class life?

A survey of lodger families in Germiston in 1948 cautions us against reading too much into illegitimacy rates. Of the 400 families questioned well over half had been married by civil rites (252), while of the remainder 115 had been married by 'native custom' leaving 17 and 16 respectively as single with family or widowed and divorced. The vast bulk of the families surveyed had moreover been married for 4 years or more with one half being married for 8-10 years. Finally 3/4 of the families surveyed had lived as lodgers in the location for five years or more, with half being resident for double that time.¹⁹ "Family disintegration" was clearly a questionable phenomenon in Germiston, and was certainly not the automatic consequence of high illegitimacy rates.

However, while the "problem" of broken marriages and temporary families must obviously be scaled down, it equally clearly cannot be spirited away. Too much evidence exists from a wide variety of sources to attest to its presence. Among the most textured and systematic was that of Laura Longmore. Longmore carried out an intensive study of Eastern Native Township in Johannesburg between 1950 and 1957 and was profoundly struck by the instability of urban marriage, (though not by any necessary and consequential incoherence of African urban life). Urban males, Longmore argued "were evading the responsibilities of fatherhood by way of the loose union, irregularly formed giving rise to the temporary family". The parent-generation forms of marriage she believed to be dying out, leaving among the new generation of their children, loose unions of different kinds fulfilling a variety of functions. It was not unusual for husbands to change frequently, leaving the home in charge of the woman and her growing brood of children. A single woman would often have children from 2, 3 or 4 different men.²⁰

Such temporary marriages, Longmore noted were not necessarily recorded as such in township censuses, since "all manner of subterfuges" were resorted to, to impress on the authorities that the couple was "legally" married, in order to obtain a house in the municipal township. Certificates from previous marriages were frequently presented as applying to the new spouse. Even the marriage certificates of friends were used, while one "enterprising" man of whom Longmore knew had acquired ten separate houses in different townships using the same certificate.²¹

For Longmore a major source of such instability and turnover was "the preponderance of unattached males living in the hostels and compounds surrounding [the township]."²² Women "were ceaselessly importuned by unlimited womanless men". This presented both a problem and an opportunity. Women without men were highly vulnerable. "Any African women living in the

urban areas of the Witwatersrand today need male protection, for in the urban African townships, women are being constantly molested". According to Longmore's informants "A husband gives the home some form of respect". Women thus had every reason to seek or acquiesce in new relationships the moment an old one was passed. "A home without a husband (was) defenceless in the townships". Such urgency could easily result in a relative lack of discrimination in choosing new partners, in which the old cycle was likely to resume again.

The persistent attentions of men was a problem for women in the townships. Conversely, the availability of so many womanless men conferred a degree of independence on women. "Urban woman has become schooled in self-reliance and self-sufficiency" wrote Longmore, with evident approval and admiration.²³ Wives no longer accepted the patriarchal authority of rural homes. Women refused to be true to husbands who kept concubines or had regular affairs. Where husbands spent their money on other women or were otherwise unable to provide for the home wives would often resort to adultery, and clandestine part-time prostitution. The taking of 'Nyatsi's' (back door lovers) was common: the receiving of presents from such men was equally common in turn. If men assaulted their spouses or mistreated them in other ways, they could easily leave and establish a relationship with other men. "If you tie a dog, you teach it to bite" the township wisdom went.²⁴ And women now were growing sharper teeth.

Poverty and insecurity induced women to enter alternative relationships. The large floating male population allowed this to happen. This pervasive poverty of the locations also had other more intimate connections with migrancy, and helped produce a variety of social dislocations and malaises. "Poverty and instability" Margaret Ballinger told the 1938 Native Juvenile Delinquency Conference "are the dominant factors in the lives of nearly all Bantu families. The struggle to live is

the continuous pre-occupation of all Bantu family groups, a struggle which dominate every other concern".²⁵ A decade later Longmore echoed almost exactly the same view. "Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of urban African life is poverty" Longmore wrote. "This poverty permeates its entire social life. The pressure of want is an ever present companion".²⁶ Survey after survey conducted through this period underscored these views.²⁷ Income fell far short of satisfying even the most basic and rudimentary wants.

At the centre of this poverty was the ceaseless flow of migrant labour from the country which kept wages low and reduced opportunities for employment. Many employers preferred to hire migrant labour rather than workers permanently domiciled in town. In June 1950, for example, Benoni's influx control officer reported that "firms continued to employ natives from the reserves in preference to local labour. They can pay them a lower salary and because of the difficulty of being employed after discharge ... they work harder and longer".²⁸ Employers generally found reserve Africans "more amenable, with better manners and in general more dependable" according to Benoni's manager of Non-European Affairs J. Matthewson.²⁹ Such attitudes did not stop at large industrial concerns. Employers of domestic servants "were also prejudiced against urban juveniles and prefer to employ rural youths whom they regard as more amenable, reliable and honest", the Inter Departmental Committee on Juvenile Unemployment reported in 1951.³⁰

These virtues outweighed the benefits of stability or of basic levels of literacy for the majority of urban employers. It has been commonly assumed that the rise of manufacture in South African industry and the large scale entry of Africans into semi-skilled jobs fostered the stabilising of African labour and the black working class, but this has at the least to be qualified for the 1940's and 1950's.³¹ Although Africans occupied 35% of semi-skilled jobs in Wage Board governed industries by 1951,

this seems to have had only very limited impact on the turn-over of African labour.³² The Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce in fact reported in 1951 "there is no doubt that the rate of labour turn-over has increased greatly in recent years".³³ In July 1952 the Benoni City Times was still observing that in many firms on the Reef the entire labour force was replaced every 8 months.³⁴ The same newspaper conducted a survey on Benoni firms early the next year and found turn-over rates of 192%, 180% and 138% in the town's heavy industries.³⁵ Again in 1955 a study by Brooks put the average labour turnover of metal companies along the Reef at 88%.³⁶ Heavy industry was obviously exceptionally wasteful in its use of black labour, and a survey of turnover conducted by the Benoni Town Council in a cross section of Benoni factories show other enterprises appreciably more stable.³⁷ Nevertheless, even here these tended to be the smaller concerns, and the turnover of the labour force as a whole stood at 50% in the early 1950's, a figure apparently matched by Pretoria.³⁸ The cheaper, the more deferential the labour it seems, the more the employers liked it, and this outweighed most other concerns.

Employers were not alone in encouraging this endless stream of rural labour. Throughout the war years the Reef municipalities made no effort to stem the flow. Johannesburg and Benoni were among the least energetic, and both were confronted by major squatter movements after the war. When Benoni Town Council was asked by the Native Affairs Department in 1938 what it was doing about influx control, its answer was 'nothing', since there was 'a great demand for labour' at that time.³⁹ In 1940 it again asked for influx control amendments to its location regulations to be deferred 'in view of the international situation', while its evidence to the Fagan Commission in 1947 recommended that the pass laws be scrapped in their entirety.⁴⁰

A change of heart was only forthcoming in the middle of 1950. As late as November, 1949, J. Matthewson, the Non-European Affairs manager of Benoni

was still complaining of the council's reluctance to control influx.⁴¹ Then in the middle of the following year the Council was confronted by a gigantic movement of squatters to the land east of Benoni. Within 10 months its population had swelled to 18 000 strong. Not uncoincidentally the squatters had settled exactly within the borders of the planned new Apex industrial township. As a result, they could not be moved. In terms of existing legislation on housing, such squatters could only be displaced once alternative accommodation had been found. By settling on the newly proclaimed industrial townships the squatters had thus check-mated the Council. Now industry could not expand until alternative housing for the squatters had been built. Only at this stage did the Council seriously begin to regulate the influx of migrant labour.⁴² It is to some of the consequences of this sustained 15 year influx of migrant labour that this paper now turns.

2. MIGRANCY, UNEMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH GANGS

This flood of migrant labour left an indelible mark on urban life in Benoni and elsewhere on the Rand. Its most obvious and immediate effect was the grinding poverty of black urban life. Many commissions and observers drew attention to this point. "As long as migratory labour comes in and competes on the labour market" Johannesburg Native Affairs Manager G. Ballenden told the Johannesburg Urban Native Juvenile Delinquency Conference in 1938 "so long will the difficulty in raising and stabilising native wages continue."⁴³ The burden of the Institute of Race Relations' evidence to the 1947 Fagan Commission was much the same. "Urban blacks" the Institute observed "are in competition with migrant labourers on the labour market and since they are outnumbered by the latter, the customary rate of wages is determined by what the migrant labourer will take Since the Reserves reduce the necessity of making the income received by the migrant in the

town adequate to support his family all the year round, a depressing effect on wages results Thus the urbanised natives have been forced below subsistence level and even when working continuously find that their earnings are not adequate to meet expenses."⁴⁴ Sections of the permanently urbanised black population themselves protested in similar vein. In 1949 Benoni's Wattville Native Advisory Board roundly denounced the damage wrought by the large-scale entry of migrant labour: such workers were prepared to accept low wages, they produced acute accommodation shortages, and they led to abandoned wives.⁴⁵ In August 1956 the Benoni Locations Advisory Board took the same argument a step further. Because of the massive influx of migrant workers into Benoni, it complained, Benoni's African labour was the worst paid on the Rand.⁴⁶

Other evidence points in the same direction, but without a closer analysis of comparative wage statistics than I have undertaken so far, I am unable to say whether the large scale migrant inflow into Benoni in particular depressed its wage levels exceptionally low.⁴⁷ What is evident nevertheless, is migrant labour's wider wage depressing role. Equally clear is its role in promoting urban unemployment. In February 1945 the Native Affairs Manager of Benoni was reporting serious unemployment among 'location natives' owing to the practice of bigger industries 'giving preference to outside natives'.⁴⁸ By June 1948 the situation remained the same.⁴⁹ Even then the main brunt of unemployment was not carried by adult males. In 1945, for example, there were 'only' 300 adult males who were out of work, and the figure for 1948 was unlikely to have been much more. It was rather male and female adolescents who were the chief casualties of this endless stream of migrant workers. Massive youth unemployment existed in many Reef towns, particularly those which permitted the relatively unrestricted inflow of migrant labour. Thus, whereas there were approximately 1 000 unemployed youths of both sexes in Germiston, Brakpan and Springs in 1951, in Benoni

there were 6 000, in Johannesburg there were 20 000, while in Pretoria a staggering 80+% of its youth population not at school, was unemployed.⁵⁰ Reasons for such high levels of youth unemployment were various but most centred around competition from migrant labour. To a greater extent than with urban labour in general, employers found urban youth undisciplined, unreliable, unpunctual, prone to absenteeism and dishonest.⁵¹ Partly this was prejudice, partly it had some basis in fact, but always the prejudice itself helped to cultivate those characteristics of urban youth that employers so deplored. The longer urban youth stayed out of work, the more likely they were to be immersed in the youth gang culture of the townships and to end up, in the language of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Native Juvenile Unemployment, as 'unfit for regular and disciplined work'.⁵² Employers for the most part were blithely unaware of their role in this process. Many wrote off "every youth as a tsotsi" the Secretary for the Native Youth Board complained.⁵³ Youths straight out of school, who in the view of the Committee, were genuinely keen to work were tainted by association. Across the spectrum of employers, urban youths' alleged 'lack of stability and discipline' had earned them 'an unenviable reputation'. Even ordinary householders preferred rural youths for domestic service: neither urban males nor urban females were considered suitable for such jobs, a feeling heartily reciprocated by urban juveniles themselves.⁵⁴

Other factors also restricted the employment of urban juveniles. The pervasive poverty of the locations, allied to the congested and unhealthy living conditions reigning there ensured that urban youths were generally weaker and lacking in the 'physical stamina' possessed by their coevals from the reserves. Studies conducted in 1939 and 1944 highlighted the appalling nutritional standards of urban youth. In 1939, for example, 85% of Orlando school-children were not getting enough food. Studies of Benoni children revealed the same nutritional gap. Employers were consequently loathe to

employ urban youths below the age of 18-20 for anything remotely resembling heavy work. Urban youth was not itself blameless on this score. The overwhelming majority shunned heavy industry and would only offer themselves for operator and distributive jobs.⁵⁵ A final contributory factor swelling the pool of juvenile unemployed was the fixing of common wage rates in Wage Board regulated industries for both juveniles and adults. Since juveniles were "generally less efficient employees than adults ... [and] lacked physical stamina ... [and] a sense of responsibility" employers had no incentive to take them on at the same wage.⁵⁶ It was one of the main recommendations of the Inter-departmental Juvenile Unemployment Committee that a differential wage scale be employed.

A youth culture associated by employers with 'tsotsis' prevented youths from getting jobs. The lack of jobs ensured that that culture would grow stronger and more pervasive, and that it would ultimately take on a powerfully anti-social character. By the early 1950's the culture of youth gangs was one of the strongest currents running through the locations. Itself the offspring of instability it profoundly dislocated location life, setting up rival poles of allegiance, antagonism and protection between gang and gang, between young and old, and above all between the fully and transitionally urban. This same youth culture was also a vital resource in wider political struggles presenting both opportunities and constraints to political action. It is to a broader discussion of this culture and its context that this paper now turns.

The youth culture of the townships was forged on the streets. Urban youth roamed the streets because of the absence of other outlets into which their energies could be channelled. Not only was suitable employment unavailable, but most children generally left school by Standard IV, and many did not attend at all. The Inter-departmental Committee on Native Juvenile Unemployment reported, for example, that of the 621 718 African

children between the ages of 6 and 14 in the Transvaal in 1946, only 163 920 were at school. The vast majority of those that did receive some instruction, moreover, pursued their studies for only 2 to 3 years (see table below).⁵⁷

This pattern did not change materially until the end of the 1950's; when the era of 'mass' Bantu education finally dawned.

TABLE I

Number of Bantu Children in each Class in 1949 in the Union
and on the Rand and in Pretoria

	The Union		The Rand and Pretoria	
	No.	%	No.	%
Sub A.	251 181	33,1	18 478	27,5
Sub B.	127 412	16,8	10 899	16,2
Std. I	111 227	14,7	9 144	13,6
Std. II	80 249	10,6	7 500	11,1
Std. III	64 580	8,5	6 222	9,2
Std. IV	46 557	6,1	4 794	7,1
Std. V	31 291	4,1	3 770	5,6
Std. VI	26 413	3,5	3 417	5,1
Std. VII	13 824	1,8	2 107	3,1
Std. VIII	4 702	0,6	820	1,2
Std. IX	904	0,1	126	0,2
Std. X	471	0,06	63	0,09
TOTAL	758 811	100,00	67 340	100,00

A study carried out by Ellen Hellman in 1938 identified a number of reasons for such high drop-out rates. At the top of the list were poverty and the pupils' own disenchantment with school. "The vulnerability of the average Native family to any economic setback such as unemployment or the expenses of illness is extreme", wrote Hellman in 1939. Of the 500 plus

school leavers she studied 20% had to withdraw from schooling owing to inability to pay fees and school expenses or the need to find work.⁵⁸ Refusal to attend school was an even more common reason for leaving. Conditions in the sub-standards where most of the pupils clustered were appalling. Pupil/teacher ratios stood at 64:1, classrooms were overcrowded, facilities were sparse. Pupils found almost nothing to stimulate their minds: sheer boredom drove them out.⁵⁹ A smaller study carried out by J.C. Reynecke between 1943-45 bore out most of these findings. Children were either rejecting schooling as useless, or were compelled by economic necessity to find work.⁶⁰

Once out on the streets children were left to do much as they liked. Low wages and poverty generally meant that both parents had to go out to work. Men went to the factories and businesses early in the morning and came back at dusk. Women spent their days washing and hawking or doing domestic work. Benoni's 1938 census showed that of the total adult female population 4 374 were in employment and only 419 out of work. In the vast majority of households both parents were absent for large parts of the day and children were left to fend for themselves.⁶¹

'Loose family unions', illegitimacy and 'social disintegration' further sapped family discipline. Fathers were less inclined to exercise control over children who were not their own: children themselves saw no reason for obeying their mothers' temporary spouse.⁶² Massive over-crowding compounded these problems. Poverty induced many families to sub-let rooms to migrants or to new arrivals from the country. Benoni's urban population, for example, grew at a rate of about 2 000 a year in the late 1940's early 1950's most of it arriving from the countryside via the mines. Many of these arrivals had to be housed in the locations as did a significant proportion of the 4 500 fully migrant workers for whom municipal hostel accommodation was not available.⁶³ Living space was thus at a premium and

many households tried to balance family budgets by sub-letting one or more rooms. Family life inevitably suffered and the 1951 Inter-departmental Committee on Juvenile Unemployment painted a sombre picture of the results. "Owing to the acute housing shortage and consequent overcrowding", the Committee noted,

"the house, which as a rule serves as the centre of home life and as a strong binding force on members of the family very often fails to fulfil this function in Native society. Children in fact are often encouraged to remain in the streets in order to make room for adults."⁶⁴

Longmore's observations led her to a very similar conclusion "What ought to be a home has all too often degenerated in the urban African township into a place where the members of the family happen to sleep".⁶⁵

Such conditions were not uniform or unchanging. Germiston managed to place a large number of its juveniles in employment even in 1951, and if its lodger survey is to be believed a much more stable family structure than was usual managed to survive through the war. From the mid fifties key aspects of social problems were ameliorated even in places like Johannesburg and Benoni as a result of housing and other reforms. Nevertheless for most of the 1940's and 1950's urban life was sufficiently brutalised and unstable as to leave its mark on a whole generation of urban children. For a significant proportion of this generation the normal socialising and disciplinary agencies in society were either atrophied or absent. The initiation schools which had carried out this function in rural society had fallen away in the town; parental control was either slack or entirely lacking; and the schooling system which carried out this role in most industrialised societies was utterly ill-equipped for the task. For Longmore the result was a generation of youth that was not so much immoral as amoral.⁶⁶ Into this moral void stepped the gangs.

Youth gangs, at least in their highly anti-social 'tstosi' form do not seem to have been a significant feature of township life until the late

1930's or 1940's. Although predecessor groups like the 'Blue-nines' were noted in Johannesburg in the 1920's and early 1930's, they were neither as disruptive nor as widespread as those that developed in the war.⁶⁷ Some of the earliest centres of the new generation of gangs appear to have been the overcrowded freehold townships of Sophiatown, Western Native Township and Newclare, to the west of Johannesburg, and Alexandra in the east, where large numbers of unemployed youth were jammed. By the early 1950's replicas or splinters had spread through most of the Reef's townships. In Sophiatown, the Americans, the Berliners and the Gestapo vied for ascendancy. In Newclare the XY's controlled much of the town. In Alexandra the notorious Msomis and the Spoilers ruled the roost. In Orlando the dreaded Torch Gang controlled the night. In the course of the 1950's new gangs wrested control from the old. In Alexandra the CPZ gang arose, also known as the Benzine Boys, after their practice of setting light to their victims.⁶⁸ On the East Rand new gangs of younger men also strove for ascendancy and engaged in protracted battles of attrition. Germiston which had been held in fief by the 'Fast Elevens' became the battleground for a deadly conflict between the DMG's (Dead Man's Gulch) and the Vultures, after most of the Fast Elevens leaders were incarcerated in goal.⁶⁹ In Benoni the principal gangs were the Dark Starring (between 4th and 6th Avenues in the location) and the Hong Kong (between 1st and 4th Avenues - the Indian and Chinese section). Other gangs that rose and fell in Benoni in this period were the Plantations, the YBS, the VCR, the Rooikamp, and the Kangaroos.⁷⁰

In the early 1950's, if not before, these gangs began to embrace a wider and wider section of the youth.⁷¹ Around this time, for example, the Dark Starring formed a junior group called the Mashalashalas (meaning somebody who does something very fast), and eventually divided up into three distinct sections - the youngest group 8-14 who would prepare the weapons,

clean shoes for the older boys, and scout; the middle group 15-19 who would be in the middle throwing stones so as to confuse the opposition gang; and the elder group, 20+, who would encircle the opposition on the flanks and carry out the 'stabbing and hacking'. Many of the younger group at this point were still at school; the middle group were mostly unemployed, while numbers of the senior group were employed in the factories.⁷²

Sources of conflict reflected some of the main pre-occupations of urban youth. A major site of struggle were the 'bioscopes' in the location. Cowboy and gangster films were immensely popular among township youth and were widely regarded as a pernicious influence by the local authorities.⁷³ Both the DMG's and the Dark Starrings took their names from cowboy films and the gangs modelled their behaviour on cowboys, hoodlums and, on occasion, even Tarzan.⁷⁴ For this largely non-literate audience these visual images were their major point of access to the outside world, and as in similar situations elsewhere, had a profound impact on values, aspirations and 'style'.⁷⁵ Episodes in films were commonly regarded as authentic representations of the outside world.⁷⁶ At the same time they were not just passively absorbed, but were recast in terms more appropriate to the urban youths' position in a depressed and oppressive urban milieu. Blinkered by its own place in a racially structured order, the Commission of Enquiry into Unrest in Krugersdorp, Randfontein, Newclare and Newlands could only partly grasp the point, noting with exasperation "The mental capacity of the audience is unable to grasp the fact that the hero succeeds in the end and crime does not pay".⁷⁷

Much effort was accordingly expended by the gangs in controlling bioscopes. In Dukathole township (Germiston) the DMG's demonstrated their authority by controlling the township's main cinema house. In Wattville (Benoni) the Star cinema was the scene of a protracted battle for hegemony in which the Dark Starring eventually ousted the 'coloured' motor cyclist

Ghost Ranger gang. Somewhat later an Indian owned cinema on 12th Street was the centre of similar struggles: 'That was in the middle. No-one had direct control of the area and that's where fights would be waged and that's where people were killed'.⁷⁸

Other sources of competition revolved around gambling and women. For the middle and older age groups battles frequently centred on women. If a gang member's girl friend was taken by - or defected to - a member of the opposition bloody fights would invariably erupt. In this case fighting was not simply a reflex response to some primordial sexual or territorial instinct of men. The same kind of episode was the trigger of numerous conflicts between amaRashea (Russian) and other gangs, and reflected a much broader shift in the status of women. As was argued earlier on in this paper, urban women combined, in paradoxical mixture, a greater degree of independence and self-reliance alongside a greater vulnerability to men. Repeated clashes over women who were abducted or simply switched their affections were a reflection of this change.⁷⁹

One last persisting source of conflict was gambling. Urban life was not only poverty stricken but boring. Urban African youth was addicted to dice and other forms of gambling which served to relieve the daily monotony of life, and where youths from rival groups engaged in this passtime fighting could easily break out. In Wattville in the 1950's "other gangsters were involved in pick-pocketing and they used to look at themselves as better off than other groups who only relied on gambling, and that would erupt in fighting as an individual from one gang would gamble and when he had lost would try to retain his money by force. This would cause gang fights".⁸⁰

As the gangs expanded and matured in the 1940's and early 1950's they developed a distinct counter-culture. Young boys were involved in pick-pocketing and bag snatching in the towns, in petty thefts of fruit and

fowls from neighbouring white small holdings, in dagga smoking and even in the drinking and sniffing of benzine. The closest many got to work was in doing small jobs for Indian shopkeepers, cleaning taxis in the location and whites' cars in the town, and in caddying on the multiplying number of golf courses on the Rand.⁸¹ Even here the urban youth were in a marginal position. Many golf-courses found urban boys unreliable and dishonest, and imported youths from the country whom they housed in small compounds.⁸²

Among the older youth a pronounced aversion to any kind of regular work developed. "Horses work. People don't" became the motto of the Berliners.⁸³ Across the Reef, in the view of the Non-European Reef Administrators, a larger and larger percentage of unemployed juveniles "took on the characteristics of tsotsis - unscrupulous, work shy and ripe for criminal careers".⁸⁴ By the end of the 1940's older 'tsotsis' were not just engaging in petty pick-pocketing (or even burglaries) in town, but had also begun preying on their own communities. As early as June 1948 Benoni location residents out at night near the location were liable to be held up 'by gangs pretending to be criminals' and stripped of all their clothing. Passengers on buses were another target of their attentions. Once robbed of their belongings, they were thrown out of the bus if they dared to complain.⁸⁵ Similar reports punctuated most of the next decade. In 1950 'a reign of terror' had been imposed on the location by these tsotsi gangs.⁸⁶ In May 1954 the Advisory Board again denounced the activities of young hooligans who assaulted and stabbed law abiding residents of the location.⁸⁷ At the end of the same year tsotsis were stoning buses, assaulting bus drivers and stealing their takings.⁸⁸ In February 1957 the Joint Advisory Boards of Benoni were again complaining of another "flareup of Tsotsism" in the locations and requesting that guns be given to police.⁸⁹

Q In some areas a distinct if ambivalent antagonism to education developed. Youths in the cities constructed their own language ('flytaal or

tsotistaal') which drew heavily on Afrikaans.⁹⁰ To speak English 'was a great setback for anyone coming into contact with tsotsis - it was considered a sign of showing ones education'. Tsotsis believed 'teachers have knowledge, but they have sense'.⁹¹ One of the major targets of these unemployed youth gangs was therefore children travelling to and from school.⁹² F., one of the gang members interviewed for this study was forced to abandon his schooling (and subsequently to join a gang) because of their constant attentions.⁹³ Again, it may not have been entirely accidental, that Elias Monyane, municipal clerk, and 'one of the most respected natives' in Benoni location was stabbed and killed by tsotsis in July 1953.⁹⁴

Youth gangs were street-wise, anti-social and suspicious, but they represented a potentially powerful political resource for any aspiring political leader. It was widely suspected by white officialdom that many gangs were in fact the witting or unwitting tools of political 'agitators'. The de Villiers Louw commission which enquired into a number of violent outbursts on the Rand in 1949 and 1950 explicitly warned that tsotsis 'thrive on disorder, and played a prominent part in all the disturbances probably acting as the storm-troopers of others operating behind the scenes'.⁹⁵ Many others, including the Johannesburg Manager of Non-European Affairs believed the same.⁹⁶

The gangs were nevertheless not quite the pliable tools that the administrators suggested. "The strongest force binding the tsotsis together" might be "resentment of whites" but they could not be automatically orchestrated for any political purposes.⁹⁷ Would-be mobilisers had to strike a responsive chord in the collective consciousness of the gangs, and this was not necessarily easily accomplished by the intelligentsia leading most of the political groups. The most effective mobilisers were predictably those who were schooled in street culture themselves. One such figure was AB and it is worth studying his career in

some detail.

AB was born in June 1924, part of the baby boom of the first post war generation of immigrants to the Rand. AB was neglected by his family and felt himself particularly rejected by his mother and elder sister. He attended the Methodist School in Benoni, passing through the sub-standards to Standard VI. According to a teacher from his school he was, at this point, expelled for disobedience and cheek.⁹⁸ In AB's own account he left because of shortage of money at home and because he wanted to enlist in the army. Once his father discovered his intention, he gave him 'a hard smack and ... as he crawled ... a kick up the arse'. AB's army career had been brought to an abrupt and ignominious halt, which in turn further fed his disaffection. "That's where I became a rebel" AB recalls, a vocation in which he was to excell. He went to boxing and weightlifting, activities much favoured by street gangs. The aggressive streak in his character also found other expressions. In these middle to late adolescent years he "had no time for girls Every time I was chased by the police for assaulting girls ... it was my sickness ... I used to hit them very bad".

An increasingly antagonistic attitude also developed within AB to the Indian traders in the Asiatic section in Benoni. According to AB, tsotsis often used to rob mine-workers coming to buy in the Indian shops. "The Shaganes" AB recalls

"were funny people. When they come to shop they will be in a group of 10 and the last one has the money They walk in a line, not together - like animals. The tsotsis, who don't work, will grab the last one, gag him, pull him away and pickpocket him."

AB claims the Indian traders originally taught the tsotsis this trick, and that they shared the spoils between them. Conflict between the traders and the tsotsis later broke out when the tsotsis refused to hand over to the traders their share. The traders responded by calling the police who 'chased the tsotsis with sjambok all over'.

The bias in AB's account is evident, and the most likely interpretation

of these events is that the traders called in the police when the tsotsis started robbing their customers on too large a scale. AB nevertheless turned the event to his own advantage. AB already had a grudge against Indian traders. "One day I was sent [to the traders store]. I was given f5. When I arrived there I bought some few things and that Indian said I gave him f2. There was a struggle ... (AB was not one to give up without a fight) and they pushed me out." IN AB's own perception this was a relatively common occurrence. He therefore decided to stop the Indians

"buggering people around I formed my own team and spoke to the tsotsi boys and said 'don't you see the Indians are finishing our people'. They said 'Yes'. I said 'we must ... hit these Indians ... and start taking their money'. We would buy raw eggs, hit the wives of the Indians and she runs away and the Indian will come in and the tsotsis go to the till and take the money."

The Indian traders soon responded by calling the police, and, when their assailants got off their charges, by negotiating for protection from other tsotsi groups. For AB who loved to fight, this was bliss. Along with "Jannie Malcolm, Bootje, Jacobo" and others he defeated the opposition. Now the traders "wanted to make friendship with us. Those [Indiands] I used to associate with [as a boy], they started tricking me ... make me food, take me to rich Indians ... they were playing with my mind ... they were trying to bribe us you know".

Thus feted, more or less amicable relationships were restored and AB turned his attention to other pursuits. Immediately after the war a major social problem had developed among whites - the so called 'ducktails' or delinquent white youth. Among their various activities were assaults on blacks. Under the headline 'Klu-Klux Clan Methods' The Guardian reported in January 1946 the increasing incidence of unprovoked attacks by bands of European youths on Africans, Coloureds and Indians.⁹⁹ Benoni was no exception to this trend. "In town, you were never, never allowed to walk on the pavement. If you do that these white boys see you and they just take you and throw you right on the veranda of the shop, and glasses will cut you

to pieces." AB organised 'milk boys' in the town and other youths from the location to retaliate against these louts. "We should hit these white people with the milk" AB told his recruits. "It must be war against whites." On the next Saturday chaos broke out on one side street in Benoni. Youths fought, black women shoppers threw stones and soon 'Police came with batons ... they were not used to shoot at that time'. Arrests were made on both sides, and after a number of similar incidents the police started enforcing the right of blacks to walk on Benoni's pavements.

AB clearly had immense rapport with the gangs. He spoke their language, and his daring and aggression made him both feared and admired. However AB was much more than a tsotsi, if indeed he can be called one at all. AB spanned a number of different worlds, although he displayed the same persona to each. He mixed as easily with the amaRashsea (Russians) - the Sotho ethnic gang - as he did with the tsotsis, and was a personal friend of the Molapo faction leader Matsarapane who was hanged for killing a white policeman in 1951. This alone set him aside from the tsotsis who hated the Russians and were hated in return. "We wouldn't even gamble with them" gang member G. recalls, as he strove to express the gulf that yawned in between.¹⁰⁰

AB also stood out in other respects. After leaving school he continued his education at night-classes. Reward for his efforts came in 1946 when a local attorney named M employed him in his office in Benoni. AB rapidly graduated through the ranks. M's practice did a lot of work with the black community and attracted a large number of people in trouble with their passes.

"These people used to come to the lawyer who said he did not know how to do them. I must see a plan. He was so clever. I used to go to these boys who used to do them, and they were so fond of me. One was called Steenkamp. I would say to him, 'Look there is one boy who has no pass and he is a good boy.' He would say, 'Bring hom hier so ek sal hom reg maak'. He would fix it and charge the boy £10. I would take £5 to the office. The boy would give me £6 after all those

efforts. From there I was the famous man of making passes. [M, the lawyer] said you are making a lot of money and I want a third of what you make, but he said don't write on my books the receipts or the inspectors will find them - then I used my own exercise book. I would make hundreds of pounds. I was now known as a lawyer rather than a servant because I had an office.

Sadly for AB, the market broke down in 1954. Steenkamp got greedy. One day "he got friendly with another boy called Frank - that boy put Mr Steenkamp into a mess - he was arrested". Press reports document that Steenkamp got off but the racket was at an end.¹⁰¹

Such exploits and contacts further enhanced AB's prestige both with the gangs and among Benoni's black population as a whole. AB was a conduit for legal aid and in the early 1950's this was almost a priceless resource. AB lost little time in converting this into more material capital. In the latter half of 1950 Advisory Board members began complaining of the unfair allocation of taxi licences in the Benoni locations.¹⁰² According to Advisory Board member Ngengbula 30 licences had been awarded to African owned taxis, 14 to Coloured owned taxis and 46 to Indian owned taxis. Ngengbula demanded a pro rata allocation.¹⁰³ Ngengbula's complaints were part of an orchestrated campaign which extended to Germison and were the prelude to applications from 'several prominent natives' for licences to run taxis. It seems likely that AB was one of the notables who applied and along with the others his application was turned down. He now took the fore in an agitation against the unequal allocation of taxi licences. At a meeting in his house on 16th April attended by Africans, Indians and Chinese demands were made that Indians dispose of their licences (some had as many as five) to blacks. A further meeting at the Star cinema a few days later broke up in disarray.¹⁰⁴ Along with Jacob Mashinini and others AB now organised a boycott of Indian taxis. "We employed our boys to tell the people to get off the taxis." The Indian taxi-owners responded by calling in the Sotho's (presumably Russians) and on the evening of the 20th April AB was shot in the thigh by an unidentified assailant. In the following days

all African owned taxis were draped in Yellow, Black and Green, colours of the ANC, as the boycott dragged on. The Indian taxi owners now resorted once more to negotiation, but although a compromise appears to have been reached, it gave little satisfaction to AB. According to him "the Indians changed their taxis and called them by their boys' surnames. They fetched money in the night, they cancelled the certificates with lawyers and made agreements". As far as AB was concerned the Indians had won.¹⁰⁵

AB nursed his grievance through much of the next year, along with other frustrated African entrepreneurs.¹⁰⁶ A chance to get even came the following July. On the 4th of the month a young African boy named Mandla was beaten up by Indian traders after he was allegedly found in their shop at night. He was taken to the police station where he died in the cells. AB vowed that they would not get away with it this time. He organised the funeral with the Methodist minister, Reverend Weyi, and then "went to call all the notorious boys from Sophiatown - and they came - Boysie from Alexandra, Lefty and Company came as well. They knew that they were going to loot the Indians". He also bought four drums of petrol and poured them into bottles which he had in the veld. After the funeral the crowd marched and attacked the Indian shops.¹⁰⁷

There followed a week of riot and arson. Repeated attacks were made on the Indian shops. According to the Benoni City Times 'tsotsis [were] foremost among the trouble-makers'.¹⁰⁸ F. was a prominent figure in their ranks and remembers the incident well. Before the funeral AB had gone round the street gangs that hung around the shops in the location and had given them instructions. At the church service AB was the last speaker and had told the congregation 'to stand bold as a black nation'. F. thereafter took part in all of the attacks. Three times he was arrested: three times he was set free by AB and the lawyer by whom he was employed.¹⁰⁹ By the middle of the next week many of the shops in the Indian section were razed, and

much of its population had fled. Order was only restored after police swept the location from end to end detaining 80 suspects, children included.¹¹⁰ AB was arrested and tried on three charges but the case collapsed six months later when nobody could be induced to testify for the prosecution.

By some curious irony the attack on the Indian shops came within a month of the opening of the Defiance Campaign which represented the most ambitious effort yet to construct a multi-racial front in opposition to the government.¹¹¹ The attack on the Indians was clearly a blow to the success of this project on the Rand and both the ANC and the Transvaal Indian Congress made urgent moves to heal the wounds. While AB was clearly contemptuous of the conservative Indian leadership in Benoni, who now once again tried to buy him off, he was more impressed by the commitment of the younger and more militant TIC. The Indian Congress he recalls

"wanted real peace - Moodley, Cachalia, Naidoo, Naicker ... came to me and we chatted about the unrest. They were trying to join hands with the ANC and the ANC was not strong in the north."

G.R. (who lived in Benoni) also approached AB. "You are a leader", AB recalls him as saying "there is nobody more powerful than you on the East Rand". AB was flattered, became persuaded of the value of a 'united front' and was shortly afterwards elected to the leadership of the Youth League of the ANC.¹¹²

The aim of the two Congresses in the area was clearly to curb some of AB's more extreme activities and to channel the militant support which he was able to tap. The exercise proved a resounding success. AB now brought his youth gangs firmly within the orbit of the ANC and they provided the shock troops for much of the rest of the decade. Operating under the name of Thaka Enyane (Young Black Soldiers) they were mobilised into most of the ANC's later campaigns. Between 1953 and 1955 the ANC in Benoni became rejuvenated and AB became a household name.¹¹³

In May 1954 the Benoni Council announced rent increases of up to 100% for sub-economic houses in Wattville and a 25% hike on 'economic housing' rents. The next month an organisation known as the Wattville Helping Hand Association - led by AB - was calling for a boycott of buses and the beerhall (AB was a rigid teetotaler) in protest against the hikes.¹¹⁴ F. recalls the 'Thaka Enyane being summoned to enforce the boycott call.¹¹⁵ In the event the boycott was a flop. There were too many houseless families prepared to take over the houses of those boycotting over rent; police swarmed through the location on the appointed day, and the Council made some minor concessions through the Advisory Board.¹¹⁶

AB was more successful in orchestrating two other campaigns. In February 1955 he successfully organised a boycott of the 'childrens treat' and other events that accompanied the opening of the Wattville Sports Stadium. Minister of Education Eiselen was the guest of honour and the boycott was in protest against the introduction of Bantu education. The boycott was total. Not a soul appeared on the streets and 3 000(?) children's cakes stood untouched. AB remembers the incident with great relish. The boycott was merely a prelude to the much more sustained campaign against the introduction of Bantu education. This opened in Benoni on 12th April 1954 in defiance of the ANC national executive's decision to postpone the campaign. Along with Germiston and Brakpan, Benoni was one of the militant centres of the movement.¹¹⁷ AB, the Youth League and the youth gangs were at the centre of its organisation. Children were stopped on their way to school and sent home. "Young natives walked through the classrooms shouting 'Africa' and persuading children to leave their desks." Teachers and Advisory Board members were threatened. The boycott became total. In the course of the next week several attempts at arson occurred,¹¹⁸ but the first stage of the boycott was ultimately broken by police action and the mass banning of 597 children from schools.¹¹⁹ Second

and third attempts at boycott flared up late in May and again in July of the same year. In both cases "native women and children" were central, a march of 2 000 women and children headed by ANC colours being broken up by police on the former occasion.¹²⁰

The Bantu Education boycott was the most sustained, militant and mass based action to have taken place in Benoni's black community. It was then that the ANC in the area came of age. At its centre were the Youth League, the gangs and the women (to whom we will return later). Its success ensured the deportation of AB to Vryburg in the north-western Cape.^{120a}

Nevertheless the tradition that he had founded carried on. F. recalls his gang now becoming connected to the Youth League by Frank Maibi whose mother was in the ANC and who was himself one of F.'s YBS gang. F. and his gang were prominent in enforcing the women's anti-pass campaign. F. himself had a strong antipathy to passes. Indeed he claimed he joined the ANC youth wing because he was against the carrying of passes. Significantly, he saw them as preventing youths being employed until 20, at which age they got a pass. With AB and his lawyer now absent F. quickly found himself in goal, after he received a 9 month sentence for assaulting a nurse. After serving his sentence, F. continued with his political activities and the young gang wing of the ANC only seems to have been effectively broken in early-mid 1960 when police undertook house to house raids and arrests to wipe out what they called the menace of tsotsiism.¹²¹ It was at this point that F. fled to Pretoria and many other youth leaders were goaled. It seems likely that it was at this time that the youth wing collapsed.¹²²

The youth gangs and the women of Benoni were central actors in the Bantu education boycott in Benoni, at least partly because it was they who were in the location during the day. The gang networks also fed themselves into the political culture of Benoni via an entirely different route. However difficult it was for the youth to get jobs, and however reluctant

many were to seek work, most were eventually employed. Even F., for example, who immediately quit his first job (in 1953) when he was shown a railway carriage full of sacks he had to unload - entered into permanent employment in 1963.¹²³ Only the most 'incorrigible' continued to spend their life on the streets especially after the tightening of influx control and passes towards the end of the 1950's.

Young men were nevertheless highly selective about the work they would take. Operative or distributive jobs, especially those which offered the prospects of promotion as bonuses were the most highly sought after kinds of employment.¹²⁴ In Benoni the scope for this kind of work was extremely limited. Heavy engineering dominated the local economy, and this kind of labour young men shunned. In 1943, however, an important new avenue of employment opened, when Amato Textile Mills (then Union and Congo) erected a factory in Benoni. From 1945 Amato Textile expanded rapidly until by the mid 1950's it employed 4 000 men.

Amato Textile was unusual in a number of respects. It was by far the largest factory in Benoni; it was the major source of semi-skilled employment in the town, and it was probably the most effectively unionised and militant factory on the Rand. Elsewhere I have discussed the reasons for this unusual degree of militancy and organisation drawing attention to the semi-skilled nature of the work, the imperatives of production, and the character of the management itself. Here I want to emphasise one particular feature of the factory to which I did not pay sufficient attention before - the composition of its workforce.

When Amato opened its gates in 1943 it recruited a largely juvenile work-force.¹²⁵ David Hapane, who worked in Amato, attributes this to the efforts of Advisory Board member and squatter leader, Harry Mabuya.¹²⁶ Mabuya may well have played some part in this decision, but a more compelling reason for Amato was probably the competing demands for labour in

Benoni during and immediately after the war. When Amato Textile approached Benoni Town Council in December 1945 for 36 acres of extra land on which to expand their factory they explained that

"the type of native required was the small active type able to use their hands in a deft manner in the working of the spinning and weaving machines, and this type of [layout?] could be drawn from the location without interfering with the labour requirements of the other industries in Benoni which usually required natives of the strong and physically robust type."¹²⁷

How 'active' this 'type of native' could be, they would shortly find out. Amato continued with this policy until the early 1950's at least. In July 1951 Benoni Council conducted a survey of juvenile unemployment and employment and found that Amato was the largest employer of male juveniles in the town, this group accounting for 25% of its total complement.¹²⁸

C.P. was one of this group. He left school at Standard IV because there was no money at home to allow him to proceed with his education. Some time later at the age of 20 he was employed in Amato Textile. C.P. later became a factory militant and a leader in both the SACTU affiliated to African Textile Workers Union and in SACTU itself. According to C.P., Amato workers were unusually militant because of the influence of the youth. "Workers who were employed there were very young, and literate i.e. they were more enlightened and had much impact." They were not prepared to accept the arbitrary and abusive behaviour of migrant boss boys and white foremen, and by developing the union gained protection from both.¹²⁹

These young workers also brought some of the anarchy and self assertion of the streets on to the factory floor. S.M. for example joined Amato Textile in 1948, at the age of 17 or 18, and was soon elected shop steward of his department. He had left school in Standard 7 after his father had died, and spent a couple of years engaged in casual labour before a job in Amato turned up. While still at school S.M. had been an active member of the VCR gang, and he carried some of its spirit of defiance with him into his job at Amato. Strikes, S.M. recalls were a regular occurrence. Some

strikes were 'geniune' but others were simply frivolous. For example,

a 'genuine' strike might start if you go outside to smoke, because smoking wasn't allowed in the factory. Then the supervisor would tell you don't go outside during work time to smoke. So if you are a shop steward you have to see whether to take it [the dispute] or not. You then turned the argument back on him saying 'Fuck you, these people are not in prison'. He then may want to chase you away and then the whole work stopped.

On other occasions they just 'caused strikes because we wanted to go to the cinema. A man will go to the manager to say that he needs to go off. Then they say to him go away we are busy working and he will go to his colleagues and tell them his problem. Then we decide to tools down and to and stand next to the office. After 30 minutes they will tell us to go home and come back tomorrow'.¹³⁰

Either through the gangs or through the factory S.M. joined the Youth League of the ANC. Many others, through their experience of the TWIU and SACTU were doing the same. Some time in the early 1950's C.P. who was by then a key leader in Amato 'took his group into the ANC'. Shortly before, another key leader named Z.M. did the same.¹³¹ Some powerful ballast for the ANC's campaign in Benoni was now in place.

3. WOMEN, THE FAMILY AND POLITICAL MOBILISATION

The youth culture described in the foregoing pages was part of the legacy of gold. It was the offspring of intense poverty, competition from migrant labour and family instability. These same factors were also responsible for one of the other most striking developments of the 1940's and 1950's - the partial emancipation of women. Urban African women, it was argued earlier in this paper, were in a highly ambiguous position - more independent and self-reliant, and simultaneously more vulnerable to men. Women might change partners often, but in the end required a male partner to provide physical protection. Yet while men might offer protection, they all too often did not provide emotional and economic security as well. Women

therefore looked for this security in a variety of other directions.

Longmore explains in this connection

"It does not follow that looseness in family involves disorganisation throughout community life.... There are other groups capable of organising intimate personal relations and controlling individual behaviour. Among these ... may be listed tsotsi gangs, stokvels, manyano societies and separatist sects."¹³²

I have not as yet conducted the research which would enable me to explore the changing role and character of these institutions. What is clear however is that women's search for security went well beyond such relatively parochial activity. One particular form of security that urban women in the 1940's and 1950's desperately sought was a house of their own. In the absence of family security the home for urban women was their crucial safety net. It is in this context that one must explain the astonishing levels of participation of women in the squatter movements of the 1940's and early 1950's.

The Tent Town squatter camp set up by Harry Mabuya next to Benoni location in 1945 is a case in point. The squatter movement in Benoni was in many ways a women's movement. It was frequently women who took the initiative to move to the encampment and it was they who most vociferously campaigned for new houses to be built. Ma-Thibéla, who 'set up tent' in the area in 1948 remembers this of the move:

[At the time] my husband was boss boy at Modder B. mine ... I told him that our children needed a change of environment, that they cannot grow like we did, and that we should learn to struggle like other people. At first he was hesitant. He didn't understand what I meant by learning to struggle and leaving his job, but ultimately he agreed, and we bought a tent and came over this side. The thing that made me do this was the mine policy that if a wife left her husband she had to leave the quarters and fend for herself.

She therefore went herself to buy a tent from Mabuya (for £15) in the first of a series of moves which eventually won her a new house in Wattville.

Women were at the centre of squatter politics. Since their husbands were usually at work in the factories all day, it was they who took the lead in organising the demonstrations for housing which the native commissioner

so dreaded. These were often accompanied by Mabuya. Ma-Thibela recalls the Tent Town women marching down the road to the Native Commissioner's office singing:

"Siyawugubha, siyawugebhula umhlaba ka Maspala"
 ("We are digging, we are seizing huge chunks of the municipality's land.")

and "we have our 'tsotsi' with us: he is not behind"
 (a reference to Mabuya).¹³³

In the actual administration of tent town women residents also took the lead. On the executive committee of the African Housing and Rates Board sat Ma-Msibi (Mabuya's cousin) Ma-Ntlokwane, Ma-Senusi, Mr Mhlambi (the secretary) and Mr Lesenya.¹³⁴ Ma-Ntlokwane was later to top the polls in the Emergency Camp's Advisory Board elections, a most unusual event at the time.¹³⁵ The African Housing and Rates Board ran every aspect of the camp life, from providing food through the Mabuya Township Trading Co-operative Society Ltd.,¹³⁶ to holding church services for the inmates in the morning and the evening, to policing the encampment during the week (the job of women) and during the week-end (the job of men).¹³⁷ It was a highly effective form of self-rule.

The importance of housing to women also explains the almost godlike reverence accorded to squatter leaders like Mabuya "He was our Moses" says Ma-Ntlokwane. "He was like a priest". The support that Mabuya consistently commanded from women in Advisory Board elections gives some idea of how broadly based that sentiment was.¹³⁸ "Housewives, grannies and widows supported him a lot" says Ma-Thibela "because he sometimes was a pillar to them. For instance ... there was a policy of not offering women houses on their own i.e. when not having a husband ... but he did just the opposite. He was very helpful".¹³⁹

The experience of the squatter movement may conceivably have bred a new confidence in women. When the Benoni municipality introduced a head tax of 2/6d. a week on all male members of a household, and 1/6d. on all female

members, irrespective of age, they met with an explosion of anger from the women of the location. This was a direct threat to the family, the main responsibility for which ultimately lay with women. The next day women began to boycott the municipal bus service and refused to allow location women to go to work in the town. Asserting that it was "a women's quarrel and they wanted all women to be in on it" they marched on the location manager's offices. Native Affairs Manager Matthewson tried to ride the storm out, but was forced to back down the next day when the women of the township issued a general strike call. Within the space of 24 hours the Council had obtained permission from the Government to waive the collection of fees for children under the age of 16 and for school children of any years.¹⁴⁰

In the events of May 1952 the ANC played a relatively peripheral role. By the time of the Bantu Education boycott it occupied the centre of the stage. It was at this point that Benoni's women (and women generally on the Rand) first entered the mainstream of nationalist politics. Ma-Thibela dates her political awareness back to this campaign. "I questioned myself. Why this sudden introduction, what is wrong with the education the children were getting?" At this point Ma-Thibela's own children were at school, but this was not the only reason for her joining the campaign. "Our social situation had [also] really made one dissatisfied." The women for Ma-Thibela were the lifeblood of the campaign. The overwhelming majority of those picketing the schools were women together with 'some men who didn't work'. They went from school to school, often chased by mounted police. On arrival they just said 'OUT' and all would leave the school.¹⁴¹

The Education boycott ultimately failed but from this time on the ANC was a force to be reckoned with in the life of Benoni. With the women and the youth marshalled solidly behind it carried great weight. Yet even now, while there was no other local political organisation that could seriously offer it a challenge, it still did not begin to achieve a hegemonic

position. At the very moment the Bantu education boycott was clearing the classrooms in the locations near Benoni, the tent schools in the new township of Daveyton were packed full. Likewise in the women's pass campaign of 1956 and 1957 it was the women of the old location and Wattville who were solidly resisting, while those in Daveyton broke ranks.¹⁴² What this represented spatially was a wider sociological cleavage. The ex-miners, the squatters, the new arrivals to town were largely impervious to the more 'urban' message of the ANC, while the ANC for its part failed to find the means of appealing to this group. To explore this issue requires another paper. Suffice it to say that this was one of the reefs on which the ANC would founder at the beginning of the following decade.

FOOTNOTES

1. D. O'Meara, 'The 1946 African Mine-Workers' Strike in the Political Economy of South Africa.' Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics, 12, 1 July 1975.
2. P.L. Bonner, '"We are digging, we are seizing huge chunks of the Municipality's Land": Popular struggles in Benoni, 1944-1952', 1-2.
3. P.L. Bonner and R. Lambert, 'Bats and Bare Heads: The Strike at Amato Textile, February 1958', 5-8.
4. J.C. Wells, 'The History of Black Women's Struggle against Pass Laws in South Africa, 1900-1960', Ph.D. thesis, University of Columbia, 1982, Chapter 8; Benoni City Times, 25 July 1952.
5. K. French 'James Mpanza and the Sofazonke Party', M.A. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1982, Chapter 2.
6. South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg Urban Native Juvenile Delinquency Conference, 1983. Paper by G. Ballenden; D.C. Hindson, 'Pass Offices and Labour Bureaux. An Analysis of a National System of Pass Controls in South Africa' D. Phil.; University of Sussex, 1982, Chapter 4.
7. C. Walker, Women and Resistance in South Africa, 147-8.
8. Colonial Annual Reports: Basutoland, 1937, 6; ibid. 1946, 15-17.
9. Interview, M.N. Pokone, 10 June 1986, Daveyton.
10. S. Majara, Matotulo, Maseru 1965; interview S. Majara 26 April 1986, Lesotho.
11. Johannesburg Juvenile Delinquency Conference
12. Ibid., Paper by G. Ballenden.
13. South African Institute of Race Relations, Monograph series 1-3, 1938-40, E. Hellman, Problems of Urban Bantu Youth, 1940, 14.
14. University of the Witwatersrand, Church of the Province of South Africa Archives, Katlehong Records microfilm, Reel 2.
15. Benoni Municipal Archives, (hereafter BMA) Non-European Affairs Committee Minutes, (hereafter NEAC) meeting of 11 November 1949, 611.
16. CPSA archives, Katlehong Records, Reel 2, S.A. Institute of Race Relations Memo. of evidence to the Inter-Departmental Committee of Native Juvenile Unemployment on the Witwatersrand and in Pretoria, 12 July 1951.
17. L. Longmore, The Dispossessed. A Study of the Sex Life of Bantu Women in the Urban Areas in and Around Johannesburg, London, 1959, 51.
18. Ibid., 118.
19. CPSA, Katlehong records, Reel 2, Town Council of Germiston NEA Dept. analysis of Rodger housing survey, Germiston location, July 1948.

20. Longmore, The Dispossessed, 51, 60.
21. Ibid, 59, 61, 70.
22. Ibid, 61.
23. Ibid, 58, 118-19, 138.
24. Ibid, 74, 79, 83-4, 117, 119.
25. Johannesburg Native Juvenile Delinquency Conference.
26. Longmore, The Dispossessed, 108.
27. CPSA, Katlehong Records, Reel 2, SAIRR memo. of evidence to the Inter-Departmental Committee on Native Juvenile Unemployment; T. Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa since 1945 (Johannesburg, 1983), 155, Johannesburg Juvenile Delinquency Conference.
28. BMA, NEAC, Meeting, 13 June 1950, 327.
29. Ibid, meeting 11 November 1949, 611.
30. CPSA, Katlehong Records, Reels, Report of the Inter Departmental Committee into Native Juvenile Unemployment.
31. e.g. Hindson, 'Pass Offices', 124-6; S. van der Horst, 'The African Worker in Urban Areas' Race Relations, XIII No. 2, 1946.
32. D.H. Terrington, 'An Examination of the Occupational Wage Structure in Selected Industries covered by the Wage Board' M.A. thesis, University of Capetown, 1974.
33. CPSA, Katlehong Records, Reel 2, Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce Memo. of evidence to the committee into Native Juvenile Unemployment.
34. Benoni City Times, 25 July 1952.
35. Ibid, 6 March 1953.
36. Ibid, 25 March 1953.
37. BMA, NEAC, meeting 14 November 1949, 411-24.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid, meeting, 6 January 1950, 11.
40. Ibid, meeting, 16 January 1946, 19-20.
41. Ibid, 11 November 1949, 588.
42. Bonner, 'We are digging', 18.
43. Johannesburg Juvenile Delinquency Conference
44. BMA, NEAC, meeting, 10 March 1947, 99.

45. Ibid, meeting 13 March 1951. Minutes of Location Advisory Board, 27 February 1951.
46. Benoni City Times, 3 August 1956.
47. Ibid.
48. BMA, NEAC, meeting 9 February 1945, 36.
49. Ibid, meeting, 1 April 1948, NEA Manager to Native Commissioner, 1 June 1948, 222.
50. CPSA, Katlehong records, Reel 2, Report of the Committee into Native Juvenile Unemployment, 1951, 2-3.
51. Ibid, 13, 17, 38.
52. Ibid, 13.
53. Ibid, Evidence to the Native Juvenile Unemployment Committee. Report of the Secretary of the Native Youth Board (H. Mehlomakulu) for 1949-50.
54. Ibid, 11, 13, 17.
55. Johannesburg Juvenile Delinquency Conference; CPSA, Katlehong Records Reel 2, Report of the Committee into Native Juvenile Unemployment, 11-13.
56. Ibid, 20-23.
57. Ibid, 8-9.
58. Hellman, Urban Bantu Youth, 58-72.
59. Ibid.
60. CPSA, Katlehong records, Reel 2, SAIRR memo. of evidence to the Committee into Native Juvenile Unemployment.
61. Johannesburg Juvenile Delinquency Conference, Paper by Margaret Ballinger.
62. Longmore, The Dispossessed.
63. Benoni City Times, 6 March 1953.
64. CPSA, Katlehong Records, Reel 2, Report of the Committee into Native Juvenile Unemployment, 6.
65. Longmore, The Dispossessed, 263.
66. Ibid.
67. D. Coplan, In Township Tonight!
68. Drum, December 1955.
69. Ibid; Interview S.M., 17 July 1985, Daveyton.

70. Interview, C.D. 14 February 1985, Johannesburg; interview, S.M., 30 July 1986, Daveyton; interview 'F', 20 March 1985, 31 October 1985.
71. Interview C.D. and S.M. C.V. Bothma 'Tsotsibendes in Pretoria'. Tydskrif vir Rasse-Aangeleenthede, Vol. 3, No. 1 Jan. 1952, 24-35.
72. Ibid.
73. Interviews, S.M., C.D., M.
74. Interview M.
75. J. Brown
76. Longmore, The Dispossessed.
77. Cited in M. Chaskalson, 'The Road to Sharpville', 19 (University of the Witwatersrand, History Department Seminar Paper, 1986).
78. Interview, C.D.
79. Interview C.D., S.M. : Also interviews with several 'amaRashea' leaders.
80. Interview, C.D.
81. Johannesburg Juvenile Delinquency Conference, Interview M.
82. CPSA, Katlehong records, Reel 2, SAIRR Evidence to the Juvenile Unemployment Committee, 3, 13-14.
83. Drum, December 1955.
84. CPSA, Katlehong records, Reel 2, Evidence of the Association of Administrators of Non-European Affairs to the Juvenile Unemployment Committee, May 1951, 4.
85. Benoni City Times, 4 June 1948.
86. Ibid, 4 August 1950.
87. Ibid, 7 May 1954.
88. BMA, NEAC, meeting 9 December 1954, Advisory Board Minutes, 23 September 1954, 480, Benoni City Times, 17 December 1954.
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90. Coplan, In Township Tonight, Drum, December 1955.
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92. CPSA, Katlehong Archives, Reel 2, Evidence to the Committee on Native Juvenile Unemployment.
93. Interview, F.
94. Benoni City Times, 3 July 1953.

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97. CPSA, Katlehong Records, Reel 2, Report of the Committee on Native Juvenile Unemployment, 18.
98. Interview, A.B., 8 May 1985, Daveyton.
99. The Guardian, 17 January 1946, 8.
100. Interview, F.
101. Benoni City Times.
102. BMA, NEAC, meeting 10 August 1950, Benoni location Advisory Board minutes, 27 July 1950, 137.
103. Ibid, meeting 14 November 1950, 385.
104. Ibid, 14 May 1951, Report Senior Superintendent Benoni location, 355-7; Ibid, Advisory Board minutes, 26 April 1951, 369-70; Ibid, NEA Manager's report, 384.
105. Ibid, meeting 11 August 1952, Advisory Board minutes, 27 July 1952; Interview, A.B.
106. BMA, NEAC, Advisory Board Minutes, 29 April 1952.
107. Ibid, meeting 11 August 1952, Advisory Board minutes 22 July 1952.
108. Ibid, meetings 15 July 1952, 1 August 1952. Benoni City Times, 11 July 1952.
109. Interview, F.
110. Benoni City Times, 11 July 1952.
111. Lodge Black Politics, 43.
112. Interview, A.B.; See also The Clarion 17 July 1952 and 27 July 1952, which speaks of mass meetings held by the ANC and T.I.C. in Benoni old location which denounced the attacks and pledged full support for the Defiance Campaign. (I have only recently come across this reference: hence it is not integrated into the text.)
113. See below, and Lodge 'Black Politics'.
114. Benoni City Times, 7 May 1954, 18 and 25 June 1954.
115. Interview, F.
116. Benoni City Times, 25 June 1954, 2 July 1954.

117. Ibid, 29 April 1955; Lodge, Black Politics, 123.
118. Benoni City Times, 22 April 1955.
119. Ibid, 13 May 1955.
120. Ibid, 27 May 1955, 29 July 1955.
- 120a. Ibid; Interview, A.B.
121. Benoni City Times, 8 and 29 April 1960, 6, 20 and 27 May 1960.
122. Interview, F.
123. Ibid.
124. CPSA, Katlehong records, Reel 2, Report of the Committee on Native Juvenile Unemployment, 12-13.
125. Interview, David Hapane, 2 March 1985, Benoni, interview 20 April 1985, Wattville.
126. Interview, D. Hapane.
127. Intermediate Archives, Johannesburg.
Benoni Council, Box 265, II/1 VOL I
Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Works Committee, 14 December 1945.
128. Benoni City Times, 20 July 1951.
129. Interview C.P.; interview Edward Mabaso, 20 May 1985, Wattville (who talks of recruiting mine workers as 'boss boys').
130. Interview, S.M.
131. Conversation C.P., 1985.
132. Longmore, The Dispossessed, 183.
133. Interview, Christina Thibela (Ma-Thibela) 4 May 1985, Wattville.
134. Interview, Ma-Ntlokwane and Ma-Senosi, May 1985, Wattville.
135. BMA, NEAC, meeting 12 July 1949, 175.
136. Ibid, meeting 8 September, 1947. Annexure "B", Notes of interview with the squatters committee, 357; interview Ma-Ntlokwane and Ma-Senosi.
137. Ibid.
138. See results of successive Advisory Board elections.
139. Interview, Ma-Thibela.
140. Benoni City Times, 23 May 1952.
141. Interview, Ma-Thibela.
142. Benoni City Times; interview Ma-Thibela.