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# ANTI-SOCIAL BANDITS
## Juvenile Delinquency and the Tsotsi Youth Gang Subculture on the Witwatersrand 1935-1960

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, for the degree of Master of Arts.

Johannesburg 1990

**Degree awarded with distinction 23 April 1991.**

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

Clive Leonard Glaser

Thirtieth August, 1990.

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I would like to thank Tom Lodge, Gail Gerhart, David Goodhew, Edwin Ritchken, Fran Buntman and, especially, Steve Lebelo for giving me access to recordings or transcriptions of interviews which they conducted for their own research.

In addition, I am grateful to my entire History Masters class for providing a supportative and stimulating work environment; the staff of the William Cullen Library for their friendliness and efficiency; and my parents for helping with proofreading.

For assisting me financially during my years of research I owe thanks to the University of the Witwatersrand (through their Senior Bursaries) and the Human Sciences Research Council.

If you are an anthroplogist who is interested in location life, especially where there are so many street fights during the weekends, study "bo Tsotsi" and you'll get enough information to write a thesis that will excite many un rsities into honouring you with degrees!

- "Mr J.D.N." of Benoni,
  Bantu World Readers' Forum
  7 April 1945.

ABSTRACT

In the context of family instability, inadequate schooling, massive youth unemployment and severe residential overcrowding, juvenile delinquency became rampant in Witwatersrand townships during the 1930s. By the mid 1940s the "tsotsis", a criminal, male-dominated youth gang subculture with its own distinctively urban style, ritual and language, had entrenched itself amongst urbanised township communities. Tsotsis angrily rejected both hegemonic white middle class values and the apparently acquiescent culture of their parents. Tsotsi style, which drew heavily on American cinema imagery, expressed a denial of cultural consensus in urban society. Tsotsi gangs preyed materially off township residents and distanced themselves from political activity or community affairs. However, around 1959-60 tsotsis were attracted to the radical, machismo, aggressively anti-establishment politics of the Pan-Africanist Congress. The subculture dissolved during the 1960s as a result of police crackdowns, expanded state schooling and improved employment opportunities for urban youth.

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# INTRODUCTION

During the late 1930s a distinctive youth gang subculture emerged amongst the permanently urbanised black population of the Witwatersrand. The subculture arose against a backdrop of massive youth unemployment, grossly inadequate schooling and recreation facilities, unstable family units and severe overcrowding in the townships. Male youths took to the streets and developed a "city slicker" style with its own distinctive codes of dressing, language, leisure activity and criminality. During the war years the gangs became a common feature of South African township life. In the early 1940s these gangsters became known as "tsotsis". The word originally described a style of narrow-bottomed trousers which became particularly popular amongst the black urban youth during the 1940s. Gradually the connotation of the word broadened to incorporate an entire youth gang subculture. Tsotsi gangs became a nation-wide phenomenon in the urban areas of South Africa. In fact, it would appear that during the 1940s and 1950s the majority of permanently urbanised black youths in South Africa's key

urban conglomerate, the Witwatersrand, were involved, to a lesser or greater extent, in tsotsi gangs.

South African administrative records, newspapers, autobiographies and works of fiction are cluttered with references, direct or oblique, to the tsotsi phenomenon. Yet, despite the prevalence of tsotsi gangs and the prominence of the tsotsis in the black urban experience, no systematic study of the tsotsi subculture has been attempted in South African historiography to date. Tsotsis have been treated persistently as a parasitic lumpenproletarian element peripheral to the processes of industrialisation and black urbanisation. The only text which deals directly with the tsotsi phenomenon is C.V. Bothma's 1951 Masters thesis for Pretoria University.(1) Bothma's thesis, although essentially a linguistic study of tsotsitaal, has a useful descriptive section on subcultural style. In addition, Bothma attempted to explain the social context of African youth gang formation in a fairly sensitive way. Nevertheless, as a broader subcultural study the thesis is altogether inadequate. First, Bothma's work was contemporary and sociological rather than historical which makes it a useful historical resource but limits its analytical scope; the study is ultimately rather static and, written while the subculture was only starting to peak in terms of prevalence, lacks an historically distanced overview. Second, Bothma's study is limited to Pretoria which in itself is a legitimate focus but leaves the far

more important urban centre of the Witwatersrand unexplored. It was on the Rand that the subculture reached its most powerful expression and where subcultural role models were generated. Third, Bothma's study, while providing useful empirical data, lacks any serious analysis of subcultural style and fails to explore the crucial class, generation and gender specific elements of the subculture. Finally, and here again Bothma's work is severely limited by its contemporaneity, he dismisses tsotsis as apolitical without serious analysis or qualification. The study, of course, chronologically precedes the more overt politicisation of tsotsi youth towards the end of the 1950s.

Although there are no other direct studies of the tsotsi subculture, part of the foundation for such a study has been established within South African scholarship. There are four areas of scholarship which either touch obliquely on the tsotsi subculture or provide useful clues in establishing a methodological framework for such a study. First, there is a growing body of literature which highlights generation as a social cleavage and a tool of analysis. Second, some work has been done on the issue of juvenile delinquency on the Witwatersrand during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Third, the distinctive tsotsi language, tsotsitaal, has been the focus of a number of local linguistic studies. Fourth, several pieces focusing on African resistance politics during the 1950s and early

1960s have drawn attention to urban African youth as a political constituency.

Generation as an analytic tool emerged in the discipline of social anthroplogy rather than history. Social anthropologists have shown that generational hierarchy is a key concept in understanding the power structure of "pre-capitalist" societies.(2) Age hierarchies were based on elders controlling the system of bridewealth and, by extension, the point of marriage and labour reproduction. In 1970 Iona and Philip Mayer, in a more historical study still based technically within the discipline of social anthroplogy, explored youth initiation in "Red" Xhosa society.(3) They showed how young men were given a great deal of freedom and were allowed to explore their sexuality in fairly autonomous youth groups while simultaneously being socialised into accepting traditional values and hierarchies. They also showed how youth initiation was adapted to the system of migrancy in the twentieth century. In the same anthology La Fontein described an extraordinarily prevalent youth gang phenomenon which had emerged in Kinshasa during the early days of Zairean independence.(4) However, her article is largely empirical and fails to problematise generation or analyse the gangs in subcultural terms. In the 1980s South African revisionist historians have been influenced by this anthropological approach. For example, Peter Delius and William Beinart have incorporated a generational analysis

in explaining patterns of migrancy in the Pedi and Pondo societies respectively.(5) While pointing to the historical significance of generational cleavage in these African societies, youth remains a peripheral concern in their work. More recently, youth and generation have moved closer to the centre stage in a number of historical and sociological texts. Paul la Hausse, for instance, has made a study of the Amalaita, a migrant youth gang subculture which emerged in Durban in the early twentieth century.(6) Phil Bonner, in a paper originally written in 1986 entitled "Family, Crime and Political Consciousness on the East Rand 1939-1955", and my own 1986 Honours dissertation, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League 1944-1955", begin to analyse tsotsis as a generation specific phenomenon.(7) In more contemporary work, Don Pinnock's superb sociological study of youth gangs in the Cape peninsula and Colin Bundy's 1986 paper on Cape youth politics also draw on generation as a key analytic concept.(8)

Ellen Hellman's 1939 Doctoral thesis, "Problems of Urban Bantu Youth" deals extremely thoroughly with the socio-economic context of juvenile delinquency on the Rand.(9) Although the thesis provides crucial background material for an analysis of the following decades, nothing of comparative depth and insight has been written dealing with the 1940s and 1950s. Hellman herself attempted to update her study in several unpublished memoranda during the 1950s

but failed to add anything of importance to her earlier work.(10) Likewise, two doctoral theses dealing with South African juvenile delinquency written respectively by W.W.J. Kieser (University of Potchefstroom, 1952) and L.F. Freed (University of the Orange Free State, 1958) made no significant advances in developing an understanding of the issue.(11) Juvenile delinquency was largely ignored historiographically until Bonner revived the issue, along with some fresh insights, in his paper to which I alluded earlier, "Family Crime and Political Consciousness".

C.V. Bothma's 1951 thesis was the first, and probably the most comprehensive to date, study of tsotsitaal. Nevertheless, there has been a revival of interest in the subject amongst local linguists in the 1980s. Two examples of recent work are B.V. Khumalo's Honours dissertation, "Sources and Structures of Tsotsitaal" (University of the Witwatersrand, 1986) and C.T. Msimang's 1987 article, "Impact of Zulu on Tsotsitaal".(12) All three linguists have emphasised that tsotsitaal emerged as an Afrikaans based hybrid language spoken primarily amongst urban African youth and that the language operated as a symbol of cultural identification, defining the "in-group' and "out-group".

The issue of urban youth politicisation on the Rand in the 1950s is tackled directly in Bonner's "Family, Crime and Political Consciousness" and developed in my Honours dissertation, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth

League". The theme is also explored in the context of East London in the early 1950s by Mager and Minckley in a 1990 History Workshop paper.(13) All three studies begin to focus on the relationship between political organisations and an urban youth gang constituency. None, however, focus on that constituency with any real depth or attempt to analyse the culture of the gangs. Tom Lodge in his doctoral thesis on Pan-African Congress (PAC) insurrectionism and Gail Gerhart in Black Power in South Africa both allude to the attraction of the PAC amongst urban youth.(14) Whereas Lodge only touches on tsotsis very indirectly, Gerhart argues explicitly that tsotsis represented an important constituency of the Transvaal PAC. Nevertheless, both Lodge and Gerhart deal very cursorily with the issue of tsotsis. While acknowledging the importance of youth to the PAC support base, they neglect to analyse that youth constituency itself.

Whereas analysis of youth subculture is seriously underdeveloped in Southern African historiography, there are rich bodies of British and American work on youth gang subcultures. With the possible exception of A.K. Cohen's insightful material produced in the 1950s (15), however, the American studies tend to concentrate on the individual psyche of the juvenile delinquent and underplay broader social conflict, particularly class conflict, in American society. An important body of marxist historical and sociological work on British subcultures was developed at

the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies around the mid 1970s. The key text to emerge from this school was Resistance Through Rituals published in 1976 and edited by Hall and Jefferson. Youth subcultures are placed within the context of their "parent" working class culture and the wider social struggle for cultural and ideological hegemony. Subcultural style, it is argued in this anthology, expresses the frustration over material deprivation through a denial of cultural consensus. The themes of this book are developed in a number of creative pieces, most notably by Phil Cohen (1980), Mike Brake (1980), Steven Humphries (1981) and Dick Hebdige (1984).(16) Despite obvious material and cultural differences between Britain and South Africa, and despite its tendency to over-stress class at the expense of other important cross-class social cleavages, this body of literature provides a valuable theoretical starting point for analysing South African urban youth subcultures.

Inevitably, in a thesis which veers away from mainstream history and deals with the experiences of ordinary people on the ground, historical sources are scattered. There is no thorough official documentation on the issue of tsotsis. Nevertheless, by gathering data from a diverse range of sources it has been possible to establish a substantial resource base. Although tsotsis were generally only dealt with obliquely, the West Rand Administration Board kept surprisingly extensive documentation on juvenile

delinquency, youth unemployment and township gangs. There were also four government commissions between 1950 and 1962 which attached a great deal of importance to the tsotsi issue.(17) Newspapers and magazines proved to be an important source, particularly those catering to a township audience such as Bantu World, Golden City Post and Drum. The features, news sections and letters columns were filled with references to tsotsi gang activity. Independent social welfare institutions and associated individuals highlighted the issue of urban African juvenile delinquency throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Useful material could therefore be gleaned from the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) Collection, the Joint Council Collection, the Ellen Hellman Papers, the Quintin Whyte Papers and the Margaret Ballinger Papers, all housed in the William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand. Autobiographies proved to be an invaluable historical source. Virtually every published South African autobiography which incorporates experiences of the Rand in the 1940s and 1950s has some reference, often very substantial, to tsotsi activity in the 1940s and 1950s.(18) This in itself reflects the importance of the youth subculture in the day-to-day experience of township residents. Tsotsis also feature prominently in South African fiction, a source which, if carefully used, can add texture to an historical reconstruction.

Finally, oral testimony provided a crucial supplement to

these written sources. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to elaborate on the problems and virtues of oral testimony as a historical resource. Suffice it to say that, with adequate self-consciousness and caution (which should be exercised with any historical source), oral evidence is extremely useful, in fact essential, for a study of this nature. No other source can compete in revealing the personal detail of individual experience, personal fluctuations in consciousness or the interaction of the individual with wider society. I conducted interviews with about twenty informants amongst whom were ex-tsotsis, politicians, musicians, journalists and ordinary township residents who had come into substantial contact with the tsotsi subculture. My informants generally lived in Sophiatown, Orlando or Alexandra for some part of their lives during the 1940s, 1950s or early 1960s. In addition, I drew on several interviews which touched on my own concerns conducted by fellow historians and about a dozen interviews with ANC and PAC activists transcribed in the Carter-Karis Collection.

The tsotsi subculture was very much a generational phenomenon; with few exceptions it incorporated only young people from around the point of puberty until marriage. In order to contextualise the subculture it is important to examine not only the material and social conditions of the broader black urban working class but also the conditions which affected black urban youth specifically. On the

Witwatersrand during the 1940s and 1950s experiences such as rampant unemployment, inadequate schooling and excess leisure time were exclusive to the youth. In Chapter One I outline the socio-economic context of juvenile delinquency and youth gang formation on the Rand from the mid 1930s until the early 1960s. This involves a thorough examination of family instability, black schooling, youth unemployment in the townships and the impact of influx control implementation on urban youth.

In Chapter Two I turn more specifically to the tsotsi subculture itself. I trace the origins of the subculture and explore the relationships between criminality, gang membership and subcultural participation. I also attempt to quantify both the wider tsotsi subculture and the core gang membership.

In Chapter Three I draw heavily on British marxist subcultural theory to analyse tsotsi style and ritual and place the tsotsi subculture within a context of the struggle for cultural hegemony. Although tsotsis directed a great deal of anger against the socio-economic and political status quo, they distanced themselves from formal political involvement throughout the 1940s and most of the 1950s. Nevertheless, once the concept "political" is broadened to incorporate the cultural and ideological spheres, the entire tsotsi subculture, I argue, represented an important form of political resistance.

Subcultural style and ritual defined itself in antagonism to hegemonic cultural norms. The subculture angrily denied social consensus in a way that political resistance movements were unable and unwilling to do. Tsotsi youth directed their anger not only at the symbols of white power and privilege but also at their parents, who they perceived to be passive and acquiescent adherents of the consensus culture. It followed that tsotsis were anti-social members of the community and directed their criminal activity primarily at the easiest victims, the township residents themselves.

In Chapter Four I focus on the masculine identity of the tsotsi subculture. I argue that the subculture cannot be fully understood without being subjected to a systematic gender analysis. Although young women played an important subordinate role within tsotsi gang life, the subculture was essentially a male one. I show that the exploration of male sexuality was central to subcultural style and ritual. I attempt to trace the origins of tsotsi sexual identity and argue that there were important continuities between traditional African youth organisations and urban gang formations. Like the traditional youth organisations, tsotsi gangs involved a separation of young men from wider society to explore their independence and masculinity. Unlike traditional youth organisations, however, tsotsi gangs were not regulated and contained by the community to promote traditional values and hierarchies. Tsotsis

systematically subverted generational hierarchy; parents were unable to regulate the sexual identity of urban youth gangs or impose effective restraints upon their sexual activity. Young women, who were involved extensively in domestic activity and had less leisure time at their disposal, were drawn into the subculture on male terms. The tsotsi subculture did not provide women with an avenue for their own sexual expression; they tended to become the objectified rewards and trophies for males who had achieved success in terms of the subcultural masculine identity.

In Chapter Five I examine the political consciousness of tsotsis. Although tsotsis made a powerful political statement through their style and ritual, in terms of formal resistance politics the subculture was essentially apolitical until the very late 1950s. The ANC, until it adopted the armed struggle in the 1960s, recoiled from the anti-social excesses and violence of the tsotsi youth. The Congress Youth League's support amongst the youth was based in the schools and universities. The tsotsis, in turn, were not attracted to the ANC's peaceful, lawful and respectable style of operating. The PAC, and the Africanist faction of the ANC which preceded it, on the other hand, were willing to take far more risks with organising the volatile and undisciplined tsotsi youth constituency. The PAC, particularly in 1959-60, the two years it operated legally, made an enormous impact amongst the urban African youth. The PAC, impatient with legal methods, tacitly advocated

violence and embraced a spirit of anti-establishment machismo and aggression. All these elements struck a responsive chord with tsotsis. Although the majority of its signed-up members were school students and educated, often professional, urban Africans, the organisation clearly penetrated the urban lumpen youth constituency in a way that the ANC had rarely done. Apart from a few scattered and individual exceptions during the 1950s, tsotsi youths became attracted to organised political opposition on a large scale only with the emergence of the PAC. Certainly this was the case on the Witwatersrand and in the Vaal Triangle. After the internal ANC and PAC were banned and decimated by the state in the early 1960s a steady trickle of unemployed former tsotsis continued to join Pogo and Mkhonto we Sizwe, the armed insurrectionist wings of the PAC and ANC respectively.

I have chosen the early 1960s as a cut-off point for this thesis because the tsotsi youth subculture gradually dissolved during the first half of the 1960s. The distinctive style, the pattern of gang formation and, perhaps most importantly, the generational element of the subculture are all extinct. The term "tsotsi" in the modern context has become too open-ended to hold any distinctive subcultural connotation. Between 1958 and 1962 the most famous of the tsotsi gangs on the Rand were broken up through the Western Areas removals and massive police crackdowns. In addition, two coinciding factors in the

1960s help to explain the dissolution of the subculture. On the one hand, secondary schooling under Bantu Education started to expand significantly providing, for the first time, mass schooling for African adolescents; on the other hand, the boom economy of the 1960s partially offset material deprivation and chronic urban youth unemployment in the townships. By the late 1960s the schools, rather than the streets, had become the most important point of cohesion for African urban youth.

NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION

(1) For a useful historiographical overview of generation as a sociological and historical tool see Mike O'Donnell, Age and Generation, London: Tavistock, 1985, particularly pp1-40. O'Donnell identifies Malinowski, Mannheim and Eisenstadt as key early figures in generational analysis
(2) C. V. Bothma, " 'n Volkekundige ondersoek na die aard en ontstaansoorsake van tsotsi-groepe en hulle aktiwiteite soos gevind in die stedelike gebied van Pretoria", Masters thesis, Universiteit van Pretoria, July 1951.
(3) Iona Mayer and Philip Mayer, "Socialization by Peers: The Youth Organization of the Red Xhosa" in Philip Mayer (ed), Socialization: The Approach from Social Anthroplogy, London: Tavistock, 1970.
(4) J. S. La Fontaine, "Two Types of Youth Group in Kinshasa" in Philip Mayer(ed), Socialization.
(5) Peter Delius, The Land Belongs To Us, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983; William Beinart, The Political Economy of Pondoland 1860-1930, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982. See also their more recent work: Peter Delius, "Sebatakgomo: Migrant Organisation, the ANC and the Sekhukhuneland Revolt", Journal of Southern African Studies 1990 (forthcoming); William Beinart, "The Origins of the Indlavini: Male Association and Migrant Labour in the Transkei", paper for Festschrift to Philip and Iona Mayer edited by P. McAllister, C. Manson and A. Spiegel, Cape Town 1990 (forthcoming).
(6) Paul La Hausse, "'Mayihlome!': Towards an understanding of Amalaita gangs in Durban, c1900-1930" unpublished seminar paper for the African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 27 April 1987.
(7) Phil Bonner, "Family, Crime and Political Consciousness on the East Rand 1939-1955", Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS) Volume 15 No 1; Clive Glaser, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League 1944-1955", unpublished Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand 1986.
(8) Don Pinnock, The Brotherhoods: Street Gangs and State control in Cape Town, Cape Town: Philip, 1984; Colin Bundy, "Street Sociology and Pavement Politics: Some aspects of student/youth consciousness during the 1985 schools crisis in Greater Cape Town", JSAS, Vol 13 No 3, April 1987.
(9) Ellen Hellman, Problems of Urban Bantu Youth, Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1940.
(10) See the Ellen Hellman Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
(11) W. W. Kieser, "Native Juvenile Delinquency", MEd thesis, University of Potchefstroom 1952; L. F. Freed, "The Problem of Crime in the Union of South Africa: An Integralistic Approach", D Phil thesis, University of the Orange Free State, Bloemfontein, August 1958.
(12) B. V. Khumalo, "Sources and Structures of Tsotsitaal", unpublished Honours dissertation, University of the

Witwatersrand, April 1986; C.T. Msimang, "Impact of Zulu on Tsotsitaal", South African Journal of African Languages, 7, 3, 1987.

(13) Anne Mager and Gary Minkley, "Reaping the Whirlwind: The East London Riots of 1952", paper for the History Workshop Conference, Johannesburg, February 1990.

(14) Tom Lodge, "Insurrectionism in Southern Africa: The Pan Africanist Congress and the Poqo movement 1959-1965", D Phil, University of York, Centre for Southern African Studies, April 1984.

(15) A. K. Cohen, Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1956.

(16) S. Hall and T. Jefferson (eds), Resistance through Rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain, Hutchinson of London 1976; Phil Cohen, "Subcultural conflict and working class community" in S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe and P. Willis (eds), Culture, Media, Language, Hutchinson 1980; Mike Brake, The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subculture, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1980; S. Humphries, Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working Class Childhood and Youth 1889-1939, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981; D. Hebdige, Subculture: The meaning of style, Methuen 1984.

(17) Report on the Commission Appointed to Enquire into Acts of Violence Committed by Natives at Krugersdorp, Newlands, Randfontein and Newclare, chaired by J. de Villiers Louw, 1950, UG 47/1950; Report on the Interdepartmental Committee on Native Juvenile Unemployment on the Witwatersrand and in Pretoria, chaired by S. P. Viljoen, 1951 (mimeographed copy); Report of the Riots Commission, chaired by A. van der Sandt Centlivres, Johannesburg March/April 1958; Verslag van die Interdepartementele Komitee insake Ledige en Nie-werkende Bantoe in Stedelike Gebiede, chaired by M. C. Botha, 196?.

(18) See particularly: Godfrey Moloi, My Life, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987 ; Don Mattera, Memory is the Weapon, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987; Bloke Modisane, Blame Me on History, London: Thames and Hudson, 1963; Moses Dlamini, Robben Island: Hell Hole, Spokesman 1984; Michael Dingake, My Fight Against Apartheid, Kliptown Books 1987; Trevor Huddleston Naught For Your Comfort, Hardingham and Donaldson 1956 ; Anthony Samson, Drum, Collins 1956.

CHAPTER ONE:

"THEIR PLAYGROUNDS ARE THE STREETS"
The Socio-economic context of Juvenile Delinquency on the Witwatersrand 1935-1960

From around the mid 1930s, before the term "tsotsi" was in usage, a clearly identifiable youth gang and juvenile delinquency "problem" began to emerge in the Witwatersrand townships. In 1938 a conference on juvenile delinquency was organised by the SAIRR and enthusiastically supported by the Johannesburg municipal authorities. The observations and analyses which emerged from the conference were taken extremely seriously by the local administrators but they nevertheless failed to implement effectively any of the wide ranging recommendations. During the war years the juvenile delinquency problem grew and the term "tsotsi" took on common township usage. The term initially referred to a specific youth subcultural style but gradually widened to incorporate urban juvenile delinquents more generally. Youth gangs, some of them extremely violent, proliferated. By the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s juvenile delinquency and "tsotsiism" were out of control both on the Witwatersrand and in other South African urban centres. Juvenile delinquency was, and always has been, a common

problem in virtually every major urban centre throughout the world. What made the situation unusual on the Witwatersrand was the sheer size of the problem amongst urbanised African youth. In fact, the terms "juvenile delinquency", "tsotsiism" and "youth" became almost synonomous in administrative jargon. In the next chapter I will trace the origins, define more carefully and make some attempt at qualifying and periodising the tsotsi subculture on the Witwatersrand. In this chapter, however, I will not focus on the subculture as such. Instead, I will confine myself to establishing the broader socio-economic context of the African juvenile delinquency crisis on the Rand during the 1940s and 1950s. An explanation for this crisis can be found in five key factors, each of which will be examined in turn:

1) family instability and the breakdown of generational hierarchy;

2) inadequate schooling and early school leaving;

3) youth unemployment;

4) poverty, overcrowding and the shortage of social and recreational facilities;

5) pass laws and urban illegality.

# I

"ere long, we shall be ruled by our children in our own homes"

- S. B. Sibiya, Bantu World, Readers' Forum
7 September 1946

From as early as the mid 1930s one of the favourite explanations for urban African juvenile delinquency was urban/rural discontinuity and social dislocation. This kind of explanation was particularly popular not only amongst Johannesburg administrative officials and liberal social welfare circles but also amongst literate urban Africans such as Advisory Board members and the general Bantu World readership. This explanation tended to romanticise and simplify rural African society and set up "the city" as its evil opposite. In rural society, it was argued, youths were socialized effectively. They were taught respect for elders; they had a wide support network of extended family; they accepted social laws and moral values and thus became constructive and integrated members of society. In the city youths were exposed to a variety of "immoral" influences such as crime, prostitution, irresponsible cinema; in the city youths of eighteen were registered as independent adults who could marry and seek employment without parental consent; in the city youths lost access to wider kinship support and socialisation networks as the nuclear family replaced the extended family. Moreover, youths were better adapted to the urban environment than their parents. They

tended to be more streetwise and were generally better educated than their parents. In short, generational hierarchy was breaking down; the parents were losing control. Without parental control and effective socialisation of youth into society, it was argued, juvenile delinquency was inevitable.

Many older Bantu World readers looked back nostalgically at the ordered precolonial rural society. Take for example Douglas Mbopa who wrote to the newspaper in 1935:

> Sir - In the olden days before the advent of Western Civilisation, the Bantu had a thorough control over their children. One never heard of Bantu youth misbehaving.
> They had chiefs who ruled, there were laws and customs which were not to be broken. Boys were trained to be straight and truthful and be worthy subjects to their chiefs to obey seniors and to fear touching anything that would degrade them. Boys grew up to their manhood trying to abide by their customs and laws... (1)

Although recognising the terrible inadequacy of education, housing, health and recreation facilities, a writer in 1938 emphasised the "moral breakdown" which accompanied the transition from rural to urban society.(2) Yet another writer, in 1939, reminisced about the "old customs" under which youths were content and controlled. The "present generation of youth", he lamented, had lost its respect for the older generation; their values and morals were degenerating.(3) Bantu World itself emphasised this theme. The following extracts from Bantu World editorial pages between 1937 and 1940 illustrate this:

> ... Juvenile delinquency is primarily, although not altogether, a product of town life and its main incidence is urban... the temptations of youth are so much more varied than those of the rural areas.(4)
>
> ... On account of the lack of education facilities, thousands of boys and girls are growing wild in the midst of the dazzling splendour of Western Civilisation, with its picture and dance halls, its lipsticks and cigarette smoking, its drinking parties and gangsters. Can such ignorant boys and girls, living in the midst of such complicated life, be expected to cultivate the good qualities of the human heart and mind?(5)
>
> ... Where is [juvenile delinquency] going to stop? Yet juvenile delinquency is a new thing among the African peoples. It was unknown in the olden-time tribal state. In the towns tribal life has broken down completely for the children at least.(6)

The white liberal social welfare organisations, such as the Joint Councils and the Institute of Race Relations, tended to adopt a more multi-faceted explanation of the juvenile delinquency problem. The rural/urban adaptation argument was placed alongside other more concrete socio-economic factors. A Joint Council memorandum on the causes of juvenile vagrancy and delinquency dating to the mid 1930s, although giving equal weight to early school-leaving and youth unemployment, placed a great deal of emphasis on "Lack of Parental Discipline". It was argued that in the city rural control mechanisms had broken down and that rural parental behaviour was inappropriate to the urban environment.(7) Likewise, Ellen Hellman, in her 1939 Doctoral thesis entitled Problems of Urban Bantu Youth, gave equal weight to the issues of youth unemployment, early school-leaving and family problems arising from urban dislocation. In rural tradition, she argued, relationships

in the immediate family emphasise respect and obedience and do not encourage familiarity and confidence. But, although there is this stress on authority within the immediate family,

> the child is subject not only to his parents but to the wider body of relatives. Moreover, the parents do not bear the sole responsibility of rearing the child, but are assisted by their kindred. The maternal relatives temper the severity of the behaviour pattern between parents and paternal relatives and the child. These behaviour patterns complement each other. The child pays respect to those in authority over him; he has an outlet for his demands for familiarity; and he receives respect from those junior to him. The whole tribal system appears to be balanced and to meet the full range of the child's needs.(8)

She went on to argue that extended kinship networks had all but ceased to function in the urban context.

> ... If relatives live nearby this is usually fortuitous, not designed. Urban conditions, in which a family has little choice but to take a vacant house in a location or a vacant room in a slum-yard, make it almost impossible for relations to settle close together.(9)

> ... The interdependence of the kinship group living and working together in a homestead no longer exists... [D]espite the numerous exceptions which are found, the individual family is the stock unit in urban areas. It is an economic unit and very largely independent of its kin for other purposes as well.(10)

Hellman observed that urban parent-child relationships remained fairly constant. The emphasis on deference and obedience continued despite the huge shift in environment. The child's upbringing, then, lacked the balance and the crucial outlets of "tribal" family life. Children consequently became unruly and rebellious. The parents' difficulty in disciplining their children was exacerbated

by parental absence from the home due to wage labour and the very real possibility of escape for children who felt they have been too severely dealt with.(11)

The findings of the 1938 Juvenile Delinquency Conference, which was supported by both the Union Social Welfare Department and the local Johannesburg Native Affairs Department, outlined four main causal factors for urban African delinquency: poverty, inadequate housing, lack of education and unstable families. The latter issue incorporated urban/rural adjustment. The Native Affairs Commission of 1940, sponsored by the central Union Native Affairs Department (NAD), picked up on the urban/rural adjustment issue to strengthen its advocacy of tightened influx control regulations. The uncontrolled drift of Africans to the cities, the Commission argued, was at the root of urban depravity.

> It cannot be denied that the bare human facts as disclosed in the papers at the Conference need to be more widely known and their full implications realised. The increase in the number of cases of juvenile delinquency appearing before the Courts in Johannesburg - an increase of 63.8% during the single year 1937/1938 - is distinctly alarming; the continual migration of the rural population to the towns - in Johannesburg an increase of 100.65% between 1921 and 1936 - must, if continued, defeat every effort at amelioration; and the growth and extension of the promiscuous society which Johannesburg is breeding up (sic) is a dreadful reflection on our civilization: for it is a society in which, in the abandonment of all tribal sanctions and coupled with a corresponding failure to adopt Christian standards of morality, the old Bantu obligations and affections and sanctity of family life are completely disappearing. An undisciplined, unmoral, lawless community is fast being created, which will become increasingly difficult to control

with the years.(12)

The Commission's strategy, then, for dealing with the growing juvenile delinquency problem was to screen out all juveniles from the cities who did not have jobs or stable, legal guardians. The South African Institute of Race Relations was heavily critical of the Commission's approach. In a memorandum replying to the Commission's draft report it pointed out that the majority of cases of juvenile delinquency came from amongst the more permanently urbanised rather than the recently urbanised section of the African population. In other words, for the Commission's strategy to be effective, the government would have to send settled and legal urban residents back to the rural areas. For the SAIRR the solution to the problem lay rather in upgrading urban facilities and improving standards of living. Juvenile delinquency was not inevitable if the urban standard of living was adequate; "delinquency is lowest in those families where good wages, a stabilised family life, decent housing and regular school attendance are to be found." (13) In other words, Africans could adjust to urban life more effectively if their urban status were acknowledged and their needs taken seriously. Whereas the NAD argued that Africans were inevitably rural people whose lifestyle was inappropriate to the city, liberal social welfarists tended to argue that social problems such as juvenile delinquency emerged out of sudden and harsh processes of adjustment to the city and that solutions lay in speeding up rather than retarding that adjustment.

Responding to the "natural protection" of the war years, South African industry continued to boom and Africans, responding to labour needs, continued to pour into the cities. Needless to say, urban facilities, inadequate as they were by the late 1930s, did not keep pace with the urban influx. The conditions which gave rise to juvenile delinquency only intensified as state policy hovered in an indecisive no-man's-land between encouraging and discouraging a settled urban African population. The urban African population was allowed to expand but little was done to cater to its needs. There were chronic shortages, particularly in housing and education. Under these conditions juvenile delinquency was nurtured and encouraged more than ever before but as a social issue it seemed to fade into the background as the war effort took precedence over most internal social issues. The problems, of course, had not gone away and by the late 1940s juvenile delinquency made a dramatic "comeback". Around 1949-50 the issue flooded back into the public consciousness. Advisory Board members constantly highlighted delinquent youth; the Inter-departmental Inquiry into Native Juvenile Unemployment was appointed under S.P. Viljoen; social welfarists organised another conference. Although more concrete factors such as youth unemployment and inadequate education started to take centre stage in explaining the growing crisis, the urban/rural adjustment argument continued to be popular. For instance, in a Joint Advisory

Board memorandum drawn up in November 1950 by, amongst others, R.V. Selope Thema, P.Q. Vundla and Paul Mosaka, the "disruption of modern industrial society" was seen as the crucial context to township crime.

> It has substituted a money economy for the cattle economy of the African; it has broken down tribal solidarity with its social sanctions; it has undermined the authority of the chief and of the parents; it has accorded a freedom to women and children which is expressing itself by a challenge to authority.

The writers then went on to say that the government had not allowed a viable urban social alternative to emerge. Despite massive urbanisation, "especially following the 1913 Land Act", the government refused to recognise Africans as urban citizens and hence had taken no care over the African urban environment.(14) The Viljoen Report which came out in 1951 also pointed to an absence of tribal youth control mechanisms which both kept youth "in their place" and imbued them with a sense of social responsibility.(15) Ellen Hellman, in a speech to the SAIRR in 1951, reiterated many of the points she had made in her 1939 thesis. Again she emphasised the "difficulties of adjustment" during a period of "intensive culture contact" as Africans shifted from a rural to an urban environment.

> But difficulties of adjustment no less significant than those due to change from country to town are those which arise out of the juxta-postion of Bantu and Western cultures, the carry-over of Bantu forms unsuited to the prevailing Western way of life and partial acculturation.
> ... Urban African children have to forego the interest, love, rewards and punishments handed out by a wide circle of relatives in the country. The majority do not pass through the initiation

> ceremonies which, under tribal conditions, play a large part in awakening a sense of social responsibility.(16)

Inevitably, many established attitudes and expectations drifted through from the rural environment which were inappropriate to the urban environment. Nevertheless, arguments which concentrate on material urban conditions are more illuminating in explaining urban juvenile "maladjustment". What is important is not so much the rural/urban adjustment per se as the urban conditions under which that "adjustment" took place. In examining the breakdown in family security and generational hierarchy, it is crucial to focus on the sheer instability of the urban African family throughout the 1930s, 40s and 50s. Family instability was by no means a <u>necessary</u> urban condition; it must be explored and explained in its own right.

Several factors accounted for the extraordinary instability of urban African families. First, African workers were generally unskilled which ensured a high job turnover. Workers were constantly on the move looking for new or better paid jobs. Second, the migrant labour system and the implementation of pass laws often broke up family units. Third, there was a disproportionately large population of males to females.

There was a clear correlation between family instability and juvenile delinquency; children of unstable families received virtually no supervision or guidance. These

children, particularly the male children, had an enormous amount of free time to roam the streets. Teenage girls tended to be drawn more effectively into housework and many were already mothers.(17) In a study of family lives of 87 Diepkloof Reformatory inmates during the mid 1930s, it was found that only about one third came from a home with both mother and father present. 54 of the 87 belonged to gangs.(18) A Bantu World editorial in September 1937 argued that, along with general poverty, the key reason for delinquency was the insecurity of the "Native Family" in the towns.(19) In a study of Juvenile Court statistics in 1939 it was found that, of the 900 cases handled by the Probation Office, about 40% had one or both parents deceased and fully one third of the total lived completely independently of parents or guardians.(20) The Juvenile Court generally dealt with children of 18 or younger and occasionally stretched their age limit to 20 year-olds.

The rate of illegitimacy was extremely high throughout the Rand townships. Ellen Hellman, in a study of 216 sample township families in 1939, found that roughly 34% of the families numbered illegitimate children amongst the family group or were "irregular" in that the parents were not married.(21) At a social welfare conference in September 1944 a welfare worker, Mr Radebe from Orlando, stressed the need to stabilise the home environment of the urban African family if juvenile delinquency were to be effectively combatted. He estimated that 60 to 70% of Orlando residents

had not entered into a form of marriage.(22) The Viljoen Report of 1951 expressed concern about the effects of illegitimacy on children:

> It would seem that the majority of Native children born in the urban areas are illegitimate, a potent force undermining parental control and weakening disciplinary forces which are so necessary to the maintenance of a stable society.(23)

Illegitimacy, however, was not necessarily the problem. Officially consecrated marriages were often as unstable as casual unions. Conversely, informal unions occasionally led to fairly stable families.(24) Technical legitimacy was less important than family stability in so far as it affected children.

Township children, whether legitimate or illegitimate, were largely free of parental controls. Parents, even if they retained a commitment to their children, were usually at work all day. Wages for unskilled African male workers were invariably inadequate to support a family in Johannesburg. The result was that wives had to seek a supplementary income, whether through formal or informal means. The SAIRR emphasised that wage levels were related to family stability. If the father earned enough, the institute researchers argued, mothers would stay at home and be able to keep a much tighter rein on their children. "The absence of the mother from any home is a menace to the well-being of the children of that home..." (25). Even in stable families, then, children remained virtually unsupervised throughout the day.(26) It was not surprising, therefore,

that street gangs became a major counter-attraction to family life.

One of the key targets of blame for juvenile delinquency, particularly in the pre-war period, was independent African women.(27) Local Johannesburg administrators, liberal social welfarists and respectable literate African males saw the issue of family instability as being inevitably intertwined with the inter-related issues of beer brewing, prostitution and "loose" and independent women. Beer brewing encouraged delinquency, it was argued, because it exposed children to "immoral" and illegal activities from an early age and because it gave women independence which, by extension, destabilised families. On the subject of beer brewing "and other illicit occupations of mothers to supplement family income", a Joint Council memorandum in the mid 1930s commented: "This, of course, means not only neglect, but the children's early familiarity with society as an enemy and the law as something to be broken rather than to be maintained in the common interest ..."(28) Graham Ballenden, the Manager of the Johannesburg Non-European Affairs Department (NEAD), made a similar observation in 1941:

> It is so frequently alleged that the children of washerwomen who go out to work are the chief delinquents ... My own impression is more often than not they are imbued with the spirit of industry of their parents. Children who are more likely to appear in the juvenile courts are those of the illicit liquor brewing mother who remains home and uses the children as 'touts'.(29)

Their opinions were, of course, informed by a network of

sexual and "western civilized" prejudices. There was no proven connection between beer brewing and delinquency. If anything, a beer brewing mother was probably more able to give her children attention than other working mothers because she tended to work from home. But these linkages remained strong in the minds of many male observers. An excellent example can be found in a 1938 Bantu World editorial. The editorial raises the issue of "old customs" undermined and discarded with the advent of western civilization.

> But nothing was done by those who urged for their abandonment to replace them by such methods as would have ensured the security of our family life and the safety of our youth. Instead women were given to understand that in the eyes of God they were the equal of men and could do as they liked; children were made to understand that as soon as they became of age they were no longer under parental control ... 'Poverty§ has driven many women - some of them 'respectable' members of our well known churches - to the selling of illicit liquor in order to supplement the meagre earnings of their husbands. But in the course of time this awful business brings family quarrels which eventually lead to separation, because women have discovered that by selling liquor they can become economically independent of men's controls.(30)

The issue of African urban family instability was clouded by a whole range of administrative and cultural prejudices. Often it becomes extremely difficult to determine where ideology and prejudice end and valid social causality begins. Nevertheless, one concrete causal factor seems to emerge from all this: urban African children were drastically lacking in parental and kinship supervision. Their time was largely unmonitored and they were generally

given little emotional or material security in the home environment. Juvenile gangs, which were involved in various degrees of criminal activity, provided an obvious alternative locus for emotional and material support.

II

> In the crowded streets of Sophiatown, Newclare and the native townships and locations, over 10 000 native children are running wild. There are no schools to accommodate them, for the schools - such as they are - are filled to overflowing. They are the adults of the future, but their chance of becoming reasonably decent, law-abiding citizens is slender. Their playgrounds are the streets - among cars, carts and the mixed traffic of the native quarters ...
>
> - The Star, editorial, 16 November 1938

> No country can expect to be free from crime when it spends proportionately such a small amount on the education of one section of its children as South Africa does. When 60 to 65 per cent. of African children of school-going age in the towns are unable to go to school through lack of accommodation, it must be clear that they are merely being qualified to become juvenile delinquents and later gaolbirds - simply because society has neglected them and does not try to discipline them or create a social environment conducive to happy, useful citizenship
>
> - Dr A.B. Xuma, address to ANC Conference, Bloemfontein, December 1945 (31)

Throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s roughly two-thirds of African children of schoolgoing age on the Reef did not attend school. School shortages and non-attendance started

to capture public attention around the mid 1930s. In early 1935 the City Manager, Graham Ballenden, released schooling figures for the narrower Johannesburg area which provoked editorials in both The Star and Bantu World. At this stage, there were officially 8 000 African children without education in Johannesburg. The newspapers feared that the problem would get bigger and noted that youths were increasingly attracted to gangs.(32) At a meeting of the Johannesburg Joint Council Committee on Juvenile Delinquency in August 1937 similar figures were quoted. They estimated that 8 000 African children in Johannesburg between the ages of 7 and 16 were not attending school. Only 10% were in schools. The committee called for sufficient compulsory schooling.(33) The figures were even more alarming when extended to the whole of the Witwatersrand. In April and November 1937 Bantu World ran feature articles on the African schools shortage on the Reef under the respective headlines "No Schooling for 60 000 Boys" and "72 000 Children Growing Wild". The November article went on to say that "from reliable sources we learn that on the Reef alone there are 90 000 Native children of schoolgoing age of whom only 18 000 are in school - and practically every school is overcrowded". The articles drew attention to the drastically inadequate schooling facilities for African children as well as the massive and growing population of "idle, loitering" youths.(34) In October 1938 the Union Secretary for Social Welfare, Dr L. van Schalkwyk, admitted that only about 40%

of African children went to school and that the provisions for schooling were "utterly inadequate".(35) In October 1939 Bantu World again editorialised the issue of youth "lawlessness". The newspaper gave the figure of 65% non-school attendance for the Johannesburg municipal area and argued that these children were "therefore a potential menace to society". The editorial explicitly linked the issues of African school shortages with the emergence of "organised African youths who attack and rob blacks and whites alike".(36) The Bantu World figures corresponded fairly closely to Ellen Hellman's figures in her Urban Bantu Youth. Hellman examined 12 sample schools, which accounted for roughly half the total of African school children on the Rand. There were 7 514 children attending these schools.(37) If we accept the total figure of 90 000 African children of schoolgoing age on the Rand the non-attendance figure is well over 80%. An important additional element of Hellman's study showed that school attendance was clustered in the lower grades. 54% of the total number of schoolchildren in her sample were in the two sub-standards. Roughly 10% were beyond Standard Four and only a meagre 3,8% were in Standard Six and above.(38) Teenagers, then, were more seriously neglected than younger children. In October 1943 Wilfred Parker, the Bishop of Pretoria, commented that it was surprising that juvenile delinquency was not even worse than it was given the appallingly low school attendance figures. Education, he

insisted, was necessary to combat juvenile delinquency and this would have to involve state intervention in African schooling as mission-run schools were hopelessly insufficient and ill-equipped.(39) By 1949, Hellman calculated, roughly 42% of African children of shoolgoing age nation-wide attended school. She considered this figure to be critically low although it represented a significant increase in per centage terms from the 1936 figure of 26%.(40) It should also be noted that in overall numbers this more than likely left as many children as ever without schooling in rapidly expanding urban centres such as the Witwatersrand. What is more, according to Hellman's figures, 51% of schoolgoers were in the substandards and only 2,7% were past Standard Six.(41)

It is particularly important to focus on secondary as opposed to primary school attendance because juvenile delinquency was a problem primarily, though not exclusively, of adolescence. This view was certainly supported by the Riots Commission of 1958:

> The major problem in regard to urban African youths centres in effecting their transition from school to employment without permitting an intervening period of idleness: for there appears to be widespread evidence that in the period, roughly from the age of 14 to 18 years, marked deterioration sets in.
> The normal process in a modern society is for young people to remain at school until at least the legally enjoined school-leaving age, usually 16 years, and then to take up employment. This is not the normal process among Africans. There is no compulsory schooling.
> ... The natural result of these conditions is the existence in the townships of a clan of native youths who are idle, uneducated, unused to work and disinclined to enter regular employment, and it is,

> of course, from such a class that the tsotsi gangs are likely to draw their recruits.(42)

Since secondary school included Standards Five to Ten, it is safe to assume that very few primary school children were more than sixteen years old and the majority were fourteen and younger. In 1962, the average age for an African Standard Four pupil was 13-and-a-half and 14-and-a-half for a Standard Five.(43) In the year 1949 only 6 533 children attended secondary school on the Rand and in Pretoria. Roughly 10% of African scholars were high school students. School attendance dropped off rapidly in each progressive year of schooling; there were 18 478 Sub A pupils, 10 899 Sub B pupils, down to 3 770 Standard Five pupils. There were only 820 Standard Seven pupils and 63 matriculants.(44) I have no comparative figures for the 1950s. However, it is likely that the secondary school figure of 6 533 remained fairly stable throughout the decade despite the introduction of Bantu Education in the mid 1950s. Perhaps partially as a result of the Bantu Education boycotts, secondary school attendance initially remained low. Hyslop shows that primary education did expand almost immediately after the introduction of Bantu Education.(45) A significant expansion in secondary schooling, however, was only noticeable in the 1960s. The total union secondary school attendance figure in 1949 was 46 314. By 1960 the union total had actually decreased slightly to 45 598.(46) Unless Pretoria and Rand attendance patterns were drastically different from those

of the rest of the union, it is safe to assume that African secondary school attendance on the Rand and in Pretoria remained below 7 000 throughout the 1950s. According to a Johannesburg NEAD estimate in 1961 for the Johannesburg area only about 4% of schoolgoers were in Standards Seven to matric.(47) Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, then, schoolgoers represented a startlingly small proportion of the African urban population aged between 14 and 20.

In addition to the problem of low formal school registration, high levels of truancy further eroded the schoolgoing population. In Hellman's 12 sample Rand schools in 1936, there were truancy rates, i.e. per centage non-attendance to enrolment, ranging from 5 to 21%. Principals were extremely anxious about this. Parents were often oblivious to their children's absence from school.(48) The problem had not gone away by as late as the early 1960s. The 1962 interdepartmental committee on "ledige en nie-werkende Bantoe in die stedelike gebiede" found that a yearly average of over 4 000 children "disappeared" from African schools on the Rand. This referred to children who registered at the beginning of the year and stopped attending classes during the year.(49)

There were three basic reasons for low school attendance, early school leaving and truancy throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. First, schooling was not compulsory and there were far too few schools and teachers to accommodate even those children who did want to attend school.(50)

Second, the quality of education was extremely low. Children rejected inferior, unstimulating teaching made worse by the overcrowded conditions. Schooling was also impractical. A school education was not perceived as enhancing a school-leaver's employment opportunities. In a study of over 500 African school leavers on the Rand in 1939, Hellman found that 25% of these children refused to go to school against the wishes of their parents.(51) To begin with, the worst teachers and the worst conditions tended to be concentrated in the Sub-standards. Hellman observed:

> To anyone who has watched the dreary classes of sub-standard children, heard their monotonous rote spelling of words and repitition of phrases, it is not surprising that after languishing in the sub-standards for three or four years the child emerges bored, listless and unwilling to continue his schooling.(52)

In addition, pupils had no incentive to stay on at schools because there appeared to be no attractive job opportunities for them on completion of their schooling. The pupils witnessed African teachers and clerks receiving similar wages to unskilled labourers. There also appeared to be no possibilities for upward mobility, despite education, because of the Colour Bar.(53) The de Villiers Louw Commission of 1950 recognised these problems. The standard of African schooling was so bad, the commission complained, that children preferred to join youth gangs. The commission also recommended that schooling should provide skills more immediately necessary to the economy.

Children, the commission argued, would then be employable once they left school and they would recognise some value in attending school.(54)

Finally, most urban African families could not afford to send their children to school. Children were pressurized from a very ealy age to become economically active. Parents often preferred to have their children contributing to the household income rather than wasting their time at school. In Hellman's study of school-leavers, she found that 37% left school out of economic necessity; either to seek employment or because their parents were simply unable to afford fees, books and school clothes.

> Thus, a child may be forced to leave school owing to the temporary inability of his parents to pay fees or buy him clothing fit for school wear. He then drifts into the company of non-school-goers and, when the requisite funds are forthcoming, he so prefers this life of leisure spent with his friends that he refuses to go back to school. "Poverty" and [the necessity] "to work" are identical causes for many of the older school-goers, as the poverty which makes it impossible to pay school expenses also forces the juvenile out to seek employment.(55)

## III

> There is a gap - a hiatus - between school-leaving and unemployment. What fills this gap? Gambling and drinking - idle congregation on the streets, joining a gang, harmless pursuits gradually becoming less harmless.
>
> - Ellen Hellman, memorandum, April 1951 (56)

> ... Unemployment hits those in the 16 to 19 age group hardest of all.
>
> - W.J.P. Carr, memorandum, September 1960 (57)

As in the case of schooling shortages and non-attendance, African urban juvenile unemployment started to attract major public and administrative attention from around the mid 1930s. In fact the two issues often went hand-in-hand as administrators and social welfarists tried to explain the massive rate of "idleness" amongst urban African youths.(58) Unemployment was a crucial focus of both the 1938 Juvenile Delinquency Conference and Hellman's 1939 thesis, "The Problems of Urban Bantu Youth". In the early 1940s unemployment continued to be identified as a major factor in juvenile delinquency.(59) Throughout the 1940s the problem escalated, coinciding with the expanding urban African population.(60) In 1948 the Native Youth Board was established, under the chairmanship of Ray Phillips, with the intention of placing African youths in jobs.(61) The youth unemployment problem peaked in the 1950s and prompted major central government intervention which will be

addressed later in the chapter. By 1961 the problem still appeared to be extremely severe.

In 1939 Hellman provided the first reliable set of statistics on the juvenile unemployment problem in th Johannesburg area. The following table showed the occupations of 139 African school-leavers in Johannesburg townships (62):

| | 14 Years and Over | | Under 14 Years | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | |
| Working full-time | 15 | 4 | - | - | 19 |
| Working part-time | 5 | 3 | 2 | - | 10 |
| Unemployed | 12 | - | - | - | 12 |
| Roaming | 12 | 18 | 18 | 3 | 49 |
| Busy in home | 1 | 7 | - | 10 | 18 |
| Reformatory | 2 | 1 | - | - | 3 |
| Sick | 3 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 15 |
| In country visiting | - | 5 | 3 | 5 | 13 |
| TOTAL | 50 | 38 | 27 | 24 | 139 |

The crucial figures here are "unemployed" and "roaming". The categories were, of course, identical but for the fact that the "unemployed" had presumably officially registered as unemployed (it is worth noting here the high level of unregistered unemployment). 61 of the 139 were walking the streets. If we discount the last three categories since these youths were, in one way or another, removed from active urban society, we arrive at a figure of 61 out of 108, almost 60%. It is also important to look at the sexual division in this table. Again discounting the last three categories, 42 out of 65 African male youths who had left school were walking the streets. It is interesting to note that, although a much smaller proportion of female youths

were employed, a much smaller proportion were "roaming". The key factor here, of course, is the extent to which girls were drawn into household labour. This helps to explain the overwhelming male domination of the youth gang subculture which emerged in the townships.(63)

In July 1950 the Native Youth Board conducted a largescale survey on youth unemployment in Jabavu, East Native Township (ENT), Orlando and Moroka. In total, 549 families were interviewed. Of the 227 children of working age (14 to 20 years old) who were not in school, 157 were unemployed. The Youth Board extrapolated wider Johannesburg figures from their survey. The following table shows the survey results as well as the extrapolated figures of the "probable" number of unemployed youths in the Johannesburg area(64):

| | Families visited | Unemployed youths | Total families (including sub-tenats) | Probable number unemployed |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jabavu | 109 | 15 | 5100 | 702 |
| ENT | 116 | 53 | 1115 | 509 |
| Orlando | 152 | 38 | 19914 | 4998 |
| Moroka | 172 | 51 | 12400 | 3676 |

If similar conditions existed in Sophiatown, Martindale, Newclare Alexandra and Pimville which between them had a total of 39 102 families, the report argued, the grand total of unemployed youths not in school in the Johannesburg area could be put at 20 833.(65) These statistics leave a number of questions hanging. First, did

domestic work count as employment? If the survey had drawn the same distinctions which Hellman drew in 1939, it would be safe to presume that youths, particularly girls, who worked in the household were not considered unemployed. Second, the statistics are not broken down into sexual divisions which makes it difficult to assess the proportion of male youths who were "idle". Third, the report does not provide total population figures for the 14 to 20 age group. Again must to resort to some guesswork here. According to official 1953 figures there were 666 000 "Non-Europeans" resident in the Johannesburg urban and peri-urban area of which roughly 33% were 0 to 19 years old.(66) Extrapolating from this, we can assume that roughly 10% fell into the 14 to 20 age bracket, which puts the total at around 65 000.(67) There is good reason to believe that this figure of 20 833 unemployed youth is an underestimate. First, it fails to take into account the numerous illegals most of whom were unemployed (and certainly not registered as unemployed); second, it is perhaps rash to extrapolate Sophiatown, Martindale, Newclare and Alexandra figures from those of Orlando, Jabavu, East Native Township and Moroka. The former townships were poorer with fewer schools and virtually no government infrastructure. It should also be borne in mind that, because of the domestic labour issue, it is likely that the unemployment figure is weighted on the side of males. It is impossible to reach any certainty with the figures available but it would be reasonable to

assume that at least half of the urban African males between the ages 14 and 20 were neither employed nor at school in 1950.

In November 1961 the Johannesburg NEAD provided the following figures for youth unemployment(68):

| | 7 and over 14 years: | | 15 and under 19 years: | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Males | Females | Males | Females |
| Residents in Johannesburg | 39 377 | 41 112 | 23 395 | 14 442 |
| At school | 31 256 | 30 000 | 6 503 | 4 200 |
| Working (registered) | - | - | 5 492 | 285 |
| Unemployed or unable to work | 8 121 | 11 112 | 11 400 | 9 957 |

According to these figures roughly 47% of African males between 15 and 18 years old were neither at school nor employed in 1961. Although the equivalent figure for females is 68%, it is likely that a large portion of the females were drawn into domestic labour. Once again it is probable that unemployment was underestimated both because of the high incidence of illegal urban residence and because of the truancy levels referred to earlier. The school attendance patterns of the time would also suggest that in the 7 to 14 age group the unemployment was clustered in the 13 to 14 year age bracket. Youth unemployment levels contrasted starkly with adult unemployment. The NEAD memorandum also provided figures for adult (19 years and over) unemployment:

| | 19 Years and over: Males | Females |
|---|---|---|
| Residents in Johannesburg | 216 821 (+ 22 377 from outside Jhb) | 164 882 |
| At school | 4 200 | 200 |
| Working | 220 260 | 75 000 |
| Unemployed or unable to work | 17 103 (+ 1235 incapacitated) | 32 182 (+ 57 500 housewives) |

Although adult female unemployment ran at just under 20%, it should be borne in mind that women were typically involved in informal employment such as beer brewing and washing clothes. The male adult unemployment rate of around 8% was not unusually high by world standards. Reviewing the 1960 unemployment figures for Johannesburg, W.J.P. Carr made a similar observation. In 1960 the estimated African adult male population of Johannesburg was 241 000; 225 000 were in day-to-day employment. Carr remarked:

> This does not mean that the difference between these two figures is unemployed as inter-town movements, sickness and seasonal fluctuations account for the major portion. The incidence of male adult unemployment is very low at the moment ... unemployment hits those in the 16 to 19 age group hardest.(69)

If employment patterns were consistent, it is also likely that the 19 to 25 year olds represented a large portion of the 17 000 male adult unemployed in 19[illegible].(70) During the war years, there was a massive demand for industrial unskilled labour which means that African adult male unemployment was probably even lower during that period. An extremely high level of endemic unemployment, then, was

an experience quite specific to the African youth, certainly in the case of the Witwatersrand.

The factors involved in youth unemployment remained fairly constant from the mid 1930s through to the early 1960s.(71) Probably the most important reason for urban youth unemployment was the competition urban youths faced from migrants on the job market. Employers on the Rand, despite influx control legislation, preferred to employ migrants rather than youths. Migrants tended to be more acquiescent, "respectful" and reliable than their urban counterparts. Furthermore, they were prepared to accept lower wages. Employers of both industrial and domestic labour tended to feel this way.(72) In an official letter to the Johannesburg Regional Employment Commissioner, W.J.P. Carr wrote in 1955:

> Native juveniles who are urbanised are often unreliable, work-shy and selective in their choice of a job - many prefer to exist by gambling and other nefarious means, and make little or no contribution to the maintenance of their families.
> ... Employers because of these facts, are unwilling to employ native juveniles.(73)

In another letter in 1956, Carr reiterated that urban African youths "tend to be unreliable, work-shy, aggressive and unco-operative when offered employment".(74) There was clearly some truth in these allegations but the unemployment problem was exacerbated by these very impressions of the employers. Employers were usually prejudiced towards urban youths and unwilling to give them a chance.(75) Employers often by-passed local labour

bureaux in the 1950s and employed directly through contacts in the countryside.(76) Throughout the 1940s and 1950s municipal authorities throughout the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeneging (PWV) generally turned a blind eye to these breaches of influx control in order to avoid discouraging local industry.(77) Domestic employers, like industrialists, preferred to employ rural workseekers, thus restricting the chief avenue of employment open to female urban youths.(78) Urban youths found it virtually impossible to penetrate the industrial and domestic labour market in any significant way. The greater the influx of rural workseekers, the smaller was the potential job market for urban youths.

There were two other practical considerations for employers. First, urban youths tended to have less strength and stamina than adults. There was a high level of malnutrition in the African locations which physically weakened children and juveniles. Furthermore, they had very little experience of hard physical work.(79) Second, the Wage Board fixed wage levels for juveniles. Industrialists might have been more amenable to employing urban youths if they could have paid them wages below the levels fixed by the Wage Board. Since wages were fixed, employers were determined to find the most productive workers possible.(80) Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) affiliates and the South African Trade and Labour Council (SATLC), although officially sympathetic to the problems of

unemployed youth, rejected any interference with Wage Board controls. Unionised adult workers feared that they would be undercut by juvenile workers should wage fixing be removed.(81) Furthermore, there was an implicit colour bar in the Apprenticeship Act which excluded African juveniles from the skilled trades.(82)

The attitude of urban youths towards employment was influenced by youth gang culture. Tsotsi culture rejected discipline, hard work and "respectable" employment. Any form of informal, quasi-legal employment was preferable to steady, badly paid, legal employment. In a July 1950 memorandum the Native Youth Board commented:

> The Employment Officers of the Board have ... discovered that numbers of Native lads are not in school, nor are they interested in obtaining employment. The lads, most of whom are city born, lounge about the Townships, live on their parents, act as "runners" for the Chinese "Fah Fee" game, sell articles on the Orlando/Pimville trains,gamble with dice or cards, engage in smuggling dagga or liquor, pick pockets and drift into crime.(83)

Crime, generally organised in gangs, often provided an alternative means of subsistence for urban youths. The need to find regular employment was therefore less urgent. In a front page article in June 1950 the Bantu World commented:

> It is common knowledge amongst Africans in the townships that many of these [unemployed] youths think it is a waste of time working for small wages while, by means of robbery, they are able to collect large sums of money.(84)

Unemployment and youth gang culture, then, mutually reinforced one another. With the existence of youth gangs,

unemployment became a viable option for urban youths. Simultaneously, unemployment helped to swell the ranks of the tsotsi gangs. The Viljoen Report of 1951 noted a direct causal link between unemployment and the prevalence of tsotsi gangs. "Juveniles out of employment develop spontaneously into Tsotsis in order to find an outlet for their energies as well as a means of earning a livelihood by illegal means".(85) The phenomenon of early school leaving, the Report added, also swelled the ranks of the youth gangs. Not only did it add pressure to the unemployment problem but it ensured that young children came into daily contact with "undesirable types". Moreover, children were more susceptible to tsotsi influences when they were no longer subjected to the disciplinary effects of the school environment.(86)

Pass laws made the prospect of finding jobs additionally unattractive. To get a job, a youth had to register officially and this could often expose shaky urban status. Moreover, passes were necessary for youths to traverse even from their townships to the City. Without the correct documentation this could lead to arrest. In 1948 Ray Phillips commented:

> The pass laws militate against their finding jobs. They fear that if they enter the towns they will be detained by the police for their lack of passes. They fear they may be returned to the smaller centres, where the type of employment they seek is unavailable.(87)

In 1951 Boys' Club officials reiterated the point: "... it

is not always easy for a boy to come up to the City owing to the Pass Law Regulations under which he might be arrested".(88) Noticing the low rate of registration for unemployment amongst African youths in 1960, W.J.P. Carr observed that "Often some of these boys are reluctant to come forward for employment because, for one reason or another, their papers are not in order and they fear arrest and persecution if they bring themselves to the notice of the authorities".(89)

During the 1930s and 1940s the juvenile delinquency problem was left in the hands of various social welfare organisations, but by the late 1940s it became clear that the efforts of the philanthropists had been in vain; they were unable to stem the growing tide of juvenile unemployment and delinquency. By the early 1950s the state, both local and central, became increasingly anxious about the youth problem on the Rand. It recognised that welfare organisations were inadequate to cope with the problem. Large scale state intervention was needed. Youth unemployment was targeted as the key issue.

In 1951 the Inter-departmental Committee on Native Juvenile Unemployment was established. This committee was aimed at investigating the extent of, and reasons for, juvenile unemployment on the Rand and in Pretoria. The committee established that there were direct links between juvenile unemployment ansd "tsotsilism".(90) The central state apparently started to identify juvenile unemployment, which

led to "tsotsiism" as politically threatening.(91) Following the Viljoen Report, the central state showed great interest in finding employment for African youths on the Rand. It attempted to provide the Johannesburg municipal government with active assistance in this regard. In February 1953 the Director of Native Labour and representatives from the Central Labour Bureau met with local state officials to discuss the issue. Central government officials called for greater coordination between local and central state.(92) The central state was eager to handle the problem in a forceful way. It offered assistance to local labour bureaux wherever possible.(93) The central government was convinced that the tsotsi problem could best be combatted through overcoming African Juvenile unemployment. H.S.J. van Wyk, the Secretary of Native Affairs in 1954, said explicitly that "die indiensplasing van jeugdige Naturelle [is] een van die belangrikste stappe om tsotsiisme te bestry ...". In the same letter he went on to argue that most young men were eager to enter the job market "Derhalwe was werkverskaffing nog altyd as die eerste en belangrikste middel ter bestyding van die tsotsi-vraagstuk beskou".(94) In the same year Dr P. van Rensburg of the Native Affairs Department, Pretoria, told The Star that "juvenile unemployment had become a big social problem and this idleness led to tsotsism".(95)

At the 1953 meeting between local and central government

labour officials, the state decided to embark on a three-pronged strategy, based largely on the recommendations of the Viljoen Report, to combat juvenile unemployment on the Rand. First,

> ... it was the intention of the Minister of Labour to grant to those industries employing juveniles exemption from the various wage instruments to allow of (sic) the payment of a lower wage than that applicable to adults.(96)

It was hoped that more local juveniles would be employed if Wage Board instruments were removed. Second, the Department of Labour committed itself to exploring avenues for juvenile employment in commerce and industry " ... and to endeavour to persuade commerce and industry to give preference in filling such vacancies to location youths in preference to youths from rural areas or Native Territories".(97) Finally, the central government intended to place the allocation of jobs on the Rand more firmly under Central Labour Bureau control. All workseekers had to be officially registered at the local bureaux which, in turn, had to supply the Central Labour Bureau with regular reports on job registration and job placement. This fitted into the Central Labour Bureau strategy to screen out illegal migrant workseekers and encourage the employment of urban juveniles.(98)

In mid 1953 the Johannesburg Department of Native Affairs launched a juvenile employment drive. Initially, the department had some success. Between September 1953 and

April 1954, 17 987 juveniles (16 to 21 years of age) were registered as employed. Of these, 15 197 found employment.(99) The official surplus was only 2 790 but of course thousands of youths managed to avoid registration.(100) The figures for 1955 showed a marked increase in the official surplus. Between February and October 1955, 38 695 juveniles officially registered as workseekers. 23 396 were placed in employment. A balance of 15 299 failed to find employment.(101) These figures probably indicate a tightening up of registration procedure between April 1954 and February 1955 rather than a decline in juvenile employment over this period. In fact the number of job placements was significantly higher during 1955. Nevertheless, in line with the central government's newly acquired concern over this issue, the Secretary of Native Affairs, van Rensburg, was angry and perplexed by the 1955 juvenile unemployment figures. He demanded more details and an explanation from the Johannesburg Registration Officer.(102) The pace of placing juveniles in employment flagged until, by the early 1960s, between 2 000 and 4 000 registered juvenile workseekers were being placed annually.(103) But even this limited success of the Johannesburg Juvenile Employment Section has to be qualified on two counts. First, it is unclear to what extent state intervention made a difference to the overall employment situation. In other words, the majority of those placed in employment may well have found employment anyway. Second, and more importantly, almost as many juvenile

workers lost jobs as those who were placed. It was not uncommon to find that overall employment figures had gone down over a three month period despite the fact that over a thousand were placed in employment.(104) Ultimately, the juvenile unemployment problem was as serious in the early 1960s as it had been in the early 1950s.

In late 1953/early 1954, the Department of Native Affairs, probably out of a growing sense of desperation, became interested in youth camps as a method of controlling "tsotsiism". Youth camps were envisaged as quasi-reformatory institutions "where young Natives who were not properly adjusted to local [urban] society could be disciplined and trained to take up various employments".(105) The Secretary of Native Affairs stressed in 1954 that youth camps were not intended to house all unemployed urban youths. The institution was to be aimed at "unemployable", work-shy youths who did not even try to seek employment.(106) The youth camps were to be placed well outside of the city limits to cut the inmates off from city influences " ... want dit is amper onmoontlik om die invloed van die ou omgewing aldaar te neutraliseer". There would also be "good traditional influences" in the countryside to discipline the youths.(107) Youth camps, then, were envisaged as a control mechanism aimed at keeping dangerous tsotsi elements out of urban areas. The first youth camp, which accommodated about 100 youths, was established at Elandsdoorn in November 1954.(108)

Conditions at Elandsdoorn were appalling and the inmates tended to be used as ultra-exploited labour on surrounding farms.(109) Probably owing to lack of resources, however, no other official youth camps were established during the remainder of the 1950s. The state concentrated its efforts on finding employment for local juveniles while simultaneously tightening up restrictions on rural workseekers.

Chronically high youth unemployment on the Rand, coupled with low school attendance, generated a massive constituency of African youths, particularly male youths, who roamed the streets of the townships without routines, supervision, regular income or responsibilities.

IV

> Our children are left loitering in the streets absolutely with nobody to guide them along proper channels of life; and of course the devil finds work for them.
>
> - C.P. Molefe, Readers Forum, Bantu World 20 July 1935

By the mid 1930s urban Africans were already experiencing severe overcrowding problems and, to avoid claustrophobic households, thousands of male children made a natural home of the streets.(110) During the war years the housing shortages became much worse. While squatter settlements

sprouted throughout the Rand, more and more children poured into the streets and efforts at providing them with alternative stimulus and recreation were hopelessly inadequate. Gang life became increasingly popular.

According to Hellman, by the early 1950s Johannesburg had a housing backlog of between 25 000 and 50 000. She observed:

> The consequence of this extreme congestion on family life is obvious: lack of privacy, inability of children to work or play in the crowded home and the necessity for them to make the street their home.(111)

After serving in the war, W.J.P. Carr returned to the Johannesburg municipal administration in 1945 to find that both the overcrowding and juvenile delinquency problems had become much more serious than in the pre-war years. Carr observed that there was nothing to attract the youths to their homes. Youths, desperate "to get out from under the feet of the adults", went out onto the streets to find their own amusement.(112)

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, social welfare and church bodies struggled to provide "suitable" recreation for township youths. If the home environment was disastrous and employment and schooling was scarce, they reasoned, youths could at least be guided and controlled to an extent through leisure activities. In Western Native Township, which, unlike Sophiatown and Alexandra, fell directly under West Rand Administration Board (WRAB) control, some infrastructure had been developed for youth recreation. The Anglican Board Mission was very active in Western Native.

Ray Phillips organised football teams which became a "tremendous drawcard" for the youth. His wife, Dora, ran the Wayfarers for girls which organised sewing classes, picnics and netball. But, even in West Native, their work was a "drop in the ocean".(113) There were also numerous independently organised soccer and boxing clubs which were extremely popular but these clubs were just as likely to reinforce, rather than counteract, gang association.(114)

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s there were persistent calls from welfarists, local administrators and government commissions for improved recreation facilities "to counteract the lure of the streets".(115) The state, both local and central, encouraged organisations such as the Boy Scouts, Wayfarers and Pathfinders but allocated no material resources to them. What resources were made available to the youth problem tended to be allocated to the creation of employment. Despite lack of resources, these organisations often attracted fairly substantial membership figures. Nevertheless, their success in counteracting the lure of gang life was minimal, largely because they recruited most effectively from amongst the schoolgoing population. They appeared to make no substantial inroads amongst youths who were already involved with gangs.(116)

The one leisure time activity which was unambiguously popular amongst township youth was the cinema. Movies were easily available and reasonably cheap. More importantly,

movies represented an outlet from the crowded home and squalid street environments; they provided a glimpse of romantic and inaccessible worlds. It was not surprising, therefore, that movie imagery became fundamental to tsotsi subcultural style. (117) Local administrators often encouraged the township movie industry, and even provided municipal mobile film units, in the hope of drawing children away from street life. Carr, for instance, felt that, if the movies were adequately monitored to allow only "healthy and wholesome" entertainment", movies could counteract youth gangsterism.(118) Ultimately this kind of approach was swamped in a wave of outrage against movie influences. By the mid 1940s the centrality of cinema to tsotsi style and imagery was abundantly clear. In a 1946 editorial, Bantu World complained bitterly that "hundreds of African children ... are running wild in the streets of our big cities" and that it was "in the cinemas where they receive an education which prepares them for a life of thieving and killing".(119) In a context of urban squalor and social and educational deprivation, the cinema encouraged rather than discouraged youth gangsterism in the townships.

P.Q. Vundla: ... I am satisfied that the cause of the majority of crimes in the townships is the passes.
Col. Grobler: What?
P.Q. Vundla: The pass laws. The young men go to the pass office, they are given a definite time within which they have to find employment, if not, they have to leave. Only this morning I took a young boy to the Superintendent - he was born at Masinga, his parents stay in Western Native Township - he was told to leave Johannesburg, he will never leave Johannesburg , the next time you meet him he will be in gaol. He is going to resort to crime.

- Extract of minutes of WRAB Conference, December 1955 (120)

Although pass laws only became a major social issue for township youth after the National Party takeover in 1948, it was by no means an issue unique to the post-1948 era. From as early as the mid 1930s numerous city-born African youths were being forced into an underground existence in the absence of official urban status. To survive in the urban underground youths had to avoid tax and unemployment registration. The easiest survival route was to join a street gang. In the early 1930s Africans became liable to pay tax at the age of 18 which, in itself, became a motivation to avoid official urban status and seek security in gang life.(121) In 1937 Bantu World noticed this connection between pass laws and juvenile delinquency.

The conception of our Native location as reservoirs of labour rather than homes for our town Native population and the operation of the trek pass system

> which obliges a man to 'move on' in the event of his losing his job and failing to find another within a certain period of time, results often in women and children being left without any claim to remain in the town in which the children may have been born. Usually the only alternative in such circumstances are (sic) to live precariously, dodging the police, or to wander homeless about the country.(122)

In the late 1940s and early 1950s the National Party tightened up on influx control particularly in dealing with "excess" unemployed urban youths.(123) The connections between delinquency, gang association and pass laws became more apparent. Hundreds of youths were rounded up and jailed or sent to the rural areas. But the hardened ones stayed in the cities, often after serving jail sentences, and lived a ! alight gang existence. Periods in jail tended to harden their criminality and registering as unemployed was impossible because it would expose their lack of urban status.(124)

In the mid 1950s the Advisory Board member, P.Q. Vundla, became vocal in pointing out the connection between pass laws and the prevalence of criminal gangs. He railed against the government, which tried to justify its clampdown on urban youth by claiming that it was encouraging the employment of permanently urban youths. This was invalid, he argued, both because city-born youths were often included in the clampdowns and because there was no significant improvement in youth employment. " ... What about this influx control? That was brought into being they told us so that only Johannesburg youngsters will get

employment in Johannesburg. If we don't get employment for these youngsters then we are waging a futile campaign..." He also argued that children who were sent to jail for pass offences made contacts and learnt things from gang members. "Many of these boys don't fear to go to jail, if they have been to jail, they are deemed to be heroes." Pass laws were forcing township youths into a criminal existence.(125) In 1956, during a Non-European Housing Committee meeting at which Advisory Board members were present, Vundla was again vocal on the issue.

> Mr Vundla wanted to know why it was that a boy, born in Johannesburg and whose parents were in Johannesburg, should be refused entry into the urban area. Many months elapsed sometimes before the boy was given permission to remain and work in Johannesburg. It often happened that when a man lost his job in Johannesburg and wished to seek other employment, he was told to leave Johannesburg and return to the place where he was born. As his family was in Johannesburg he remained in the area. He would go into hiding from the police and would become a menace to society as he had no legitimate means of earning a living.(126)

Early in 1957 an article in The Star dealing with crime in Alexandra identified pass laws as an important factor in gang activity. Pass laws were seen as particularly destructive in that they interfered with job opportunity.

> One resident said that the reason for the existence of these gangs is the number of unemployed young Natives who have not been given passes to work in Johannesburg.
> 'They have nothing to do all day and they also have no money. They expect to live on us workers.'(127)

The issue remained alive in the early 1960s. In 1961 three Advisory Board members from South West Bantu Townships

asserted that youngsters became delinquents and gang members in response to being endorsed out of the city and not vice versa as government sources claimed.(128)

I have shown earlier how, in the contexts of urban adaptation and juvenile unemployment, there was a divergence in strategy between local and central state. Influx control lay at the centre of this disagreement. Whereas the local Johannesburg administration argued that urban juvenile delinquency could best be combatted through improving urban conditions and expanding juvenile job opportunities, the central government tended to place their faith in influx control.(129) Through limiting the number of Africans permanently settled in the city, the central administrators asserted, jobs could be found more easily for local youths and resources would be less thinly spread. Although this strategic divergence became much more pronounced in the era of Nationalist rule, it was apparent during the 1930s and 1940s as well.(130) In the early 1950s there was a great deal of continuity in the administrative staff of the Johannesburg NEAD while the central administrators were more ardent adherents to influx control strategy than their predecessors. There was enormous tension at local government level as the central administration placed permanent inspectors in W.J.P. Carr's offices to ensure that ministerial instructions were carried out.(131)

Influx control backfired tragically as a strategy for

combatting juvenile delinquency. Instead of allowing the administration to concentrate its energy and resources on a limited number of strictly legal urban youths, the pass laws created a massive population of influx control refugees who lived a shadowy illegal existence in the townships. Hounded by police and without any chance of finding legal employment, their best chance for urban survival lay in joining criminal street gangs.

Juvenile delinquency and youth gangs emerged almost organically out of the social and economic dead-ends which township youths faced throughout the 1930s, '40s and '50s. It was also important that youths, particularly boys, were left with an extraordinary amount of free time virtually without supervision. The typical male township teenager lived in an unstable family unit in which one or both of his parents were absent. Even if his parents remained attached to one another, he saw very little of them because they both worked, leaving for work before he woke up and returning after nightfall. His household was drastically overcrowded; any real privacy was impossible. He had left school because his household could not afford to keep him there especially since schooling was unlikely to secure him a better job in the future anyway. He was unemployed. Although he tried finding a job on a number of occasions, he soon became disillusioned. He was also worried that he

would lose his urban status if his books were found not to be in order. Besides, many of his friends were earning a substantial living through robbery. There were no decent recreation facilities in his vicinity. While his sisters tended to do a great deal of housework, he was not socially expected to do the same. He spent the major part of his day unsupervised and without any structured activity. Gang life seemed attractive; it offered companionship, a sense of belonging and a possible means of income.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE

(1) Bantu World (BW) 13 July 1935, "Readers' Views". Similar views were expressed in an All African Convention memorandum on the Children's Protection Act in the mid 1930s:

> "In the urban areas where there are no chiefs, nor headmen, and where the Native Advisory Boards have no authority of any kind to regulate social conditions, the law of emancipation for children seems to operate in a disastrous manner, precipitating a general demoralisationn and child delinquency. Resulting from this apparently general tendency is a state of rebellion of children against any form of parental control, the early mating of juveniles and the deflowering and seduction of girls at tender ages. One need scarcely mention the ever increasing number of illegitimate children and illicit marriages, to say the least of neglected children by able and hardworking fathers."

See Central Archives, Pretoria (CA), NTS 8/331, Memorandum on Juvenile Courts and the Children's Protection Act presented by the Executive Committee of the All African Convention, undated, c1936.
(2) BW 18 June 1938, letter from Golden J. Sithole, Adam's College.
(3) BW 2 December 1939, letter from Walter B. Nhlapo. Nhlapo was a very respected member of the Johannesburg African elite and a regular contributor to the BW letters pages.
(4) BW 25 September 1937, artical on editorial page entitled "Poverty and Delinquency".
(5) BW 21 October 1939, editorial.
(6) BW 2 March 1940, article entitled "Alarming increase in juvenile lawlessness among Africans", p16
(7) University of the Witwatersrand, Church of the Province of South Africa Library (CPSA) AD1433, Joint Council Collection (JC), Memorandum: "Juvenile Vagrancy and Delinquency", undated, c1936.
(8) Hellman, Ellen, Problems of Urban Bantu Youth (PUBY), South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg 1940, p5. This is a published version of Hellman's 1939 Phd thesis.
(9) Hellman, PUBY, p5
(10) Hellman, PUBY, p6
(11) Hellman, PUBY, pp7-10
(12) CPSA AD843, South African Institute of Race Relations Collection (SAIRR), B25, Native Affairs Commission Draft Report, Cape Town 1940, parag 6.
(13) CPSA AD843, SAIRR, B23, Memorandum submitted to the continuation Committee of the Delinquency Conference, undated, c1940.
Interestingly, W. Eiselen, as Chief Inspector of Native Education in the Transvaal, also supported government intervention to improve African schooling in the urban

areas. He saw expanded education as crucial for the social control of youth. See CA NTS 8/331 (7642), letter from Eiselen to the Secretary for Native Affairs with a TED memorandum enclosed, 20 October 1938 and CA NTS 8/331, Eiselen's speech to Bantu Juvenile Delinquency Conference, 1938.

(14) Intermediary Archives Depot (IAD), West Rand Administration Board Archive (WRAB) 351/1, "Memorandum on the Growing Incidence of Crimes of Violence in the African Townships", 19 November 1950. The memo was drawn up by an elected committee at a meeting of the Joint Advisory Board.

(15) Report on the Inter-departmental Committee on Native Juvenile Unemployment on the Witwatersrand and in Pretoria, chaired by S.P. Viljoen, 1951, mimeographed copy (Viljoen Report), pp 5-6.

(16) CPSA A1419, Ellen Hellman Papers (EHP), Memorandum: "Bantu Youth in Our Cities", presented as a speech to the SAIRR, 26 April 1951.

(17) See Hellman, PUBY, p43.

(18) CPSA AD843 SAIRR B14, Memorandum: "A Preliminary Investigation of African Juvenile Delinquency" by J.L. Reyneke, undated, c1935

(19) BW 25 September 1937, p8

(20) IAD WRAB 351/2, Non-European and Native Affairs Department (NEAD and NAD), Research and Welfare Branch, "Non-European Juvenile Delinquents", June 1938-June 1939, Probation Office and Juvenile Court Statistics.

(21) Hellman, PUBY, p16; see also BW 8 July 1937, "The Neglect of Bantu Youth" by Francis LeMas.

(22) IAD WRAB 351/2, South African National Congress on Post-War Planning of Social Welfare Work, session 2:30-4:30pm, 27 September 1944.

(23) Viljoen Report, p6.

(24) See Phil Bonner, "Family, Crime and Political Consciousness on the East Rand 1939-1955", JSAS, Volume 15, No 1, 1988, pp393-401.

(25) CPSA A843 SAIRR B23, Memorandum submitted to the Continuation Committee of the Delinquency Conference, undated, c 1940.

(26) There are numerous references to the issue of parental absence from around the mid 1930s until the late 1950s in newspapers, social welfare organisation reports and local Johannesburg administrative documents. See for example: BW 18 September 1937, editorial; BW 3 September 1940, p3; IAD WRAB 351/3, report by L. Nkosi, "The Nsibanyoni Gang", April 1940; IAD WRAB 351/2, letter from P. Mashego to the Welfare Officer, undated, c August 1944; The Star 11 January 1957, comments by W.J.P. Carr on delinquency problem; IAD WRAB 285/7, Memorandum: "Urban Bantu Youth Problem and its Possible Solution" by A.S. Marais, Director of NEAD Boksburg, 24 June 1959; The Star 20 October 1959, letter from Boyle S. Ndukwana of Dube.

(27) For an interesting argument about independent African urban women and "moral panic" see Kathy Eales, "Rehabilitating the Body Politic: Black Women, Sexuality

and the Social Order in Johannesburg 1924-1937", unpublished paper for the African Studies Institute seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 2 April 1990.
(28) CPSA AD843 SAIRR B25.3, Memorandum: "Native Juvenile Destitution and Delinquency", Johannesburg Joint Council of Europeans and Africans, undated, c1935.
(29) IAD WRAB 351/2, letter from Manager (Graeme Ballenden) to Senior Probation Officer, 15 December 1941.
(30) BW 29 October 1938, editorial, p4.
(31) BW 22 December 1945, front page headline article.
(32) BW 12 January 1935.
(33) CPSA AD 41433 Joint Council Collection Cj2, minutes of meeting of the Committee on Juvenile Delinquency of the Johannesburg Joint Council of Europeans and Non-Europeans held at the Bantu Men's Social Centre, 24 August 1937 (figures include Alexandra).
(34) BW 10 April 1937, p20; BW 13 November 1937, p16.
(35) BW 8 October 1938
(36) BW 21 October 1939, editorial: "The Menace of Lawlessness".
(37) Hellman, PUBY, p34
(38) Hellman, PUBY, pp 34-35
(39) BW 30 October 1943
(40) CPSA A1419 EHP File 51, Memorandum: "Bantu Youth in Our Cities", 26 April 1951, pp19-21.
(41) ibid p21
(42) Report on the Riots Commission (Dube Hostel 14/15 September 1957) chaired by A. Van de Sandt Centlivres, Johannesburg March/April 1958 (Riots Commission 1958), parags 96-99. For another, earlier, expression of the same view, see CA NTS 8/331, letter from E.W. Louw, Native Commissioner, Johannesburg to the Chief Native Commissioner, Witwatersrand, 5 February 1936.
(43) Verslag van die Interdepartementele Komitee insake ledige en nie-werkende Bantu in stedelike gebiede, chaired by M.C. Botha, 1962 (Botha Verslag), parag 276.
(44) Viljoen Report, p8.
(45) Jonathan Hyslop, "'A Destruction is Coming': Bantu Education as Response to Social Crisis", paper presented to the Social Transformation Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 21 April 1989. See particularly p9 and p16. At no point does Hyslop attempt to disaggregate primary from secondary schooling. During the seminar discussion he did point out, correctly, that pupils often remained at primary school until as old as sixteen years of age.
(46) For the 1949 figure, see Viljoen Report, p8. For the 1960 figure, see Colin Bundy, "Street Sociology and Pavement Politics: some aspects of stud t/youth consciousness during the 1985 schools crisis in Greater Cape Town", JSAS Vol 13 No 3, April 1987. This figure is taken from a table "The Expansion of African Education since 1960", p311.
(47) IAD WRAB 401/44/20, Johannesburg NEAD Memorandum for the Interdepartmental Committee to inquire into idle and unemployed Bantu, 15 November 1961.

(48) Hellman PUBY, p28. See also IAD WRAB 351/3, "The Nsibanyoni Gang", personal profiles of young gang members in Orlando written by Lucas Nkosi and passed on to Johannesburg NAD, April 1940; IAD WRAB 351/2, letter from Bantu Lads Hostel Committee to the Manager, NAD, 1 April 1943. The Committee could not cope with the number of applicants to their hostel. Parents complained repeatedly about "children out of control" and truancy.
(49) Botha Verslag, parag 14 and corresponding footnote.
(50) See CPSA AD1433 Joint Council Collection, Memorandum: "Juvenile Vagrancy and Delinquency", undated, c1936. In 1944 this problem was recognised in an article on the front page of Umteteli wa Bantu, 11 March 1944. A new Anglican mission school was opened in Orlando with a capacity of 495. Hundreds of children apparently had to be turned away. In this article the newspaper complained that African schooling was hopelessly inadequate on the Rand. In the early 1950s the Eiselen Report reiterated the shortage of schools for Africans throughout the country.
(51) Hellman, PUBY, p54
(52) Hellman, PUBY, p41
(53) Hellman, PUBY, p70
(54) Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into Acts of Violence Committed by Natives at Krugersdorp, Newlands, Randfontein and Newclare, chaired by J. de Villiers Louw, 1950, UG 47/1950, parags 189-190. See also IAD WRAB 351/1, Report of the Manager, W.J.P. Carr, to the Technical Subcomittee, 19 March 1957.
(55) Hellman, PUBY, pp 54-55
(56) CPSA A1419 EHP File 51, memorandum: "Bantu Youth in Our Cities", 26 April 1951, p13
(57) IAD WRAB 285/7, memorandum: "Juvenile Unemployment, Johannesburg" written by W.J.P. Carr and submitted to the Town Clerk and Bantu Affairs Commissioner, 20 September 1960.
(58) BW 12 January 1935 "8000 City's Bantu Children of School-going age without Education"; CPSA AD843 SAIRR B14, memorandum: "A Preliminary Investigation of African Juvenile Delinquency" written by J.L. Reyneke, undated, c1935 (a case history of 87 juvenile delinquents residing at Diepkloof reformatory which revealed that only 14 were in school or employed at the time of conviction); IAD WRAB 351/2, NEAD and NAD Research and Welfare Branch, "Non-European Juvenile Delinquents", Probation Office and Juvenile Court statistics, June 1938-June 1939: of 900 cases handled by the Probation Office, 62% were found to be employed or at school (a surprisingly low figure given some of the other figures on juvenile delinquency in the late 1930s).
(59) IAD WRAB 351/3, "A preliminary survey of juvenile gangs in Orlando" and "The Nsibanyoni Gang", both by Lucas Nkosi, Boys' Unit, Orlando, passed on to Johannesburg NAD, February 1940 and April 1940 respectively; IAD WRAB 351/2, letter from Honorary Secretary of Bantu Lads' Hostel Committee to the Manager, Johannesburg NEAD, 25 June 1941

calling for an extension of the Municipal Labour Bureau to "offer increased employment facilities for juvenile adults"; IAD WRAB 351/3, letter from Magistrate W.L. Marsh to Social Research Officer, NAD, 14 March 1942, examining the background of a convicted juvenile gangster called Fish Kates; BW 8 August 1942, "Wave of Crime", p4, in which Colonel Horak, Deputy Commissioner of Police for the Witwatersrand, drew attention to "tens of thousands of unemployed Native juveniles roaming the streets" and called for, amongst other things, improved employment opportunities for African juveniles.

(60) IAD WRAB 351/2, "A Practical Suggestion towards the Prevention of Delinquency amongst Native Juvenile-Adults in Large Urban Areas", C. Norman Crothall, for Chief Social Welfare Officer, received by the Manager, Johannesburg NAD, 11 April 1947 drawing attention to the drastic lack of facilities for dealing with youngsters between the ages of 15 and 19 who are unemployed; IAD WRAB 351/2, letter from the Manager, NAD, Johannesburg, to the Town Clerk, Port Elizabeth, 23 September 1947.

(61) The Star 20 July 1948.

(62) Hellman PUBY, p77

(63) See Chapter Four for an analysis of gender relations in the subculture.

(64) IAD WRAB 285/7, Native Youth Board, "Report on the Investigation into African Juvenile Unemployment in Four Johannesburg Townships", July 1950. The survey was carried out in conjunction with a case instructor from the Jan H. Hofmeyr School of Social Work.

(65) In a thesis written in 1952, W.J. Kieser, a principal of Diepkloof Reformatory in the 1950s, computed that there were "about 120 000 Native children of schoolgoing age idling away their days in the streets about the locations of the City and the Reef". Over half of those, he claimed, were in Johannesburg with 10 000 in Springs, 9 000 in Germiston and 6 000 in Krugersdorp. Kieser, W.W.J., "Native Juvenile Delinquency", MEd thesis, University of Potchefstroom, 1952.

Kieser's figure of over 60 000 for the Johannesburg area does not necessarily differ greatly from that of the Native Youth Board since he includes all children of schoolgoing age, roughly 7 to 20 years old, whereas the NYB focuses on the age group 14 to 20. Population was also weighted in the lower ages. Nevertheless, Kieser,s figure is higher and possibly more accurate. His estimate could include one or both of the following: a marked deterioration over the two years since 1950 or, more credibly, a figure which moves away from the official population census.

(66) IAD WRAB 205/1, Joint Report: Manager of NEAD and Medical Officer of Health, population statistics, 17 September 1953. This figure included Orlando, Moroka, Jabavu, Pimville, East Native Township, West Native Township, Sophiatown, Martindale, Newclare, Pageview and Alexandra.

(67) This allows for three years growth and takes into

account that population is slightly weighted in the lower age groups. For instance, in 1961 statistics, 80 000 fell into the group 7 to 14 years old (spanning 8 years) and 37 000 in the group 15 to 18 years old (spanning 4 years).

(68) See IAD WRAB 401/44/20, memorandum from NEAD Johannesburg to Interdepartmental Committee on Native Juvenile Delinquency, 16 November 1961.

(69) IAD WRAB 285/7, memorandum: "Juvenile Unemployment, Johannesburg" by W.J.P. Carr submitted to the Town Clerk and Bantu Affairs Commissioner, 20 September 1960. See also IAD WRAB 351/2, record of discussion between the Manager, NAD Johannesburg and Joint Native Advisory Board, 1 March 1961, report on Juvenile Unemployment Section.

(70) For instance, around 1940 Hellman estimated that whereas 50% of the 14-18 year old African males were unemployed, 20% of the 18-21 year-olds were unemployed. See CPSA A1419 EHP File 51, memorandum: "Early School-leaving and African Juvenile Occupational Opportunities", undated, c1940.

(71) Hellman provides an excellent summary of the factors as she saw them in 1939:

Summary of the Main Factors Affecting Juvenile Occupational Opportunities

(a) External

1. Physical inability to undertake heavy manual work excludes all but mature juveniles - and certainly those under 18 years - from employment in industries such as brickmaking, most branches of engineering, etc.

2. A minimum wage, while there is no scarcity of adult labour, makes it unprofitable for industries to employ juveniles.

3. In industries in which wages have not been regulated, the low average Native wage does not make the savings which can be effected on the wages of juveniles sufficiently marked to offset the additional supervision which juveniles require.

4. The implicit colour bar in the application of the Apprenticeship Act completely excludes juveniles from entry into skilled trades.

5. The prejudice of employers and employees, sanctioned by the civilised labour policy of the Government, prevents the acceptance of Native juveniles into occupations for which they would be suitable.

6. The absence of any machinery enabling juveniles to ascertain where they can obtain work leads to a fruitless and protracted search for work with consequent discouragement and apathy.

7. Most Natives are unskilled labourers earning a more or less standardized unskilled labourer's wage. There is accordingly little, if any, inducement for the juvenile to commence working at an early age in the hope that his industry will be rewarded by periodic wage increments. The man who, at the age of 26, has been working for ten years is seldom able to command a better position and better wages than the man of 26 who has been idling

around. In other words, the absence of a graduated wage scale and the inability of most Natives, under South African industrial conditions, to progress even from unskilled to semi-skilled work, influences the attitude of the juvenile in that no stimulus towards perseverence and industry is offered.

8. The absence of recognition for educational attainment and the limitation of occupational scope for the educated juvenile fail to encourage the educated juvenile to enter the labour market as speedily as possible. His educational qualifications are of no use to him; such employment as he can obtain will likewise be open to him in the future.

(b) Internal

1. The inconsistency and unreliability of many urban juveniles, due to upbringing and environmental influences, have caused widespread dissatisfaction among employers and have led to a general condemnation of juveniles as a class.

2. Opposition - both reasonable and unreasonable - to registration on the part of some juveniles causes them to refrain from taking such employment as is obtainable.

3. The demand of juveniles who are earning low wages (more marked among urban juveniles) for rapid increments and advancement, and the labour mobility consequent upon this attitude imperils their chances of permanent employment.

Hellman, PUBY, pp131-133.

(72) Viljoen Report; Bonner, "Family, Crime and Political Consciousness"; Matthew Chaskalson, "The Road to Sharpeville", unpublished paper for African Studies Institute seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, September 1986.

(73) IAD WRAB 401/25/1, letter from W.J.P. Carr, Manager, to Regional Employment Commissioner, 22 December 1955.

(74) IAD WRAB 401/25/1, letter from W.J.P. Carr, Manager, to the Native Affairs Commissioner of Johannesburg, 17 October 1956.

(75) Bonner, "Family, Crime and Political Consciousness", pp404-405.

(76) In Vereeniging, for instance, industrialists built up a relationship with a particular group of migrants from a particular rural district and employed freely from this pool. See Chaskalson. "The Road to Sharpeville", p7.

(77) Chaskalson, "The Road to Sharpeville", p7.

(78) Viljoen Report. According to this commission, unemployment amongst female youths was "probably worse" than amongst male youths.

(79) IAD WRAB 351/2, letter from NAD, Johannesburg, to the Mayor, "Appeal to His Worship the Mayor by the Transvaal Association of Non-European Boys' Clubs", enclosed in letter from the Manager (Acting), W.J.P. Carr, to Councillor Hurd, 23 May 1951.

(80) Bonner, "Family, Crime and Political Consciousness", pp404-405

(81) CPSA AH646 TUCSA Collection, memorandum, African Textile Workers Industrial Union (Witwatersrand Branch) to Native Juvenile Unemployment Commission, 6 June 1951; CPSA AH646 TUCSA Collection, "Findings: Native Juvenile Delinquency", Western Province Local Committee, SATLC, reply to Native Juvenile Unemployment Commission questionairre, undated, c1950.
(82) CPSA A1419 EHP File 51, memorandum: "Early School-leaving and African Juvenile Occupational Opportunities", undated, c1940, p9.
(83) IAD WRAB 285/7, Native Youth Board, "Report on the Investigation into African Juvenile Unemployment in Four Johannesburg Townships", July 1950.
(84) BW 24 June 1950, p1. See also IAD WRAB, memorandum: "Steps to Combat the Rising Incidence of Unemployment among Urban Location Youths", 10 May 1950; IAD WRAB 285/7, extract of minutes of meeting between NEAD and Native Youth Board deputation, 28 September 1950; IAD WRAB 210/5, minutes of meeting between NEAD and Executive Committee of Joint Native Advisory Board, 18 September 1957.
The attitude of tsotsis toeards the "work ethic" is explored in more detail in Chapters Three and Four.
(85) Viljoen Report, p7.
(86) Viljoen Report.
(87) The Star, 20 July 1948
(88) IAD WRAB 351/2, letter from NAD Johannesburg to the Mayor, "Appeal to His Worship the Mayor By the Transvaal Association of Non-European Boys' Clubs", enclosed in a letter from the Manager NAD Johannesburg to Councillor Hurd, 23 May 1951.
(89) IAD WRAB 285/7, memorandum: "Juvenile Unemployment, Johannesburg" written by W.J.P. Carr and submitted to the Town Clerk and Bantu Affairs Commissioner, 20 September 1960.
(90) Viljoen Report, pp7-10.
(91) The de Villiers Louw Commission of 1950, UG 47/1950, which was appointed to investigate acts of violence in Krugersdorp, Randfontein, Newclare and Newlands, identified youth gangs as major catalysts of violence in all four locations. Youth gang involvement is mentioned on virtually every page of the report.
See also IAD WRAB, memorandum: "Steps to Combat the Rising Incidence of Unemployment among Urban Location Youths" written by W.J.P. Carr and submitted to the Native Youth Board; Chapter Five contains a more detailed exploration of state fears of youth gang politicisation.
(92) IAD WRAB 401/25/1, letter from Acting Deputy Manager to Acting Manager, Johannesburg NAD, 19 February 1953.
(93) For instance, on 4 May 1953 the Director of Native Labour sent a letter to the Johannesburg Native Commissioner offering central state assistance to tackle youth unemployment; IAD WRAB 401/25/1.
(94) IAD WRAB 401/25/1, letter from H.S.J. van Wyk, Secretary of Native Affairs, to the Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 1 February 1954.

(95) The Star 10 February 1954
(96) IAD WRAB 401/25/1, letter from Acting Deputy Manager to the Acting Manager, Johannesburg NAD, 19 February 1953.
(97) ibid
(98) ibid
(99) IAD WRAB 401/25/1, Monthly Reports from the Registering Officer, City of Johannesburg, on juvenile unemployment. These figures are computed from monthly statistics.
(100) W.J.P. Carr admits to this himself in a letter written in October 1957; IAD WRAB 401/25/1, letter from W.J.P. Carr, Manager, to the Native Commissioner, Johannesburg, 17 October 1956.
(101) IAD WRAB 401/25/1, letter from W.J.P. Carr, Manager, to the Regional Employment Commissioner, 22 December 1955.
(102) IAD WRAB 401/25/1, letter from van Rensburg, Secretary of Native Affairs, to the Registration Officer, Johannesburg, 24 November 1955.
(103) IAD WRAB 285/7, Quarterly Reports, Registration Officer to the Manager, July 1960-March 1962.
(104) IAD WRAB 285/7, Quarterly Reports. See, for example, the figures for October-December 1960.
(105) The Star 10 February 1954. Interestingly, the normally philanthropically inclined W.J.P. Carr supported the idea. See IAD WRAB 351/1, minutes of conference attended by Deputy Commissioner SAP, Witwatersrand, Area Officers, members of the Non-European Affairs Committee and members of the Advisory Board, 14 December 1955.
(106) IAD WRAB 401/25/1, letter from H.S.J. van Wyk, Secretary of Native Affairs, to the Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 1 February 1954.
(107) ibid
(108) IAD WRAB 401/25/1, General Notification issued by W.W.M. Eiselen, Secretary of Native Affairs, 2 September 1954.
(109) See Golden City Post 1 September 1957, pp10-11 and 8 September 1957, pp10-11, for an expose" on the conditions in th Elandsdoorn youth camp.
(110) See BW editorial 18 September 1937, "Poverty and Delinquency" and a letter from Golden J. Sithole calling for better education, health, housing and wholesome recreation to combat the juvenile delinquency problem, BW 18 June 1938.
(111) CPSA A1419 EHP File 51, memorandum: "The Sociological Background to Urban African Juvenile Delinquency", 16 August 1953, p3.
(112) Interview, W.J.P. Carr, Johannesburg, 15 April 1988
For an interesting individual case study of a young gangster during the war years, see letter from Probation Officer, Mr Marsh, to Social Research Officer, 14 March 1942. A youth called Siwande, about 19 years old, arrested for handbag snatching, came from a family of seven children who shared a one-roomed house in Alexandra with their parents. Siwande was associated with a youth gang in Alexandra called the Tuta Rangers which, it was estimated,

had a membership of between 150 and 180 youths.
(113) Carr 15/4/88
(114) Interview, Don Mattera, Eldorado Park, 10 July 1988.
(115) The quotation comes from a Johannesburg Joint Council Memorandum cited in BW 8 August 1942, "Wave of Crime", p4. See also the following: CPSA AD843 SAIRR B23, memorandum on Native Juvenile Delinquency, 1938; The Star 14 November 1938, editorial; BW 17 August 1946, editorial; IAD WRAB 351/2, "A Practical Suggestion towards the Prevention of Delinquency amongst Native Juvenile-Adults in Large Urban Areas", C. Norman Crothall for Chief Social Welfare Officer to the Manager, 11 April 1947; Sunday Times 7 September 1958; UG 47/1950; Viljoen Report 1951; Riots Commission 1958, parag91; Botha Verslag 1962, parag69.
(116) See Chapter Four for an analysis of the competing attraction of youth gangs and the Boy Scout Movement.
(117) See Chapter Three for a more thorough exploration of this issue.
(118) See Carr's letter in The Star 15 January 1954, letters column.
(119) BW 17 August 1946, editorial
(120) IAD WRAB 351/1, Extract of minutes of conference attended by the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Witwatersrand Branch, Area Officers, members of the Non-European Affairs Committee and members of the Advisory Board, Johannesburg, 14 December 1955.
(121) See CPSA AD843 SAIRR B25.3, memorandum: "Native juvenile destitution and delinquency" compiled by Johannesburg Joint Council of Europeans and Africans, undated, c1934.
(122) BW 25 September 1937, editorial: "Poverty and Delinquency", p8.
(123) See Lazar, J., "Coformity and Conflict: Afrikaner Nationalist Politics in South Africa 1948-1961", PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1987, p97. In Chapter Five I discuss how the intensified application of pass laws in the early 1950s politicised tsotsis.
(124) Interview, Godfrey Moloi, Soweto, 26 March 1988; The Star 20 July 1948; BW 30 September 1950, Readers' Forum, "Knife Terror and Terrorism Associated with Pass Laws" by Charles Ricksha Finquana; BW September 1951, "Thema and Marks on Tsotsis", p1; Drum November 1951, feature article entitled "The Birth of a Tsotsi"1; IAD WRAB 351/2, letter from Johannesburg NAD to the Mayor, 23 May 1951.
(125) IAD WRAB 351/1. Extract of minutes of conference attended by the Deputy Commissioner of the SAP, Witwatersrand Branch, Area Officers, members of the Non-European Affairs Committee and members of the Advisory Board, Johannesburg, 14 December 1955.
(126) IAD WRAB 210/6, minutes of meeting between NEAD Housing Committee and members of the Advisory Boards, 28 March 1956. Mr Malize, a member of the Jabavu Advisory Board, raised the issue earlier in 1956; see IAD WRAB 351/1, Extract from minutes of Jabavu Advisory Board meeting, 23 February 1956.

(127) The Star 12 January 1957. See also the comments of Ray Phillips during a social welfare meeting in 1957: IAD WRAB 219/13, minutes of first AGM, Johannesburg Planning Council for Non-European Social Welfare, 26 March 1957.
(128) IAD WRAB 351/2, Minutes of meeting of the South West Bantu Township No 3 Advisory Board , 15 June 1951. The three members in question were messr. Ramokgadi, Ngqase and Ncwana.
(129) Carr 15/4/88
(130) It is interesting to contrast the arguments in the Native Affairs Commission Draft Report and an SAIRR memorandum compiled in response. CPSA AD843 SAIRR B25, Native Affairs Commission Draft Report, Cape Town 1940, parag6; CPSA AD843 B23, memorandum submitted to the Continuation Committee of the Juvenile Delinquency Conference, undated, c1940. Local Johannesburg government strategy on this issue tended to be in line with that of the SAIRR.
(131) Carr 15/4/88

CHAPTER TWO:

# THE RISE OF THE "BO-TSOTSI"
## The Origins, Definition and Structures of the Tsotsi Subculture

In contemporay usage, a "tsotsi" refers very broadly to an urban African criminal. During the second half of the 1940s and throughout tne 1950s, however, the meaning of "tsotsi" was far more specific. A tsotsi was a young man who dressed, spoke and behaved in a clearly identifiable way. He imitated American "city slicker" clothing styles, spoke tsotsitaal, indulged in some kind of criminal or quasi-legal activity and generally moved around in gangs. It is useful to conceptualise the tsotsis of the 1940s and 1950s as a subculture; they represented an insular culture within a broader township ghetto culture. Tsotsis constituted what the contemporary sociologist, C.V. Bothma, described in 1951 as "a society of the adolescent" with a clear sense of identity forged in the furnace of a hostile urban environment.(1) A description and explanation of tsotsi style and ritual is deferred to the next chapter. In this chapter I attempt to periodise and quantify the subculture as well as define its boundaries. In the first section I examine some of the early social forerunners to tsotsi

youth gangs and then explore the emergence and meaning of the word "tsotsi". In the second section I examine the boundaries and internal structures of the subculture which emerged in the early 1940s. I also assess the extent to which criminality and gang membership were integral to the subcultural definition. In the third and final section of this chapter I assess the prevalence of the subculture on the Witwatersrand during the 1940s and 1950s.

## I

By 1943 the term "tsotsi" had not entered common usage. There had been no reference to tne word in either newspapers or administrative documents. Nevertheless, throughout the 1930s and early 1940s township youth gangs started to emerge which had many similarities to the later tsotsi gangs. Probably the earliest African youth gang formations in the South African cities were the Amalaita. These distinctive gangs emerged, particularly in Durban and Johannesburg, as early as the 1920s. They continued to have a presence in the urban areas until well into the 1940s and even 1950s. But, although state officials often failed to differentiate between the various urban youth gangs (2), Amalaitas represented a tradition of urban youth gangs separate from those which pre-dated the tsotsis. Amalaita

gangs were made up of young male migrant domestic workers who lived in white suburban domestic quarters. Amalaita gang members tended to have a strong rural consciousness which was particularly evident in the fact that they continued to participate in the circumcision ritual. Gang association could be seen as a way of coping with an alien urban environment. Although Amalaitas, generically, did not all have the same ethnic background, the individual Amalaita gangs did tend to associate along ethnic lines. During the week, gang members were employed domestic servants; their Amalaita identity only became apparent on their "day off", Sunday.(3) Another early form of youth gang formation, extremely common amongst young Pondo migrants from as early as the 1930s, was the indlav... Rather than being urban youth gangs, however, the indlavini could be seen as renegade youth bands which had broken away from traditional Pondo age structures. The indlavini consisted of youths who had shaken off traditional courtship and initiation rituals. Although the indlavini were heavily influenced by urban life through migrancy and displayed a number of characteristics associated with the tsotsis such as territorial violence and sexual aggression, they were essentially a rural phenomenon.(4) By contrast, the gangs which can be identified as tso*si forerunners were township based and, even if some of their members were technically migrants, asserted a strong urban identity.

In a book published in 1962, Absolom Vilakazi argued that

the most important cultural forerunner to the tsotsis in Natal was a social stratum called the abaghafi. The abaghafi apparently emerged in the urban areas during the early 1920s. Like the tsotsis, they were adolescents heavily influenced by American movie images, particularly those of the Wild West. Their style was modelled on cowboys. But most young urban Africans could not afford real cowboy get-up, so cheap imitations emerged: ordinary handkerchiefs were used instead of mufflers and pants were tied under the knees to imitate breeches. Vilakazi says nothing about abaghafi gang formation. It would appear that the abaghafi were an amorphous stratum of Natal youth whose chief expression existed at the level of clothing style. Vilakazi argued that, through migrancy, the style became popular amongst rural youths. But, whereas the abaghafi style remained popular in the countryside, it gave way to the tsotsi style in the urban areas. "In the urban areas, what would have been the abaghafi in the past are now called the tsotsis". By the 1950s, abaghafi style in Natal actually became symbolic of rural lack of sophistication.(5)

In the Pretoria townships youth gangs, called Funanis generically, emerged during the 1930s. Like the tsotsis, these gangs asserted their urban identity and were influenced by American gangster imagery. They spoke an embryonic form of tsotsitaal called flaaitaal. The Funanis self-consciously differentiated themselves from the

Amalaita gangs. The term "tsotsi" eventually came to incorporate what were the Funanis.(6)

In Johannesburg, there were a number of precursors to the tsotsis. By the early 1940s the Blue Nines and Malalapipes had become a common feature of township life, particularly in Sophiatown and Alexandra. The Blue Nines and Malalapipes were an amorphous strata of ragged, homeless children and young adolescents who engaged in begging and petty theft. The Malalapipes got their name from the discarded junkyard pipes in which they slept and sought shelter.(7)

In 1940, on the request of Graham Ballenden, the Manager of the NAD Johannesburg, an Orlando Boys' Unit employee, Lucas Nkosi, was asked to gather information and write up a report on local youth gangs. According to Nkosi, a number of juvenile gangs sprung up in Orlando in the late 1930s. the best known of which were the Nsibanyoni Gang, the Board Gang and the Station Gang. Each gang tended to have between 15 and 20 members aged between 13 and 21 years old. The gang members were generally unemployed and engaged in informal employment or petty theft; they smoked dagga and gambled on the streetcorners; they were influenced by American movies and those who could afford it attempted to imitate American clothing fashions. Nkosi added that similar gangs operated in Alexandra, Pimville and Sophiatown but the Orlando gangs were generally "better behaved" than those of the other townships.(8) In January 1942 the Orlando Residents' Association requested a meeting

with Ballenden to discuss the deteriorating juvenile delinquency problem in Orlando.(9) The meeting went ahead and in September 1942 Ballenden commented: "It would appear that delinquency amongst children ... is on the increase. Cases have recently been reported where children have operated in 'crime gangs'".(10) Similar problems were being experienced in West Native Township. One resident wrote to Ballenden complaining that "people are simply stunned, they do not know what to do. The location is controlled by wicked boys..."(11)

In early 1942 administrative attention was drawn to the activities of the Tuta Rangers, a massive criminal juvenile gang operating in Alexandra.(12) According to the Norwood and Wynberg police the gang was tightly organised making it extremely difficult to pin any incriminating evidence on the members. The Tuta Rangers apparently operated on a smaller scale in Sophiatown. The Superintendent of West Native Township commented that "a common threat in Sophiatown is 'I will call the Tuta Rangers from Alexandra to fix you up'".(13) The Alexandra gang consisted of between 150 and 180 members ranging from 15 to 30 years of age. The gang was known to have robbed "respectable Natives and unprotected women" and to have broken up dances and concerts. Several shooting incidents in Alexandra were believed to have been associated with the gang. With the money raised from criminal activities the Tuta Rangers hired expensive lawyers to defend members under

prosecution. According to Lieutenant-Colonel Horak, Deputy Commissioner of Police for the Witwatersrand Division, it had been established "that members of these gangs are children of respectable stand-owners in Alexandra township, and their parents have no control whatsoever over them."(14)

In Johannesburg, a more generic term for young township "city slickers" was Clevers. Rather than referring to a specific youth gang, Clevers represented a stratum of urban African youth: unemployed, stylish, influenced by American movie images.(15) The term Clevers survived into the tsotsi era but the meaning narrowed to refer to a more senior, experienced and socially successful type of tsotsi.(16)

Tsotsitaal was an important element of tsotsi subcultural identity during the late 1940s and 1950s. Like the tsotsi gangs themselves, tsotsitaal had its precursors. The first distinctive language used by township youth gangs, particularly the Funanis of Pretoria, was known as shalambombo. It was a language intelligible exclusively to the "in-group" based on Zulu and Xhosa. Shalambombo was self-consciously a "secret language" which delineated a group identity. The word "shalambombo" comes from two Zulu words: "shala" meaning "shunning" and "mbo-mbo" meaning "covering over" or "turning upside-down".(17) Around 1935 flaaitaal, a secret language with an Afrikaans basilect, took over as the most popular language amongst the urban

youth gangs first, it seems, in Pretoria and then spreading to the Rand. Shalambombo gradually faded out.(18) Flaaitaal evolved into tsotsitaal. The languages were essentially the same but for a major expansion in vocabulary that is associated with tsotsitaal. Tsotsitaal was also more widely spoken; it became a language almost universal amongst the African urban youth. The linguist C.T. Msimang argues that "the development of Tsotsitaal is one of the most important socio-linguistic developments in Southern Africa in the twentieth century".(19)

The term "tsotsi" entered township vocabulary around 1943/1944. There is general consensus amongst my informants that the word referred to a style of narrow-bottomed pants which became popular amongst urban African youth in the early 1940s.(20) In American gangland slang the narrow-bottomed pants were called "zoot-suits". It is possible that the word "tsotsi" comes directly from the word "zoot-suit", with a pronunciation shift. C.V. Bothma provides another fairly plausible suggestion that the word comes from the South Sotho "ho tsotsa" which means "to sharpen", referring to the shape of the pants.(21) There is some evidence to suggest that the fashion became popular after the movie Stormy Weather was screened in the townships in the early 1940s.(22) The style was reinforced through another influential movie, Cabin in the Sky, screened in Johannesburg between 1945 and 1950.(23) To be "in fashion" township boys had to wear tsotsis; it became a crucial

symbol of urban sophistication. "All the youngsters used to wear these pants," recalls ex-Spoiler, Norris Nkosi.(24) The sharper the trouser bottoms, the more fashionable the youth was deemed to be.(25) Initially, then, "tsotsi" referred to a style fashionable amongst the township youth. It referred to a style of dress "which was worn by any self-respecting city slicker. To be 'with-it' you had to dress like that. Dressing like that meant you were an urban kid. As opposed to a well-mannered, well-brought up, God-fearing country kid".(26) All youths who wore those pants were called tsotsis. Gradually, however, the meaning shifted. Tsotsi became synonomous with "skelm" or "villain" or "trickster".(27) A tsotsi became "someone who is rude towards everything"; disrespectful towards elders, laws, employment. For teenagers, the mere act of wearing long pants was deemed to be precocious; parents still expected their teenage sons to wear shorts in the 1940s.(28) Although older people tended to view all those who wore tsotsi pants as gangsters, this was not necessarily the case. The pants were almost mandatory amongst teenage boys by the late 1940s.(29) The subculture, then, acquired a name and a dominant style around 1943/1944. However, much of what later became associated with the concept "tsotsi" had already started to take shape by the mid- to late 1930s.

The first written reference to tsotsis can be found in the Bantu World Readers' Forum in April 1945. Between April and

June 1945 a vigorous debate raged in the Readers' Forum over the nature of what most readers called the "Bo-Tsotsi". Whereas some readers argued that the tsotsis were a dangerous scourge, others argued that tsotsis were essentially harmless youths very concerned with their clothing style. Clearly, by April 1945 the tsotsis had made a major impact on township life. The first letter in this series was written by a Mr J.D.N. of Benoni. The letter is an important historical document not only because it helps to periodise the emergence of the tsotsi subculture but also because it helps to establish its parameters. The letter is worth quoting in full.

> As a result of the introduction of fashions in dressing, of broad-brimmed hats and narrow trousers - which have been christened "Tsotsi" - not excluding the different kinds of bright-coloured shirts, ties and sports jackets, of all designs, there has emerged into popularity (I wonder if I should say Notoriety) a class of young men in Johannesburg who answer to the fancy name of "bo Tsotsi."
>
> This class of budding "men of tomorrow" forms the bulk of the cinema goers, "cultured" audiences of shows and concerts and the "Jive Kings" of Johannesburg and the Reef locations. They are common in the streets, where they are sometimes in the company of young damsels whose very fine broad-brimmed and decorated straw hats make them very attractive to the "bo Tsotsi"; although I would rather wear such a hat on the beach, they haunt the dance halls, they sleep latest, and most of them are more artful than the "artful Dodger" in Charles Dickens' "Oliver Twist" when it comes to "borrowing" your wallet or playing "hide and seek" with the Police.
>
> You would think there was never such a thing as work when you saw how some of them "burn the candle at both ends" in idling and moving about from pillar to post. Those who work, among them, represent a very small per centage of the "Tsotsi" population. they are a defect in the "Tsotsi" body.
>
> Talk of drinking and I'll tell you to consult Mr. "Tsotsi" who knows more about the manufacture and price control of every kind of location beer (or

"Boil", as it is sometimes called) than he knows his own name. Consult him on how you can be happy and he will philosophise to you with the words: "Eat, drink, steal and be happy for tomorrow you go to gaol!"

If you are an anthropologist who is interested in location life, especially where there are so many street fights during weekends, study "bo Tsotsi" and you'll get enough information to write a thesis that will excite many universities into honouring you with degrees!

Step into a train and you'll find that our friends form the majority of the passengers; peep into a prison cell and you'll find a regal choice of them, go anywhere, in any place, as long as there's room for mischief there, you'll find your "Tsotsi" gentlemen.

"Bo Tsotsi!" The Reef is exhausted by the terror that they wrought (sic), parents bewail every day the sad fate of the existence of these "guys", they are a thorn in the flesh these poor victims of ruthless delinquency. Yet they seek to be helped out of this dungeon of the giant Mischief.

Only by patient reform and moral training, on the side of parents, can we be rid of this trivial nuisance: but how can it be done? Has it been tried? And to what extent? I pause for a reply.(30)

It is clear from this letter that a distinctive tsotsi subculture had emerged by the mid 1940s on the Rand. Many of the elements of subcultural identification observed by the writer - clothing style, street fights, attitudes to work - will be explored in more detail in Chapter Three.

## II

Both contemporary observers such as Mr J.D.N. and historians alike have tended to use the term "tsotsi" very loosely. Little attempt has been made to get to grips with

the definitional ambiguities of the concept. What was the relationship between youth gangs and the wider subculture? Were all tsotsis necessarily gang members? What did a "gang" entail? Were tsotsis necessarily criminals? In this section I explore some of these ambiguities and attempt, ultimately, to infuse the subcultural definition with some precision.

During the mid- to late 1940s the term "tsotsi" seemed to have a broad subcultural, fashion-centred connotation. Gradually, though, throughout the 1950s, the criminal and gang connotations strengthened but remained somewhat ambiguous. In the Bantu World Readers' Forum tsotsi debate, between May and July 1945 several of the readers defended tsotsis as being harmless adherents to fashion. Fashion, rather than criminality or gang formation, was seen by these readers to be the essence of the tsotsi phenomenon. Thus, a Mr Nzima wrote, "Let them be! a fashion never harmed anyone, and the present fashion is the best for the time."(31) Another contributor, Walter Nhlapo, took a similar position: "Why should these children apologise for their clothes? It is a fallacy that certain clothes signify corruption or degradation of the spirit."(32) Even once the criminal gang connotation had become widespread, the term "tsotsi" continued to embrace young "city-slickers" who were neither in gangs nor involved in criminal activity. A tsotsi was a "slick guy" who dressed and behaved in a particular way.(33) For ex-American, Peggy

Bellair, the word represented "a style, a way of life".(34) The stovepipe trousers remained the key identifying symbol.(35)

During the 1950s, most township residents perceived the subculture to be undifferentiated: zoot trousers implied tsotsi which, in turn, implied member of criminal gang.(36) According to Norris Nkosi, tsotsi trousers were so pervasive that elderly people described almost any youth wandering around the streets as a tsotsi.(37) Stan Motjuwadi made a similar observartion: "The ordinary elderly citizens mistook all those youths who wore the style for a bad element."(38) It would be safe to say that the subculture extended to include urban youths who were neither gang members nor criminals. Subcultural identity cut across gang membership and criminality. A young male could be a member of the "in-group" if he wore tsotsis, drank alcohol and smoked dagga freely, spoke tsotsitaal well and demonstrated a familiarity with the township environment. Nevertheless, the criminal gangs constituted the core of the subculture; they epitomised subcultural style and behaviour.

Clearly, members of the subculture tended to cluster in groups. Subcultural clusters, however, took a number of forms varying in degrees of cohesion and size. There was also a great deal of shading in the extent to which these groups participated in violent or criminal activity. Three different gang formations were discernible within the

tsotsi subculture: "big shot" gangs, "small-time" criminal gangs and non-criminal street-corner networks. The divisions were rarely clear-cut; these three categories often merged into one another.

The "big shot" gangs were gangs with name and fame in the townships. Individuals were known, they dressed distinctively. Their criminal activity tended to be slick and well organised. They often ran protection rackets and gambling dens. Leadership figures would often be older - in their late twenties or thirties. These gangs liked to distinguish themselves from the common tsotsis. Motjuwadi explained:

> To be a gang member in especially the old townships had a certain exclusivity attached. It was like a closed club with a clear identity. Sure, they broke the law occasionally, but they weren't involved in heavy crime. Apart from gang warfare. If you became a member of a gang it's prestigious. You aren't a nobody. The muggers were despised ... The old gangs were looked up to in a way ... they commanded some respect and they were envied by youngsters.

The famous gangsters enjoyed dressing well and "liked to associate with socially acceptable people" such as musicians and politicians. They had a known, coherent membership. "So-and-so is a member of the Americans, so-and-so is a member of the Berlins ..." They almost had a register of membership.(39) The Spoilers of Alexandra did not like to be called tsotsis, claims ex-Spoiler Norris Nkosi, "The small-time gangs were not of our class."(40)

Where does one draw the line between "big-time" gangs and

smaller tsotsi gangs? Henry Miles argues that there were only three "real" gangs during the 1950s, the "Big Three": the Americans, Spoilers and Msomis.(41) Whereas these three were clearly the best known youth gangs in the Witwatersrand townships, a number of other gangs could realistically be placed in the "big-time" category such as the Black Caps (which was best known during the 1940s), Die Jakes Gang and the Berliners of Sophiatown, the Co-operatives of West Native Township, the X.Y.s of Newclare, the Otto Town Gang of Orlando, the Apache and Berliners from Orlando East, the Black Swines of White City (see Table One). All these gangs controlled large areas, had large memberships with known leaders and ran extensive crime operations. They aspired to high style. The Torch Gang of Orlando was an ambiguous case. It was as famous and as large as the other big-time gangs but its membership was amorphous and its style (apart from its notorious custom of shining torches in mugging victims' faces) was not distinctive. The gang was more interested in theft than exclusivity and style.

Motjuwadi claimed that the bigger, slicker gangs had "a kind of a code" not to mug and steal from township residents. "They were township kids themselves. The township residents [were] their parents ... they [were] known".(42) Nkosi supports this view. "The Spoilers," he insists, "were decent guys."(43) There is some supporting evidence to suggest that the Americans, as a lone

exception, had social scruples. Their criminal operations, whether robbing railway trucks or pickpocketing, tended to be carried out in the Johannesburg central business district rather than the townships.(44) The Spoilers and Msomis did not need to mug local residents because they ran extensive protection rackets. Although protection rackets can hardly be construed as socially scrupulous, their operations did have a professionalism which set them apart from petty muggers. Residents of Alexandra, it seems, would feel safer running into a group of Spoilers in a dark alley rather than some nameless tsotsi gang (provided, of course, they had paid their protection fees). Spoilers took pride in their operations; they did not like to be associated with petty criminals. It is impossible to determine whether this attitude of professional pride extended beyond the "Big Three". Clearly, though, the well-known, bigger gangs operated more slickly and less arbitrarily than anonymous tsotsi gangs. Their very familiarity with the residents seemed to place some restriction on their activities. One notable area of exception, however, was in their treatment of women. Their sexual violence and arrogance was in line with the wider subculture.(45) Sexual violence aside, serious and overt violence was, for the most part, confined to inter-gang warfare. In dealing with residents, coercion was unstated, the violence was latent. So a well-known gangster would walk into a restaurant and, in a very courteous manner, order a meal which, it was understood, he would not pay for. An anonymous tsotsi would have to hold

the proprietor up with a knife or gun to get his meal.

Small-time tsotsi gangs ranged in membership from as little as three or four to as much as twenty.(46) In some cases their membership could be as large as those of some big-time gangs but it was an amorphous, shifting membership without a clear organisational structure or hierarchy. The gangs would often remain nameless; those that had names were only known very locally. These small, often anonymous, criminal tsotsi gangs were extremely common; they preyed off the community shamelessly, mugging and pickpocketing residents in trains and on the streets. They lacked the polish and exclusivity of the big-time gangs and they tended to be more overtly violent towards residents.(47) Occasionally, individuals from these gangs would "graduate"; "some would become refined from the money they made and they would go and join the bigger gangs after that."(48) The tsotsi term for a gang was "rasi" or "rensi", coming from the common cowboy word "ranch" which referred to a group of cowboys based at a particular cattle post.(49) The term rasi was used to describe these smaller, less formal groups rather than the big-time gangs.

The street-corner networks, also referred to as rasis, were essentially non-criminal, unarmed and defensive. It was, however, extremely difficult to draw a distinction between the criminal and non-criminal rasi. Many of these rasis arose to protect themselves against violent, bullying local

gangs but their response was often violent itself and shaded into criminality. Bloke Modisane, in his autobiography Blame Me on History, recalls how his own little rasi emerged in Sophiatown.

> I did not learn ... the daredevil hero complex of the American male; I wanted to be with the good boys against the bad boys, so we formed a street-corner gang: Philip Spampu, Mannass, Ncali, Valance, Dwarf, Niff and I; we were the Target Kids, with targets drawn on the sides of the shop on Gold and Victoria Road. Target was for girls and we wrote the names of the girls we wanted; but we were also a kind of vigilante group concerned with keeping our corner safe from the marauding gangs of Sophiatown; we were neither thieves nor thugs, and never carried knives but we never hesitated to use violence against the tsotsis, the bull-catchers who attacked, robbed and stripped people. We answered the tsotsis with violence, which was a kind of lingua franca, and, in effect, we too were tsotsis; legally we should have handed them over to the police, but we were black, the tsotsis were black and the law was white. We had no intention of being produced by whites as witnesses against blacks, this would have exposed us to the vengeance of the tsotsis, arranged us in the line of knives and guns, and to the scorn of other Africans. The tsotsis were violent men; the force of violence was the only voice they respected; it was a comforting morality adequately masking the violence within us, we were little giants with power complexes, filled with acts of cruelty, injustice and oppression. We cleansed ourselves with rationalisations, armed in point with pious indulgences, like a Christian straight out of a confession box.
>
> We grouped round our corner singing pop songs, making instrument sounds with the mouth, whistling wolf calls at the passing parade of girls, daring each other on ... (50)

This is an interesting extract in a number of respects. First, it reflects the spontaneity and essentially defensive nature of the street-corner rasi. Second, it reveals an ambiguous identification with tsotsis; Modisane and his friends simultaneously set themselves up in opposition to the tsotsis and absorbed the logic of the

subculture. They hated the violence of the tsotsis and yet were violent themselves; they actually did take on "the daredevil hero complex of the American male". Their identification with the tsotsis was ultimately stronger than it was with "the law".

There were also street-corner rasjs which were less ambiguously non-violent and non-criminal. According to Henry Miles, there were not many substantial gan[illegible] Orlando; "there were many stre[illegible]-corner rasjs that were of no significance ... harmless and useless". They would club together, wear the same clothes and call themselves a rasj.(51) Many of these networks emerged quite spontaneously out of play groups consisting of boys between six and ten years old. As they got older, minor skirmishes arose between the emerging rasjs. For some street-corner networks, the fights become increasingly violent as they defended their respective territories from rivals. The rasjs clustered around street-corner shops which, because of their potential for both odd jobs and petty theft, became a central territorial element.(52) "McCoy" Mdlalose recalls that there were numerous little street-corner protection networks in Sophiatown during the 1940s and 1950s. His own group did not dress up particularly stylishly and they did not have a name. They would stand about at the Chinese and Indian shops trying to pick up a "pansella". They played dice and "heads and tails" with a coin, often for small sums of money. They spoke tsotsitaal

together. Some of them, like Mdlalose himself, went to school.(53) These street-corner _rasis_ were on the periphery of the wider tsotsi subculture. They were not classic tsotsis but they spoke tsotsitaal, wore tsotsi trousers, were involved in petty gambling and were heavily influenced by American movies.

In Pretoria, C.V. Bothma identified what can perhaps be considered a fourth tsotsi gang category: the _Hepkets_. The _Hepkets_ aspired to high tsotsi style and yet were clearly non-violent and non-criminal. In terms of style, they could be mistaken for "big-league" gangsters. But they were generally employed, educated and law-abiding.(54) Although it is extremely likely that a similar category emerged in the Rand townships, I have no clear evidence of its existence.

The tsotsi subculture, then, was far from monolithic; it contained a great deal of variety and stratification within it. Despite the shading, however, there were enough points of commonality and identification for a case to be made that it did in fact represent a fairly coherent subculture. The "big-league" gangs, although often consciously separating themselves out from tsotsis, were the subcultural role models. The streetcorner gangs, in all their shades of style, violence and criminality, constituted the bulk of the subculture.

# III

Quantifying the subculture is a treacherous task. There is quite literally no hard data on gang membership or subcultural participation. This section is therefore unavoidably impressionistic. Nevertheless, it is possible to create a powerful picture, albeit impressionistic, of the prevalence of the subculture, both in the wider sense and in terms of gang membership.

Perhaps the best starting point is the material presented in the previous chapter on juvenile delinquency and unemployment because these phenomena are far more quantifiable. In the eyes of both township residents and administrators there was a very strong connection between the juvenile delinquency phenomenon and tsotsi gangs; the problems were seen as largely indistinguishable. I showed that from the war years through to the early 1960s probably the majority of urbanised African youths on the Rand were out of school or unemployed. I went on to argue that for the unemployed male youths there were few available outlets other than township youth gangs. In the following table I have compiled a list of township gangs between 1940 and 1960 which can be referenced concretely. Where possible, I have added information on size and age range. It is important to note that this list of almost one hundred gangs only touches the surface of gang membership since the

overwhelming majority of gangs were nameless or too little known to be mentioned in newspapers, autobiographies, NEAD reports or remain imprinted in the memory of my informants. In this section I will look first at the wider subcultural presence in the Rand townships. This will be followed by an attempt to assess the prevalence of tsotsi gangs. Finally, I will focus on the social pressures which propelled male African youths into gangs. These pressures were so powerful that it becomes possible to extrapolate, albeit impressionistically, about the pervasiveness of the gangs.

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WITWATERSRAND GANGS 1940-1961

The following (overleaf) is a list of tsotsi gangs which operated on the Rand between roughly 1940 and 1960. As I point out in the text of the chapter, this list only touches the surface of township gangs. Most gangs were nameless or too small to be documented. Essentially, then, this is a list of known and referenced gangs. I have grouped the gangs chronologically on a township by township basis. Where possible, I provide information on dates of operation, gang size and age range within the gang. The dates given are the dates at the point of reference unless the reference provides an alternative starting date. In other words, it can be assumed that the gang operated for at least some time before the point of reference. If a date range is given, it has been inferred from the first and last points of reference.

ORLANDO

| Name | Date | Approx. Size | Age Range | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Board Gang | 1940 | 15 | 16-21 | (55) |
| Nsibanyoni Gang | 1940 | 15 | 14-16 | (55) |
| Station Gang | 1940 | 20 | 14-16 | (55) |
| Nzama Gang | 1940 | 14 | 14-18 | (55) |
| Brown Sports Gang | 1940 | 8 | 18-21 | (55) |
| Blue Sports Gang | 1940 | 8 | 18-21 | (55) |
| Mofokeng Gang | 1940 | 16 | 14-16 | (55) |
| Club Gang | 1940 | 19 | 12-15 | (55) |
| Ngcukushe Gang | 1940 | 7 | 17-21 | (55) |
| Nineteen Gang | 1940 | ? | 12-14 | (55) |
| Otto Town Gang | mid 1940s-late 1950 | 20 | 16-25 | (56) |
| Salamas | 1951 | ? | 16-25 | (56) |
| Kid Ranchers | 1951 | ? | 16-25 | (56) |
| Torch Gang | 1953-early 1960s | ? | 16+ | (57) |
| Three Star Boys | 1955 | ? | 15-16 | (58) |
| Plantation Spoilers | 1957-1959 | ? | leader was 20 | (59) |
| Berliners | 1959 | "very large" | ? | (60) |
| sub-gangs: | | | | |
| High Society | | | | |
| Escourt | | | | |
| PM | | | | |
| Apache | 1959 | "very large" | ? | (60) |
| sub-gangs: | | | | |
| Germans | | | | |
| Black Swines | | | | |
| Black Knights | | | | |
| Deckoids | | | | |
| Mlamlankuzi | 1959-1961 | ? | ? | (61) |

SOPHIATOWN

| Name | Date | Approx. Size | Age Range | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Black Caps | late 1930s-early 1950 | ? | ? | (62) |
| Tuta Rangers (local branch) | 1942 | ? | ? | (63) |
| Americans | 1945-1956 | 30-45 | 20-25 | (64) |
| Berliners | mid40s -mid50s | 30 | 15-20 | (65) |
| Angels With Dirty Faces | 1940s | ? | ? | (66) |
| Tonto Brothers | 1950s | ? | ? | (66) |
| Die Jakes Gang | early 1950s | "ruled Western Areas" | | (67) |
| Casper Kids | early 1950s | 50+ | "mostly teenagers" | (68) |
| Dead End Kids | 1954 | ? | ? | (69) |
| Sundowners | 1950s | ? | ? | (70) |
| Mangamanga | 1950s | ? | ? | (70) |
| Fighting Guardsmen | 1950s | ? | ? | (70) |
| Styles Gang | 1950s | ? | ? | (70) |
| Home Ds | 1950s | ? | ? | (71) |
| Gestapo | 1950s | ? | ? | (72) |
| Vultures | 1950s | 50+ | teenagers | (72) |

ALEXANDRA

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tuta Rangers | 1941 | 150-180 | 15-30 | (73) |
| Zorro's Fighting Legion | 1947-1953 | "mob of tough youths" | | (74) |
| Spoilers | 1952-1959 | 250 | 18-21 (in 1953) | (75) |
| Black Koreans | 1953 | ? | ? | (76) |
| "6 major gangs" | 1953 | (combined) 500+ | "youngsters" | (76) |
| Mau Mau | early 1950s | ? | ? | (77) |
| Stonebreakers | early 1950s | ? | ? | (78) |
| Msomis | c1953-1958 | 80+ | older leadership, younger henchmen | (79) |
| ZP5 | 1950s | "little gang" | ? | (80) |
| Benzine Boys | 1958 | ? | ? | (81) |
| CPZ | 1959 | ? | ? | (82) |
| Satan's Boys | 1960 | ? | "youth" | (83) |
| Rope Gang | 1961 | ? | 13-20 | (84) |

PIMVILLE

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Spoilers (local branch known as "Japanese") | 1952 | ? | ? | (85) |
| Die Jakes Gang (extension of Sophiatown gang) | early 1950s | "ruled the Western Areas" | | (86) |
| Styles Gang | 1950s | ? | ? | (87) |

NEWCLARE

| Name | Date | Approx. Size | Age Range | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Spoilers (local branch) | 1953 | ? | ? | (88) |
| K.Y.s | c1953 | "big gang" | ? | (89) |

MEADOWLANDS

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| "gang from Meadowlands" | 1957 | 22 | "youths" | (90) |
| Wibsey Gang | 1960 | ? | ? | (91) |
| Black Swines | 1961 | ? | 17-26 | (92) |

KLIPTOWN

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Slagpaal | 1951 | ? | 16-25 | (93) |
| Vaalkamers | 1951 | ? | 16-25 | (93) |
| Co-operatives (local branch) | 1958 | ? | 15-19 | (94) |

WHITE CITY, JABAVU

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Torch Gang (extension of Orlando gang) | 1953-1955 | ? | ? | (95) |
| Big Fives | 1956 | ? | ? | (96) |
| Black Swines | 1956-1960 | "very big gang" | 14-18 | (97) |
| Pirates | 1956-1957 | "big gang" | 14-18 | (98) |

WEST NATIVE TOWNSHIP

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Co-operatives | 1952-1958 | ? | 15-19 | (99) |

MOROKA

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Terrors | 1954 | ? | ? | (100) |
| Torch Gang (extension of Orlando gang) | 1953-1955 | ? | ? | (101) |

EAST NATIVE TOWNSHIP

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fast Elevens | 1961 | ? | ? | (102) |
| German Spoilers | 1961 | ? | ? | (102) |

GERMISTON

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fast Elevens | 1953-1955 | ? | ? | (103) |
| Dead Man's Gulch | 1955 | ? | ? | (104) |
| Vultures | 1955 | ? | ? | (104) |

| Name | Date | Approx. Size | Age Range | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| BENONI and EVATON | | | | |
| Msomis (Alexandra remnant) | 1958 | ? | ? | (105) |
| Mashalashala | 1960 | ? | ? | (106) |
| Rooikamp | 1960 | ? | ? | (106) |
| ROODEPOORT | | | | |
| Gas Devils | 1953 | ? | 17-23 | (107) |
| Dead End Kids | 1953 | ? | ? | (107) |
| Torch Commando | 1961 | ? | 16-22 | (108) |
| VREDEDORP | | | | |
| Spoilers (local branch) | 1953 | ? | ? | (109) |
| Time Squares | 1959 | ? | ? | (110) |
| Durbaners | 1959 | ? | ? | (110) |
| FERREIRASTOWN | | | | |
| Old Man Y | 1952 | ? | ? | (111) |
| Baby Face Gang | 1952 | ? | ? | (112) |
| DOORNFONTEIN | | | | |
| Thousand and One Gang | 1954 | "massive membership" | "young" | (113) |

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One possible way in which to assess the prevalence of tsotsi gangs is to observe the reactions of township residents to them. The spate of letters in Bantu World during May to July 1945 clearly demonstrates the massive impact that the tsotsi subculture had made on the consciousness of township residents. One Brakpan resident summed up the spirit of these letters when he commented: "The talk of the day and the question of the time is 'Botsotsi' and their effect upon human peace and morality."(114) The style, as opposed to the criminality

and gang formation associated with it, penetrated well beyond the unemployed youth constituency. One Bantu World reader estimated that "about 90 per cent of the students from the reef and Pretoria wear 'bottoms'".(115) My informants reinforced this impression. There is general consensus that during the late 1940s and 1950s most teenage boys wore tsotsis, though not all those who wore the pants could be presumed to be gangsters.(116) Tsotsitaal, petty gambling and the imitation of American style was also common to the majority of young males.(117) The participation of girls and young women in the subculture is an ambiguous issue which will be discussed at length in Chapter Four.

The best documented evidence suggesting the massive impact of tsotsi criminal gangs on the Rand can be found in township Advisory Board minutes between 1955 and 1958. Board members complained constantly about tsotsi terror, about youths out of control and police neglect. The streets of the townships and the trains were unsafe during the day, let alone at night, because of the tsotsi "menace". Residents were too scared to make official reports to the police because they were scared of tsotsi reprisals. Township residents made regular requests to the authorities to allow civil guards to operate which, the Board members seemed to agree, was the only way to combat marauding tsotsi gangs.(118) Alexandra, Sophiatown and Newclare, being freehold townships and "nobody's baby", were not



25×15

represented by Advisory Boards. This possible source of information about gangs is thus absent in these areas. Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that the tsotsi gang presence was probably even more powerful in these townships. A Bantu World editorial in 1955, for instance, commented: "At Alex Township, tsotsis have gone out of hand. Europeans and Africans walk the streets of that township after sunset, at their peril ... The people see no remedy other than to appoint civic guards, to clean the tsotsi-infested streets of their township."(119) In 1957 Captain Rocco de Villiers, an "expert" on township gangsterism, was interviewed in The Star. According to him, the tsotsi gang problem was particularly serious in Sophiatown and Newclare. He observed wryly, "I have had more shots fired at me in Newclare in one year than in all the time I was fighting in North Africa - fortunately they are bad shots."(120) There was also a clear perception amongst ANC politicians that gangsterism was rife amongst their potential urban youth constituency. In his autobiography, Moses Dlamini recalls the violent death in 1956 of his seventeen year-old cousin Abel who led a gang called the Terrors in White City. At Abel's funeral, Dlamini's father, who was a member of the Congress Youth League, asked in anguish, "How many of them have died like this ... butchering one another mercilessly for trifles? How shall our people get their freedom with the majority of our youths turned to gangsters?"(121)

According to Godfrey Moloi, who grew up in Orlando, "It was unusual to find a male teenager who wasn't in a gang." Those who escaped came from a "small fringe of 'decent' families" who tended to be churchgoing and who often sent their children to distant places to do their schooling.(122) "One way or another," observed Stan Motjuwadi, "just about every young boy was sucked into the gangs, though most of them were fairly harmless."(123) Henry Miles, who was a teenager in Alexandra in the latter half of the 1950s, confirms this: "Most of the teenagers belonged to harmless smaller gangs ... Every street-corner had a ra..i. Every street-corner had a leader and there were sort of hangers on..."(124) Nkosi and Mdlalose attest that there were numerous street-corner youth protection networks throughout the townships.(125)

Clearly, there was enormous social pressure on male teenagers to join gangs. "Even if you didn't like the gang," recalled Motjuwadi, "you were forced to join for your own protection."(126) There was a general understanding that a teenage male who lived in a particular area was a member of the gang that controlled that area. Thus, in Orlando East, "if you lived in Pirate territory you were thought to be a member of the Pirates."(127) Peggy Bellair's recollections for Sophiatown are similar. "If you grew up in a particular street and there was a gang which operated there, you would automatically become a member because all your friends were part of it. You've got to

join them. It was the obvious thing. There were some young guys who kept out of it and we called them sissies. 'Ag man, just leave him alone. He's a sissie.'"(128) Peter Magubane was never a member of the Berlins gang but he lived in the Berlin area. "If you lived in Berlin territory you were effectively a member of the gang whether you liked it or not." Young males who resisted membership were victimised. Very few youths in Berlin territory were not Berlins. According to Magubane, this pattern was common throughout the townships. "If you can't defend yourself, you become a victim."(129)

Despite the total absence of statistics on gang membership, it is possible to establish a fairly accurate impression of the size of the tsotsi subculture on the Witwatersrand. Judging from the number of catalogued gangs between 1940 and 1961, the scale of the reaction to "tsotsiism" and the extent of social pressure on township adolescents to join gangs, it seems reasonable to assert that the majority of African male youths on the Rand belonged to gangs, whether "big-league" or streetcorner <u>rasi</u>.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO

(1) Bothma, C.V., " 'n Volkekundige Ondersoek na die Aard en Ontstaans oorsake van Tsotsi-groepe en hulle Aktiwiteite soos Gevind in die Stedelike Gebied van Pretoria", MA thesis, departement van Bantoetale en Volkekunde, Universiteit van Pretoria, July 1951, p38.
(2) Bothma, MA Thesis, p30. Interestingly, this confusion is apparent in a memorandum on Amalaita gangs by S.S. Tema in 1935. He fails to distinguish between the embryonic tsotsi gangs and the Amalaitas; CPSA A1433 JC Collection, "The Amalaita menace" by S.S.Tema, 18 July 1935.
(3) For a more detailed account of the Amalaitas, see La Hausse, P, "'Mayihlome!': Towards an understanding of Amalaita gangs in Durban, c1900-1930", paper presented to the African Studies Institute seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 27 April 1987. See also Bothma, MA Thesis, pp27-30. On the issue of Amalaita rural consciousness and circumcision, see Peter Delius, "Sebatakgomo: Migrant Organisation, the ANC and the Sekhukhuneland Revolt", JSAS, Vol 15, No 4, 1990, pp369-492.
(4) For the most up-to-date analysis of the indlavini see William Beinart, "The Origins of the Indlavini: Male Associations and Migrant Labour in the Transkei", unpublished paper for forthcoming Festschrift to Philip and Iona Meyer, edited by P. McAllister, C. Manson and A. Spiegel, Cape Town 1990.
(5) Vilakazi, Absolom, Zulu Transformations, Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1962, pp76-78.
(6) Bothma, MA Thesis, p30; see also BW 2 June 1945, Readers' Forum, letter from W.N. Nzima of Lady Selbourne.
(7) Mattera 10/7/88; see also BW 2 June 1945, letter from W.N. Nzima.
(8) IAD WRAB 351/3, "A preliminary survey of juvenile gangs in Orlando", L. J. Nkosi of Orlando Boys' Unit, February 1940.
(9) IAD WRAB 351/2, letter from Orlando Residents' Association to the Manager NAD Johannesburg, 27 January 194[2].
(10) IAD WRAB 351/2, letter from Manager NAD Johannesburg to Senior Superintendent, Orlando, 24 September 1942.
(11) IAD WRAB 351/2, letter from G.S. Mabeta (Western Native Township resident) to the Manager NAD Johannesburg, 29 December 1943
(12) IAD WRAB 351/3, letter from Magistrate W.L. Marsh to Social Research Officer NAD, 14 March 1942 (see also enclosed letter from L.T. de Jager, Probation Officer); IAD WRAB 351/3, letter from Native Commissioner to the Manager NAD Johannesburg, 11 February 1942.
(13) IAD WRAB 351/3, letter from Superintendent, West Native Township, to the Manager NAD Johannesburg, 7 March 1942.
(14) IAD WRAB 351/3, letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Horak, Deputy Commissioner of Police commanding Witwatersrand Division, to the Manager NEAD and NAD Johannesburg, 12

March 1942.
(15) BW 2 June 1945, letter from W.N. Nzima.
(16) Bothma, MA Thesis, p33.
(17) Msimang, C.T., "Impact of Zulu on Tsotsitaal", South African Journal of African Languages, 7(3) July 1987, p82; Bothma, MA Thesis, p49.
(18) Bothma, MA Thesis, p50.
(19) Msimang, "Impact of Zulu", p86
(20) Interviews: Norris Nkosi, Soweto 25/9/88; Jacob Nhlapho, Johannesburg 9/5/ 89; "Peggy Bellair" (Ephraim Sinnle), Soweto 2/6/89; Henry Miles, Johannesburg 4/4/89 and 11/4/89; Stanley Motjuwadi, Johannesburg 29/9/88; "McCoy" Mdlalose, Johannesburg 20/4/89.
(21) Bothma, MA Thesis, p2
(22) Interview, Peter Magubane, Johannesburg 7/9/88.
(23) Nkosi 25/9/88; Motjuwadi 29/9/88; see also Bothma, MA Thesis, p39.
(24) Nkosi 25/9/88
(25) Miles 4/4/89
(26) Motjuwadi 29/9/88
(27) Miles 4/4/89
(28) Nkosi 25/9/88
(29) Mdlalose 20/4/89; Motjuwadi 29/9/88
(30) BW 7 April 1945, letter from Mr J.D.N. of Benoni.
(31) BW 2 June 1945
(32) BW 7 July 1945; see also BW 28 April 1945, letter from Mr Pooe of Sophiatown.
(33) Miles 4/4/ 89 and 11/4/89
(34) Peggy Bellair 2/6/89
(35) Mdlalose 20/4/89; Nhlapho 9/5/89; Magubane 7/9/88.
(36) Nkosi 25/9/88; Magubane 7/9/88; Motjuwadi 22/9/88
(37) Nkosi 25/9/88
(38) Motjuwadi 22/9/88
(39) Motjuwadi 22/9/88
(40) Nkosi 25/9/88
(41) Miles 4/4/89 and 11/4/89
(42) Motjuwadi 22/9/88
(43) Nkosi 25/9/88
(44) Peggy Bellair 2/6/89; Motjuwadi 22/9/88; Mattera 10/7/88; Magubane 7/9/88.
(45) See Chapter Four.
(46) Mattera 10/7/88; Miles 4/4/89 and 11/4/89.
(47) Nhlapho 9/5/89; Motjuwadi 22/9/88; Nkosi 25/9/88; Mattera 10/7/88; Miles 4/4/89 and 11/4/89; interview, Ellen Kuzwayo, Soweto 1/6/89.
(48) Mattera 10/7/88
(49) Bothma, MA Thesis, p39; Henry Miles uses the term frequently.
(50) Bloke Modisane, Blame Me On History, pp67-68.
(51) Miles 4/4/89 and 11/4/89
(52) Motjuwadi 22/9/88; IAD WRAB 351/3, "A preliminary survey of gangs in Orlando" by L.J. Nkosi of the Orlando Boys' Unit, February 1940.
(53) Mdlalose 20/4/89
(54) Bothma, MA Thesis, pp31-32.

(55) IAD WRAB 351/3, "A preliminary survey of gangs in Orlando" by L.J. Nkosi of the Orlando Boys'Unit, February 1940.
(56) Drum October 1951, feature headed "Inside Johannesburg's Underworld"; Moloi 26/3/88; Motjuwadi 22/9/88; Peggy Bellair 2/6/89
(57) IAD WRAB 351/1, letter from Deputy Manager NAD Johannesburg to the Manager NAD Johannesburg; Rand Daily Mail, letter to the editor signed "Once Beaten Up", 9 December 1955; Drum, April 1955; Mattera 10/7/88; Motjuwadi 22/9/88.
(58) IAD WRAB 351/1, minutes of conference between Deputy Commissioner SAP, Witwatersrand, Area Officers, members of the Non-European Affairs Committee and members of the Advisory Board, Johannesburg 14 December 1955.
(59) GCP 23 July 1961.
(60) IAD WRAB 351/3, letter from W.J.P. Carr, ManagerNAD Johannesburg, to Senior Superintendent, Orlando, 23 July 1959; GCP 1 November 1959; Thwala 21/9/88.
(61) GCP 23 July 1961.
(62) Peggy Bellair 2/6/89; Mdlalose 20/4/89; Kort Boy in Sophiatown Speaks, 1986.
(63) IAD WRAB 351/3 , letter from Magistrate W.L. Marsh to Social Research Officer NAD Johannesburg, 14 March 1942.
(64) Drum May 1952; BW 6 November 1954; Rand Daily Mail, letter to the editor, 9 December 1955; Mattera 1979; Mattera 10/7/88; Motjuwadi 22/9/88; Mdlalose 20/4/89; Peggy Bellair 2/6/89.
(65) Drum May 1952; Mattera 1979; Mattera 10/7/88; Magubane 7/9/88; Motjuwadi 22/9/88; Mdlalose 20/4/89.
(66) GCP 15 December 1963.
(67) Drum June 1950.
(68) Mattera 10/7/88; Nhlapho 9/5/89
(69) BW 6 November 1954; Magubane 7/9/88.
(70) Mattera 10/7/88
(71) Motjuwadi 22/9/88
(72) Mattera 10/7/88
(73) IAD WRAB 351/3: letter from Native Commissioner to the Manager NAD Johannesburg, 11 February 1942; letter from Secretary of Advisory Board (AB) to the Manager NAD Johannesburg, 7 March 1942; letter from the Superintendant, WNT, to the Manager NAD Johannesburg, 7 March 1942; letter from Magistrate W.L. Marsh to Social Research Officer NAD Johannesburg, 14 March 1942.
(74) GCP 26 July 1959; GCP 13 November 1960.
(75) Drum May 1952; Drum May 1953; GCP 26 July 1959; BW 7 November 1953; Manana 21/9/88; Motjuwadi 22/9/88; Nkosi 25/9/88; Miles 4/4/89.
(76) Drum May 1953.
(77) Drum May 1953; GCP 26 July 1959.
(78) GCP 26 July 1959.
(79) GCP 28 September 1958; GCP 6 December 1959; The Star 8 May 1968; IAD WRAB 79/27/27, Gesondheidsraad vir Buitestedelike Gebiede: Alexandrase Plaaslike Gebiede, Verslag tot 30 September 1958; Manana 21/9/88; Motjuwadi

22/9/88.
(80) Miles 11/4/89.
(81) GCP 28 September 1958; GCP 16 August 1959; Nkosi 25/9/88.
(82) GCP 23 August 1959.
(83) GCP 26 June 1960.
(84) The Star 8 May 1962; Motjuwadi 22/9/88; Nkosi 25/9/88; Miles 11/4/89.
(85) Drum May 1952; Drum May 1953.
(86) Drum June 1955
(87) Mattera 10/7/88.
(88) BW 7 November 1953
(89) BW 7 November 1953; Drum June 1955; Rand Daily Mail, letter to the editor, 9 December 1955; Motjuwadi 22/9/88.
(90) IAD WRAB 351/3, letter from Superintendent, Orlando West No 2, to Senior Superintendent, 1 July 1957.
(91) GCP 28 February 1960.
(92) GCP 21 May 1961.
(93) Drum October 1951
(94) GCP 22 June 1958
(95) Drum April 1955; IAD WRAB 351/1, letter from Deputy Manager to Manager NAD Johannesburg 29 October 1953.
(96) GCP 4 March 1956
(97) GCP 28 February 1960; interview, Gertrude Thwala, Johannesburg 21/9/88; see also Mbulelo Mzamane, "My Other Cousin, Sitha", Staffrider, Vol 7, No 3 and 4, 1988.
(98) Thwala 21/9/88
(99) Drum May 1952; GCP 6 July 1958; Motjuwadi 22/9/88.
(100) Moses Dlamini, Robben Island, pp88-99.
(101) IAD WRAB 351/1, letter from Deputy Manager to the Manager NAD Johannesburg, 29 October 1953; Drum April 1955.
(102) IAD WRAB 285/7 Report on East Native Township by Mrs Leballo, social worker for Juvenile Employment Section, 5 April 1961.
(103) BW 14 August 1954;Rand Daily Mail, letter to th editor, 9 December 1955; Africa! No 15, May 1955; GCP 13 November 1960.
(104) Africa! No 15, May 1955; BW 24 September 1955.
(105) GCP 28 September 1958.
(106) GCP 24 January 1960.
(107) GCP 13 November 1960.
(108) GCP 18 June 1961.
(109) Drum May 1953.
(110) GCP 3 May 1959.
(111) Drum November 1952; Drum March 1953.
(112) Drum November 1953.
(113)Drum November 1954.
(114) BW 26 May 1945, letter from T.B. Masekoameng of Brakpan.
(115) BW 2 June 1945, letter from W.N. Nzima.
(116) Interview, Kay Manana, Johannesburg 21/9/88; interview, Bum Thabethe, Alexandra 18/1/90; Nkosi 25/9/88; Nhlapho 9/5/89; Mdlalose 20/4/89.
(117) Nkosi 25/9/88; Mdlalose 20/4/89; Motjuwadi 22/9/88; Miles 11/4/89; Manana 21/9/88.

(118) See particularly the fo g: IAD WRAB 351/1, extract from minutes of Jabavu ..J . eting, 8 September 1955; IAD WRAB 351/1, minutes of conference between Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Witwatersrand, Area Officers, members of the Non-European Affairs Committee and members of the AB, Johannesburg 14 December 1955; IAD WRAB 351/2, extract from minutes of West Native Township AB meetings, 7 August 1956 and 15 August 1956; IAD WRAB 351/3, letter from W.J. P. Carr, Manager, NEAD Johannesburg, to NEAD, 1 October 1957 in which Carr informs NEAD of a meeting sheduled for 4 October 1957 with the Executive of the Joint AB (the only item on the agenda is "Suggested steps to deal with young 'tsotsies' in the townships); IAD WRAB 351/3, extract of minutes of Moroka AB meeting, 21 December 1957; IAD WRAB 351/3, extract of minutes of Moroka AB meeting, 8 February 1958; IAD WRAB 351/3, extract of minutes of Orlando AB meeting, 9 December 1958.
(119) BW, 29 October 1955, editorial.
(120) The Star 21 January 1957.
(121) Dlamini, Robben Island, p99; the whole career of Abel is interesting as a case study of a tsotsi, pp88-99.
(122) Moloi 26/3/88
(123) Motjuwadi 22/9/88
(124) Miles 4/4/89 and 11/4/89
(125) Mdlalose 20/4/89; Nkosi 25/9/88
(126) Motjuwadi 22/9/88
(127) Thwala 21/9/88
(128) Peggy Bellair 2/6/89
(129) Magubane 7/9/88. See also IAD WRAB 351/1, letter from Abner Sekoane to the W.J.P. Carr, Manager NAD Johannesburg, received 18 September 1959. Here is a direct transcript of the letter which was scrawled on a scrap of paper:

"Mr Car

Apach
Berlin
Black Swan
Pa Ret [Pirates?]
Abner Sekoane

I was a gang star. They say I must all so kill pepls so I say I will never kill any pepls They wan I say that they take my pass They say I must be one of them Then I say I will never do that
Abner Sekoane
2214 Orlando east."

CHAPTER THREE:

# ANTI-SOCIAL BANDITS
## Culture, Hegemony and the Tsotsi Subculture on the Witwatersrand during the 1940s and 1950s

I

With a few minor exceptions, the tsotsi gangs which roamed the Witwatersrand during the 1940s and 1950s never involved themselves in "politics". Because they were almost by definition unemployed they were also marginal to the struggle between capital and labour. A study of the tsotsi subculture is therefore in danger of becoming politically irrelevant, a colourful sociological study detached from broader social power struggles. This paper attempts to offset this danger from the outset by broadening the definition of "political" to embrace culture and ideology. I will place the tsotsi subculture within the context of the struggle for cultural hegemony in South Africa. Not only did the tsotsi subculture occupy a significant niche within the cultural fabric of urban South Africa, but, I will argue, it represented a powerful counter-force to the cultural hegemonic status quo.(1)

Although tsotsis never challenged state power in any direct

way, it could be argued that they represented a threat to the consensus culture more profoundly than did political organisations with clear political programmes. Although organisations such as the ANC and the Congress Youth League challenged hegemonic cultural notions of racial domination and supremacy, they simultaneously embraced most of the values of the dominant western culture throughout the 1940s and 1950s: patriarchal family structures; reverance of education; disapproval of drugs, alcohol and promiscuity; adherence to the law; respect for private property (though of course this did not apply to the Communists who had penetrated these organisations); revulsion of violence; a sense of living for the future rather than for the here-and-now; the work ethic. It was against these cultural elements that the tsotsis rebelled. They created for themselves an insulated alternative culture which was considered "unnatural", an anathema to both blacks and whites, both working class and bourgeoisie.

In this section I will attempt to place the concept of subculture into a theoretical framework, drawing extensively on British marxist subcultural theory, particularly theory generated at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS). Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts, all associated with the BCCCS, articulate probably the clearest and most coherent marxist approach to youth subcultures in their seminal 1976 article, "Subculture, Cultures and Class", published in a

book edited by Hall and Jefferson entitled Resistance through Rituals.(2) Clarke et al insist that subcultures can best be explained through class analysis; they attack a wave of post-war subcultural theory which dumps class in favour of generational analysis. Many of these post-war theorists argue that as the standard of living of the working class in Britain rose, and as consumerism gradually penetrated the working class, generation replaced class as the central antagonism in British society. Subcultures are seen as a product of the new consumer age in which youths suddenly have money to spend and assert their independence from the older generation. Clarke et al reject this argument on the grounds that subcultures are still basically a working class phenomenon and that the improved standard of living of the working class has been exaggerated. In order to understand subcultures, they argue, you first have to look at the parent working class culture; subcultures ultimately arise as an attempt to "resolve the contradictions" within the subordinate culture. Although they acknowledge that there are vital generation-specific factors mediating the experience of working class youth, working class youths share essential baseline experiences with their entire class. These shared experiences, they argue, should be the starting point for any analysis of subculture. Generational factors are then important in shaping the specific responses of working class youth to cultural and economic subordination.

British subcultural theorists such as Phil Cohen, Clarke et al and, more recently, Brake, Humphries and Hebdige have been concerned to examine the relationship between subcultures and the dominant hegemonic order (3). Hegemony is the dynamic, shifting consensus culture which emerges out of the clash between ruling class and working class cultures. Hegemony ultimately reinforces ruling class control by absorbing and neutralising elements of resistance within subordinate cultures. But hegemony is not as instrumental a concept as that of "ideology": whereas ideology is generally regarded as a construction of the ruling class engendering a "false consciousness" amongst the working class, hegemony is a constantly adapting consensus culture forged out of diverse real and valid lived experiences confronting one another. "A lived hegemony is always a process," argues Raymond Williams, "...it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance."(4). The working class accepts and gives consent to numerous elements of ruling class culture and thereby allows for hegemony but elements of working class culture may remain confrontational and hostile to ruling class culture, elements which, if they become too powerful, can create a hegemonic crisis. In such cases, these confrontational elements either have to be absorbed and neutralised by the hegemonic order or, as a last resort, the ruling class has to fall back on the coercive might of the state in order to preserve the social hierarchy. The

trade union movement is a good example of a working class cultural element which has the potential to cause a hegemonic crisis. In advanced western democracies trade unions have generally been culturally absorbed but there have certainly been important instances in which coercive force has been required to subdue them. The concept of hegemony was, of course, devised to explain bourgeois domination in advanced western democracies, societies in which consent is forged primarily through ideological and cultural means rather than through coercion. Nevertheless, this does not suggest that coercion is absent in the forging of hegemony. Social consent is a far cry from social contentment; consent can involve resignation to the status quo. Fears for security and safety can be as significant as cultural cooptation and absorption. In other words, elements which are hostile to, and aware of, cultural and economic subordination, such as workers with a "working class consciousness", can still participate in, and help to constitute, the hegemonic culture.(5)

Clarke et al, Humphries, Hebdige and Brake all broadly agree with Phil Cohen's contention that "the latent function of subculture is this: to express and resolve, albeit 'magically', the contradictions which remain hidden and unresolved in the parent culture."(6) In other words, through an appropriation of certain styles and rituals, working class subcultures challenge, or deal with, working class commonplaces such as exclusion from political power

structures, hard work for low pay, no ownership of property, drab clothing, crowded family units, limited leisure time, etc. In addition, working class youths face generation-specific problems such as schooling and youth unemployment. The resolutions to contradictions are "magical" in that they fail to tackle the real source of the contradictions; the resolutions involve creating an artificial and insulated environment which escapes rather than fights those contradictions. For instance, the fierce territoriality of subcultures can be seen as a magical solution to the lack of ownership; subcultural clothing styles can be seen as a magical solution to exclusion from expensive bourgeois clothing styles. Subcultures also create alternative status structures based on, for instance, criminal and physical prowess. This is necessary because of their definitionally low status and exclusion from channels of upward mobility, such as good education, within the hegemonic culture.(7)

Subcultures express themselves through their style and ritual. What they express is a denial of consent, a rejection of the hegemonically determined "natural". They challenge hegemony precisely through rejecting consent. Although they are largely powerless and unwilling to fight the material contradictions in society, they challenge the hegemonic cultural consent which reinforces and reproduces those material contradictions; they refuse to let the hegemonic order airbrush those contradictions out of

existence. As Hebdige puts it: "Style in subculture is ... pregnant with significance. Its transformations go 'against nature', interrupting the process of 'normalization'. As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the 'silent majority', which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus."(8) It is not so much the ruling class culture against which the subcultures define themselves as against the historically forged hegemony.

Subcultural styles draw on both working class and ruling class imagery. Subcultural images are rarely alien. They become "unnatural" through their contextual use. In fact, the power of their symbolism depends on their familiarity. All cultural images are symbolic; a crucial element of the hegemonic project involves the creation of social conformity in the symbolic comprehension of those images. Subcultural style involves the subversion and deflection of the "natural" meanings of familiar images. Clarke et al provide an excellent example.

> The bowler hat, pin-stripe suit and rolled umbrella do not, in themselves, mean 'sobriety', 'respectability', bourgeois-man-at-work. But so powerful is the social code which surround these commodities that it would be difficult for a working-class lad to turn up for work dressed like that without, either, aspiring to a 'bourgeois' image or clearly seeming to take the piss out of the image. This trivial example shows that it is possible to expropriate, as well as appropriate, the social meanings which they seem 'naturally' to have: or, by combining them with something else (the pin-stripe suit with brilliant red socks or white running shoes, for example), to change or inflect their meaning. (9)

The ruling class and the working class, then, are involved in an ongoing struggle to constitute the hegemonic culture. The cards are always stacked in favour of the ruling class, of course, because of its control over media, property, commodity production and, in the last resort, the means of coercion. The hegemonic culture is a dynamic and constantly contested terrain: there are elements of both working class and bourgeois culture which cannot automatically be absorbed and neutralised, elements which can lead to a crisis of consent. Ultimately, consent involves acceptance (even if resigned acceptance) and compromise. Although coercive power always lurks behind the hegemonic order, western bourgeois democracies depend on that cultural consent for their survival. Working class youth subcultures, although experiencing broadly similar conditions to those of the rest of their parent culture, withdraw consent. The subcultures, though unwilling and/or unable to challenge the material contradictions in society in an overtly political way, highlight social contradictions through their style and ritual. Formal, legal political activity is itself generally viewed as a form of cultural collaboration. Subcultural anger and ridicule is often directed as much against the parent culture as against ruling class culture because the parent culture, though subordinate, participates in, and gives consent to, the hegemonic cultural order.

The greatest weakness of British marxist subcultural theory is that it fails to give adequate attention to non-class social cleavages in explaining the subcultural phenomenon. Race, ethnicity, gender and generation, though dealt with sensitively and seriously, tend to be subordinated to class in a hierarchy of explanatory importance. The result is that key points of social identification and cleavage are often underplayed in analysis. Marxist subcultural theory provides an extremely useful point of departure for any subcultural anaysis. It does, however, have severe limitations. It generates a necessary but inadequate set of analytic questions. Social categories such as gender and generation have to be allowed an autonomous analytic status in order to broaden our understanding of urban subcultures. In this thesis, then, while accepting that the BCCCS tradition has generated the most incisive tools of subcultural analysis to date, I attempt to build in important autonomous cross-class dimensions which would be obscured by a rigid base-superstructure model.

Apart from pointing out its broader inadequacies, it is also important to assess how appropriate British marxist subcultural theory is to the specific case study of South Africa in the 1940s and 1950s. How useful is all this theory in analysing the tsotsi subculture of Johannesburg? The South African case involves two significant departures from this British subcultural model. First, the South African state has historically been far more dependant on

the coercive rather than the cultural elements of hegemony for social control when compared to western bourgeois democracies. Second, and most obviously, South Africa has a particularly powerful racial dimension which intersects with, and mediates, class. In other words, the very notion of a working class subculture becomes somewhat awkward, at least without careful adaptation.

Does hegemony, and therefore cultural resistance, lose all meaning in the South Arican context? I would argue that it is dangerous, particularly before the 1960s, to underestimate the extent to which the hierarchical order was maintained through the cultural elements of hegemony. The South African police force and defense force were still relatively small while the permanently urbanised African population was already substantial. The strictly regimented compound system, of course, contributed to the ruling class's coercive apparatus but this only really involved the control of migrants in the mining sector. The majority of township Africans hated the government and the apartheid system and yet they also acquiesced, albeit often resignedly, to the hegemonic cultural power. They gave their consent to non-violence, to the work ethic, to private ownership and the sanctification of private property. The tsotsi subculture provided opposition, arguably the only significant opposition, to cultural hegemony. They rejected the passivity and consent of older generation Africans. So, although the tsotsis were "anti-

social" and "apolitical", a study of South African urban resistance in the 1940s and 1950s would be incomplete without paying attention to them. Following Gramsci, it is necessary to view "all expressions of anger, despair and alienation in class society as potentially erosive of ideological hegemony."(10)

Tsotsis were almost exclusively African (though many "coloureds" participated in the subculture in Sophiatown where they were residentially integrated with Africans). Whereas subcultural boundaries were fairly clearly defined in racial terms, class definition was more ambiguous. Broadly, the tsotsi phenomenon could be described as a working class subculture. But class categories cannot be applied too strictly in defining the subculture; clearly, children of the small urban petty bourgeoisie (minor landlords, shop-owners, clerks, teachers, ministers) often participated in gangs or adhered to the wider tsotsi style.(11) It would be more appropriate to see the subculture as a phenomenon of the township, or what Mattera and others have called "the ghetto".(12) The township itself has to be seen as the complex interweaving of class and racial subordination in South Africa. The townships were segregated and controlled residences for the African working class which serviced urban capitalist enterprises. Class and racial spatial separation, therefore, provides a crucial context in understanding the parent culture of the tsotsi subculture. In dealing with the issue of class

boundaries, two important facts should be borne in mind about the township petty bourgeoisie: first, it was extremely small and, second, it was spacially interwoven with the working class and often indistinguishable in material terms.(13) The children of, for instance, standowners or teachers shared the same streets as working class children; they too were likely to become involved in local street gangs. Don Mattera's father was a relatively well-off standowner in Sophiatown yet this did not inhibit Mattera's active involvement in a gang called the Vultures.(14) The children most likely to be insulated from the tsotsi subculture came from a heavily christianised fringe of the township communities which emphasised education, nuclear family life and christian morality. This element was often, but not necessarily, petty bourgeois. Because of this emphasis on the nuclear family, mothers tended to be full-time housewives even if this entailed material deprivation. The children therefore received greater parental supervision than the average township child and were kept in school at virtually any cost. The extent to which children were isolated from tsotsi life depended to a large extent on the active intervention of parents.(15) Parents from this "decent fringe", as Godfrey Moloi puts it, often sent their children to schools in the countryside in order to isolate them from tsotsi influences.(16)

Having assessed the significance of class and race in the

identity of the tsotsi subculture, it is important also to address ethnicity and gender as components of subcultural identity. Ethnicity, it appears, played no recognisable part in tsotsi gang identity. Gang members often came from widely diverse ethnic backgrounds and communicated with one another in the Afrikaans-based tsotsitaal.(17) Occasionally gangs were ethnically homogenous; gangs were generally street-based and parents of the same ethnic background tended to cluster together wherever possible, particularly in the less regulated freehold townships. Nevertheless, ethnically homogenous tsotsi gangs emphasised their urban identity; they quickly adopted the style and language of the wider urban youth subculture.(18) In fact, "urban-ness" was central to the tsotsi self-image. Tsotsis looked down upon those who had come in from the countryside; they referred to the newcomers scornfully as "moegoe", "worsie" or "bari". Boys who came in from the countryside were given a hard time by the tsotsis; "moegoes" had to become tsotsis themselves or remain victims.

Sexuality, unlike ethnicity, did play a crucial role in tsotsi subcultural identity. Although prestige and status spheres were male dominated it would be inaccurate to describe the tsotsi subculture as exclusively male. I argue later that females played an important, though subordinate, role within the subculture. Although females were present, the exploration and expression of male sexuality were

central to the tsotsi subculture. The gangs, which formed the core of the wider subculture, were almost exclusively male and the clothing style associated with the subculture was worn by males. It was extremely unusual to find a female referred to as a tsotsi. Gender relations and the construction of subcultural sexuality are explored in depth in Chapter Four.

The tsotsi subculture was very much a youth phenomenon. "Youth", however, was, and remains, a term bandied about by administrators and academics with very little precision. The term is hazy on both ends of the age scale; "youths" ho " somewhere between childhood and adulthood. In this thesis, I use the term in the following way. On the lower end, youths are becoming too old for primary school and, perhaps more importantly, reach puberty. They start to become sexually active and exploratory. Youths are generally restless, unsettled and have few responsibilities. On the upper end, young people cease to be "youths" when they begin to find jobs more easily (see the discussion on this issue in Chapter One) and start to think about marriage and family responsibilities. Male youths range roughly between 14 and 25 years of age; female youths are likely to be 13 to 21 years of age. This definition of youth would accord well with the age boundaries of the tsotsi subculture. It was unusual to find a tsotsi who was in his late twenties. They would "settle down, get a job, get married". Older gang members gradually

moved out of the subculture and the void was filled by young "up-and-comings". Within the gangs there was age hierarchy; the older members were generally the leaders but they reached an age at which they were expected to "move on".(19) Some of the bigger gangs, most notably the Spoilers and Msomis of Alexandra, had leaders who were well into their thirties and forties but this was extremely unusual. The Spoilers and Msomi leaders were not really thought of as "tsotsis"; they were big criminals, while rank-and-file members were youths and tsotsis.(20)

Whether the hierarchisation of class is accepted or not, what remains powerful in the BCCCS approach is its insistence on examining the parent culture as a starting point to any analysis of subculture. Once this base line has been established, the focus can shift to the specific generational factors which mediate the experiences of youth. In the South African context (and possibly in other urban contexts as well) it is useful to understand the parent culture not unproblematically as the working class culture but as the ghetto culture, a formulation which reflects all the tensions and contradictions of an extraordinarily complex urban environment. But this "ghetto culture" is particularly difficult to define. In the last decade or so, South African sociologists and historians have taken great pains to disaggregate African urban culture, to demonstrate and explain its diversity, incoherence and internal tensions.(21) Divisions, which

are still apparent to this day, abounded in the 1940s and 1950s: between ethnicities, generations and sexes, between tenants and landlords, between migrants and the permanently urbanised, employed and unemployed, skilled and unskilled, established urban dwellers and recently urbanised, traditionalists and christians ... This process of disaggregation has been vital. Nevertheless, it is necessary to draw out the common threads as well, to create some sense of a consensus ghetto culture. What cultural and ideological elements were broadly regarded as "natural" to the diverse ghetto culture? It is an important question because it is precisely these elements against which the tsotsis defined themselves, the elements which were regarded as "straight". And the essence of any subculture lies in its particular definition of "straight".

Urban youths, of course, shared many material experiences with their parents: overcrowding and poor facilities, low wages, constant pass law and beer raids, an absence of meaningful political representation, the humiliations of racism. But they also had to cope with specific generational experiences: extraordinarily high youth unemployment, poor and inadequate schooling, daily parental absence and sheer boredom.(22) This mixture of experiences, both in common with the subordinate parent culture and specific to youth, lies at the heart of the tsotsi subcultural response, a response which, in almost every way, defined itself in antagonism to consensus cultural

values. In a deliberate attempt to smudge contradictions and diversity, common ideological threads in mainstream Witwatersrand ghetto culture throughout the 1940s and 1950s can be listed as follows: adherence to the law (albeit often reluctantly and with striking exceptions in the cases of pass and beer brewing laws); respect for private property; rejection of violence; acceptance of the work ethic; respect for schooling and education; patriarchal family arrangements; respect for elders; prudent living for the future; adherence to religion whether in the form of christianity, ancestor worship or hybrid faiths. The most common languages spoken were Sotho, Zulu and Xhosa but English and Afrikaans were also spoken fairly widely. Township residents generally wore cheap and sober western-style clothes (Amalaitas and blanket-clad Russians have to be seen as distinctive subcultures in themselves). These common elements of ghetto culture provide a context for an explanation of tsotsi cultural reversal.

## II

### The Law, Criminality and Private Property

Open defiance of the law was "natural" to the tsotsi sub-culture. Crime was more than simply a material issue as Tourikis argues(23); it became a central sub-cultural theme during the 1940s and 1950s. "The resorting to crime is a

way of attempting to get one's own back against a hostile society in whose functioning one plays no part," commented Johanesburg Native Affairs Department menager W.J.P Carr about tsotsis in a 1957 memorandum.(24) In 1953 Ellen Hellman commented with alarm that the increasing lawlessness of urban youth involved "...a rejection of moral norms, which amounts to a repudiation of the rule of law." In the same memorandum she continued:

> The growing prevalence of an attitude which condones theft from a European and describes it by the vernacular "work" points to the emergence of a tradition of this nature. Certainly the various types of gangs, usually referred to as "tsotsi" gangs, which are becoming conspicuous in the urban african scene, are developing a tradition of criminality and of idealization of gangsters."(25)

Tsotsi crime involved a brazen openness which was not necessarily concerned with maximising criminal efficiency. In one of its many focuses on tsotsi crime, Drum Magazine observed:

> The tsotsi and his fellow-thugs are more familiar to the Johannesburger than the policeman, they parade themselves openly and arrogantly on the streets, dress in their conspicuous 'uniform' and with little fear of the law." (26)

In 1958, Golden City Post described the Co-Operatives gang of Kliptown as a "cluster of teenagers between 15 and 19 [who] have formed their own 'co-operative enterprise' of robbery and assault conducted under the nose of the police."(27) Throughout the 1950s tsotsi gangs were responsible for numerous public sexual assaults and brazen armed robberies in residents' houses.(28)

In some ways, defiance of the law was an area of cultural commonality with the parent ghetto culture, particularly in the defiance of beer brewing and pass laws. When their parents defied the law and the hegemonic status quo, the tsotis would happily cooperate. Tsotsis often assisted in the illegal domestic beer brewing industry, particularly as lookouts. Numerous tsotsis were passless and constantly evading the law.(29) "'Getting by' without a pass is an indication of skill," observed Ellen Hellman. "Going to gaol for beer-brewing is bad luck. Hence going to gaol altogether tends to lose its moral stigma."(30) There also tended to be very little moral censure for tsotsis who robbed from whites. But only criminal subcultures and gangs were prepared to put such activity into practice. Parents also tended not to question their tsotsi sons on the source of goods and income they would bring into the household. Can Themba, in trying to describe the average struggling township resident, writes:

> ...This is not really you, the criminal, the delinquent tsotsi.
> More like you is the concerned animal who consents to let your children bring home, nights, mysterious bales of stuff about which questions are not asked. Or you, when you accept the purchase of goods at the back-door - at half-price when you know darned well they were not obtained from the legal train.(31)

The attitude of the tsotsi subculture to the law, then, differed from that of its parent culture in two distinct ways. First, of course, most victims of tsotsi criminal activity were ordinary African township residents. In other

words tsotsis defied the law where it actually gave protection to the average township resident. Consequently, tsotsis were generally hated and feared. Second, tsotsis displayed an arrogant and courageous open defiance of the law which went well beyond anything in the parent culture. In some areas, breaking the law was natural to the parent culture but lawbreakers generally weighed up risks carefully and never drew attention to themselves. For the tsotsis the Defiance Campaign was no big deal. They had been defying the law for years.(32)

Crime and gangsterism were glorified by tsotsis. Their styles of dressing, speaking and behaviour were heavily influenced by gangster images in movies, books and comics. This will be dealt with in more detail later. What is significant at this point is their admiration for, and idolisation of gangsterism. Anthony Samson, for instance, describes an outing to a "non-European" cinema during the early 1950s showing the popular Street With No Name. The tsotsis, who represented the major part of the audience, jeered at the FBI and cheered for the arch villain, Stiles. "The scene shifted to the gangsters' hideout. A hush from the audience. Richard Widmark appeared in one corner. A shriek from the house. 'Stiles! Attaboy! Go it, Stiles!'" In one scene, a short gangster kills a night watchman with a knife and a tsotsi in the audience shouted "Kort Boy!" (Kort Boy was a Reef gangster famous for his skills with a knife who ended up serving eighteen years in jail for

murder). Finally, "Stiles was shot dead by the FBI. The audience groaned, as the FBI took over."(33) As early as 1940, Lucas Nkosi, a member of the Orlando Boys' Unit, pointed to the idolisation of screen gangsters by local young gang members. He also noted that they idolised real gangsters such as the notorious William Goosen who had escaped from prison. The tsotsis followed Goosen's progress eagerly in the newspapers and pretended to be him in their games.(34) Younger boys hero-worshipped the older and more experienced tsotsis as well as the adult criminals with whom they came into contact.(35) "... Even play groups consisting of youngsters under the age of 12, model themselves on adult criminal gangs ...," observed sociologist C.V. Bothma in 1953.(36) "Criminals and violent types are treated like Hollywood film stars in the townships," grumbled Captain Rocco deVilliers, an "expert on township gangsterism", in an interview with The Star in 1957.(37)

Tsotsis regarded a jail sentence as a status symbol. Not only was it proof of substantial criminal activity, but it also meant coming into contact with other high-status criminals. P.Q. Vundla, a prominent Advisory Board member, explained this to members of the South African Police Force in 1955. "Many of these boys don't fear to go to gaol, if they have been to gaol, they are deemed to be heroes."(38) Boston Snyman, who eventually became a member of the Msomis in the late 1950s recalls, in his earlier days, being

impressed by the words of a big time gangster: "A thug gets his confirmation behind bars, you must go to jail for a genuine offence or a frame up. When you come out from the can you can pronounce yourself a gangster."(39)

The tsotsis had no respect for private property. They considered themselves entitled to anything they could lay their hands on. Can Themba describes the activities of tsotsis on the trains:

> There is little method in the operations of these criminals. Many pickpockets just put their hands into your pocket and take what they want. More likely than not you will not feel anything as you struggle for breath in the crowd. If you do, what matter? They out-brave you and threaten you with violence. The younger pickpockets go down on their knees, cut a hole into your trousers with a razor blade, and then let slide into their hands whatever comes forth.
>
> But the true terror for train users comes from the rough-house thugs who hold people up at the point of a knife or gun, or simply rob and beat up passengers. The fear among passengers is so deep that some people don't even want to admit that they have been robbed. And pay days - Fridays, month-ends, from half-past four in the afternoon - are the devil's birthdays. (40)

There is some evidence that some of the better organised gangs, particularly in Sophiatown, were fairly scrupulous in selecting their victims. They tended, it would seem, to concentrate on white and state targets rather than on residents from their own community.(41) Even for the more scrupulous gangs, however, this became increasingly difficult as security was systematically stepped up in the white areas throughout the 1950s.(42)

Another common tsotsi activity was vandalism. They would

often throw stones at houses or other property for no other reason than a minor grudge, or for no reason at all.(42)

Tsotsi gangs were fiercely territorial. Gangs fought each other frequently to retain control of streets or areas.(44) Peter Tourikis explains this in purely material terms: gangs competed to establish criminal monopolies over particular areas.(45) Although there is some truth in this formulation, it fails to accommodate the subcultural dimension of the issue. Phil Cohen's assertion that "territoriality appears as a magical way of expressing ownership" is more helpful in this respect.(46) African urban youths, experiencing the denial of conventional legal ownership, carved out their exclusive territories according to their own rights of ownership. This was a central concern for tsotsi gangs, from the big time Americans who sought to be "Kings of Sophiatown" down to the insignificant street-corner gangs who fought for "ownership" of their streets as though their lives depended on it.(47) It was as much an issue of prestige and dignity as one of material need. So ownership was important to them, but it was an ownership based on physical strength and cunning rather than on legal codes.

Violence

Violence was very much a way of life for the tsotsis. Most of the smaller, poorer street-corner gangs would confine themselves to inter-gang fist-fights or knife fights and

the occasional mugging.(48) But violence could become much more serious than this, particularly amongst the bigger, better equipped gangs. Murders, assaults and rapes carried out by youths were daily occurrences. This is reflected in Johannesburg Juvenile Court statistics. The following table represents cases of murder, assault and rape which appeared before the Juvenile Court between 1949 and 1960.

| | Murder | Attempted murder | Assault | Rape and attempted rape |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1949 | 20 | - | 135 | 33 |
| 1950 | 34 | - | 125 | 57 |
| 1951 | 26 | 4 | 126 | 43 |
| 1952 | 18 | 5 | 53 | 24 |
| 1953 | 25 | 7 | 225 | 98 |
| 1954 | 39 | 3 | 264 | 106 |
| 1955 | 26 | 13 | 342 | 118 |
| 1956 | 8 | 22 | 379 | 32 |
| 1957 | 36 | 5 | 323 | 57 |
| 1958 | 41 | 10 | 312 | 99 |
| 1959 | 40 | 12 | 381 | 71 |
| 1960 | 23 | 5 | 228 | 62 |

Between 1936 and 1939, before the tsotsi gangs started to predominate, a total of 6 murder, 253 assault and 11 rape cases appeared before the Juvenile Court.(49) Although these figures are not entirely reliable, they do indicate a substantial escalation in youth violence during the late 1940s and 1950s.

During the 1950s the bigger gangs were extremely well armed. The Americans, Berliners and Vultures of Sophiatown were involved in regular gun battles.(50) The Torch Gang, which operated generally in Orlando, roved around "armed with revolvers, crow-bars, knives and clubs".(51) The Spoilers of Alexandra apparently owned an entire warehouse

in which they kept their ammunition.(52) In the early 1950s, revolvers could be bought on the black market for 5 Pounds and quality knives for 3s 6d.(53)

Gang warfare was probably the most common form of violent activity for the tsotsis. Wars regularly broke out over territorial competition, rivalry for women, personal insults, gambling debts. In order to assert their authority or carry out revenge, bigger gangs would often carry out horrific ritual violence. Such as a case in which an 18 year old Orlando youth who was kidnapped by a band of about 30 youths and hacked to death at his home in front of his grandmother.(54) Or another case in which a young man was hacked to death by the Mashalashala Gang of Benoni because he strayed into their territory wearing a red beret and was mistakenly identified as a member of a rival gang.(55) The most startling example of all occurred in the Johannesburg Fort in 1958. After a history of bitter and brutal rivalry for the control of Alexandra, dozens of members of the Spoilers and Msomis were arrested in a huge police swoop. The Spoilers were all but destroyed by the Msomis prior to the crackdown and were eager for revenge. Four awaiting-trial Msomis were placed in a cell full of Spoilers. The four were subjected to a ritualised trial and then kicked to death. The next morning their mutilated and dismembered corpses were found scattered over the floor of the cell.(56)

Although often broadly sympathetic to the demands of

African resistance politics, tsotsis, who had a history of violent confrontation with the police, were impatient with the peaceful methods and the intellectualism of the ANC. Peaceful protests and delegations seemed senseless to the tsotsis. Throughout the 1950s tsotsis involved themselves sporadically and spontaneously in ANC campaigns. But they fell under no discipline and used the violent methods with which they were familiar: beating up stayaway breakers, waylaying and assaulting school children during Bantu Education boycotts, violently engaging police who tried to break up mass meetings or raid for beer, attacking work crews and bulldozers during the Sophiatown removals.(57) There is some evidence, however, that tsotsis, and urbanised youths more generally, became more interested in politics and more coherently politicised, during the late 1960s and early 1360s.(58)

Violent achievements and physical strength were clearly symbols of status within the tsotsi subculture. Male children in the townships grew up with tremendous respect for the knifemen. Special prestige was accorded to killers. A tsotsi interviewed in Drum talks about his attitudes as a ten year old during the late 1940s. "Our heroes were the boys who could steal and stab. The more stabbings they did, the bigger they were. The 'biggest shot' of all was the one who had killed somebody - either with a knife or a gun."(59) Moses Dlamini, in his autobiography, recalls how his 16 year old cousin, Abel, became a hero of "the

underworld" after he had personally killed eleven people during gang warfare in Jabavu in 1955.(60) Gang leaders were chosen for their physical prowess and strength and gangs often only admitted a member if he could point to some impressive personal act of strength or violence.(61)

The work ethic

A Kliptown tsotsi commented in 1951: "I am a tsotsi, it is true. I don't care to work. Working at a regular job does not pay. I can make more money by stealing - at least most of my friends do. That is why they won't work."(62) Tsotsis rejected the idea of steady employment. In fact they were regularly referred to as "won't-works" by exasperated government personnel concerned about high youth unemployment. The Centlivres report of 1958 notes:

> The normal process in a modern society is for the young people to remain at school at least until the legally enjoined school-leaving age, usually 16 years, and then to take up employment. This is not the normal process amongst Africans. There is no compulsory schooling ...
>
> The natural result of these conditions is the existence in the township of a class of native youths who are idle, uneducated, undisciplined, unused to work and disinclined to enter regular employment, and it is, of course, from such a class that the tsotsi gangs are likely to draw their recruits.(63)

The Viljoen report of 1951 and the M.C. Botha report of 1962 both went one step further, arguing that the tsotsi culture actually exacerbated the youth unemployment problem. In analysing the youth unemployment problem of the early 1960s M.C. Botha distinguished between the "bona fide" unemployed and the "ledige", youths who voluntarily

avoided finding employment. Not only did the gangs encourage a negative attitude towards work, but they actually provided an alternative support network and attracted youths away from "normal" employment. Youth unemployment and tsotsi culture were seen as mutually reinforcing one another.(64) The state, as well as social welfare institutions concerned with juvenile unemployment and juvenile delinquency, saw it as essential to correct this "unnatural" attitude to work. Diepkloof Reformatory, which was "mainly for Johannesburg's tsotsis", was one corrective institution involved in this task. Its principal in 1956, W.I. Kieser, made this clear: "All these boys are undisciplined and do not believe in labour. We teach them trades, hygiene and first aid, and train them back to normality."(65)

Tsotsis saw regular wage labour as undignified, unprofitable and a denial of freedom. As one tsotsi explained to Dr Ray Phillips of the Native Youth Board: "Why should I accept a job from the Native Youth Board at 25-30 shillings a week when I made 100 Pounds last month by gambling?"(66) In sheer material terms, crime offered tsotsis a higher standard of living and a more exciting lifestyle than wage employment. As Drum observed: "A Tsotsi may earn as much as 5 Pounds a day; how else could he earn such big money? With that he can look after his girlfriends, keep his parents and gamble away the rest." When asked why he became a tsotsi, Jeremiah Majola of

Alexandra explained, "I wanted to have a lot of money to have a good time and give my girls a good time. Sometimes I made 50 Pounds in one day with the gun."(67)

Education was seen in a similar light to steady employment. Only a trickle of African schoolchildren stayed in school beyond primary school. Throughout the 1950s an annual average of about seven thousand African children attended high school on the Witwatersrand. There was also an extremely high truancy rate amongst those who did register at township schools. Education was seen as boring and restrictive. It also very rarely improved chances of employment.(68) Although the majority of tsotsis were semi-literate through sub-grade school attendance or extensive comic book reading, educational achievement held no status at all within the tsotsi subculture.(69) In fact, speaking English could often hamper social acceptance as it was seen as a sign of showing off education. Tsotsis felt that "teachers have the knowledge, but they have the sense."(70) They emphasized being streetwise rather than educated. A youth became a "clever" through knowledge and experience of the street rather than through schooling. Tsotsis were scornful of those who took schooling seriously and enjoyed waylaying and harassing schoolgoers.(71)

Linked to their rejection of employment and education was a pervasive hedonism. Tsotsis did not believe in living for the future; they searched for immediate excitement and

danger, immediate gratification. They rejected all "responsible" and "respectable" notions of saving for, and investing in, the future. They aspired to extravagant lifestyles: if they got hold of money, they would spend it - on gambling, alcohol, clothing, women. Spending their days working at jobs or at school seemed senseless when there was an exciting, dangerous life out in the streets.

Being unemployed and out of school was an important symbol of subcultural identification. It was conceivable to hold down a job or go to school and, after hours, adhere to tsotsi style but it was unusual to find an employed or schoolgoing youth who was also a fully-fledged gang member.(72) Apart from the physical absence from gang activity during the day that this entailed, it was difficult to hold down a steady job and retain respect within a tsotsi gang.

Family and generational hierarchy

During the 1940s and 1950s township parents found it extremely difficult to discipline their teenage sons. Whereas girls were usually drawn fairly effectively into household activities, boys tended to be uncontrollable. Working parents were absent during the day, while schools and the labour market absorbed a minority of township teenagers. Most male youths were left with few structures, controls and restraints during the day.(73) During the nights gang life provided a powerful counter-attraction to

family life. Although parents often struggled to "normalise" the situation, male youths were largely absent from the nuclear family. For a large portion of them gang life became their most important collective experience.

Throughout the 1950s, Advisory Board members identified tsotsi crime and juvenile delinquency as a crucial township issue. Apart from youth unemployment, they saw a general breakdown in parental authority and control as probably the most important contributing factor.(74) The Riots Commission of 1958 also observed a " ... noticeable weakening of filial discipline resulting in many cases in a complete breakdown of parental authority."(75)

Tsotsis had no particular respect for adults. Adult township residents were the chief victims of tsotsi criminal activity. This was such a common pattern, in fact, that the "crime problem" in the townships almost took on the characteristics of a generational war, particularly when residents organised civil guard movements to protect themselves from tsotsi pillaging. A 1952 extract from Drum highlights this: "The story is told of a voluntary guard patrolling in Alexandra who was attacked by tsotsis, and had to shoot one of them in defence, only to find that it was his own son. This is a tragic illustration of the rift that gang war has caused in the locations."(76) Tsotsis seemed unperturbed by the age of their victims. Older married women were often sexually assaulted by tsotsis and

prominent Advisory Board members were attacked. In one particularly stark example in 1955 a 12 year old boy stabbed a 40 year old man to death after a gambling dispute. The boy was involved with a gang in Alexandra called the "Peacemakers".(77)

The tsotsi subculture, then, subverted the natural order of parental and adult authority. This may perhaps create too stark a picture of generational relations in the townships. Male youths were involved in the tsotsi subculture to varying degrees, almost impossible to quantify. Many retained some respect for, and some commitment to, their kinship network. Many shuttled, through time and space, between the two opposite poles of collective security: the family and the gang. But the hardened tsotsi accepted no hierarchies other than those of internal gang leadership. Nor did he accept any responsibility for, or answerability to, his immediate kin; the gang became his real family.

Style and ritual

Movies, comics, magazines and cheap novels were the key sources of tsotsi imagery and style. For permanently urbanised African youths there was an almost complete absence of alternative imagery. Rural and "traditional" imagery had very little impact on them. Most had lived in the cities all their lives and had lost contact with a rural life-style. Those elements of rural imagery and ritual which did seep through to them via their parents or

grandparents were generally rejected in their struggle to assert an urban identity. Traditionalism was seen as naive, old-fashioned and inappropriate to modern urban street life. This set the tsotsis apart starkly from groups such as the Amalaitas who retained strong rural links and drew heavily on traditional imagery and ritual such as circumcision. Because of racial discrimination and economic deprivation township youths were denied access to fashionable white middle class style and culture. As Anthony Samson puts it: "Gangster films, street-corner gambling, drinking to get drunk, were open to all. Theatres, decent houses, libraries, travel abroad, were for Europeans only."(78) And so they had to draw on imagery which was familiar, affordable, accessible, appropriately urban and exciting. It is not surprising, then, that movies, in the absence of alternatives, became such a powerful source of imagery for township youths during the 1940s and 1950s.

By the late 1930s movies were easily accessible to township youths. The Institute of Race Relations began, even at this stage, to be concerned about the influence of movies on youths, singling out popular shows of the time such as Gay Divorcee, Murder in Trinidad, Road House and Charlie Chan in Paris.(79) In 1940 Lucas Nkosi of the Orlando Boys' Unit, in a survey of Orlando youth gangs, expressed similar concern. Gang members, he observed, would go to movies whenever they had money. Afterwards they would act out the

stories for the other members who were unable to afford the entrance fees.(80) Municipal authorities also recognised the problem but, until the mid 1950s, argued that, as long as movies with specifically immoral messages were banned, the popularity of movies amongst township youths need not be discouraged. They preferred to have the youths in cinemas than out in the streets. In 1954 an irate doctor wrote a letter to The Star complaining, "We are helping to feed the fires of crime by our indifference to what is a canker in our society - the showing of crime films to the less educated class of our population." But W.J.P. Carr, the manager of Johannesburg's Non-European Affairs Department, in replying to the letter writer, was not worried. The upholders of law and morality always came out on top in these movies, he felt, and the good, law-abiding people were always the heroes. He expressed confidence that the movies shown in the townships could only have a good influence.(81) Carr's department even employed mobile film units in the West Rand townships, both to help keep youths off the streets and to encourage the right kind of morally sound movies. By 1954 there were 9 cinemas dotted around the townships as well as 4 Non-European cinemas in Johannesburg and 2 in Fordsburg. In addition to this, 3 mobile NEAD film units were in operation which attracted about 30 000 African viewers per week.(82) What Carr and his department failed to understand, of course, was that African youths tended to identify with the baddies rather than the goodies. Even if the baddies lost out in the end,

it was the baddies who provided the source of imagery and style. While watching Street with No Name with Can Themba in Sophiatown during the early 1950s, Anthony Samson recalls:

> Stiles wore a long overcoat, sniffed a Benzedrine inhaler and occasionally bit an apple. Beside him slouched his henchman, wearing a belted raincoat with slits at the back.
>
> "When this film first came out," Can whispered, "the sales of Benzedrine rocketed. Everybody munched apples. All the tsotsis wore those raincoats.(83)

Movies were always influential in informing style in the dominant South African culture as well, but, by modelling themselves on the thugs and gangsters rather than on the goodies and cops, tsotsis inverted conventional symbolism and morality. Their style was clearly symbolic and its message to the hegemonic culture was unambiguous: we reject the law, crime does pay, your enemies are our heroes, we will not live by your rules and norms.

Apart from movies, magazines, comics and cheap books provided a rich source of imagery for the largely semi-literate tsotsis. Zonk and Drum, magazines which targeted a young township audience, ran regular well-illustrated features on American fashion and local music, sport and gang activity. The magazines were widely available and widely read by young people in the townships.(84) Marvell Comics were particularly popular amongst the younger tsotsis, who used to compete over their comic collections. Once they became a bit older, they graduated to paperback thrillers in the James Hadley Chase mould.(85) Books about

American gangsters were always popular. One book in particular seemed to catch the imagination of many tsotsis in the 1950s - Willard Motley's Knock on Any Door.(86) An ex-tsotsi recalled that he used to carry a book around with him on the mafia which became his "textbook" for all his "big crimes".(87)

Tsotsi dressing style was distinctive and it was a central element of tsotsi identification. Tsotsis were extremely self-conscious about their clothes. In 1945 a Bantu World reader referred to tsotsis sarcastically as "a group of well dressed gentlemen"(88); another reader called them "gentlemen of leisure".(89) Hugh Masekela, recalling his days as a stylish township youth in the 1950s, commented: "In those days, a man was known and recognised by the label that was attached to his clothes. We used to spend hours cleaning our shoes, and then go to the cinema very early, just to show off."(90) Before attempting to describe tsotsi clothing style, two important observations need to be made at the outset. First, style was not static. Within the broader parameters of tsotsi style details shifted; certain elements of style went through waves of fashionability, usually brought about by a particularly popular movie. For example, tsotsis liked to chew on something to round off stylistic effect but whether it was apples or toothpicks or chewing gum they chewed was influenced by the particular fad of the day.(91) Second, although tsotsis aspired to high style, most were unable to

afford it. For the average tsotsi a stylish item of clothing, whether it was a pair of trousers, a hat, a jacket, a smart pair of imported shoes, was a treasured possession which was worn frequently. Tsotsis often managed to pull off an acceptably stylish image with very little; only the big and successful gangsters could afford polish and variety.

There is general agreement amongst my informants that the key to subcultural style lay in imitating American fashion. "Anything American was something to imitate"(92); " ... everything they did had to be American".(93) The Americans gang of Sophiatown perfected American style and they consequently became a role model for other tsotsis. The most important medium for communicating fashion was, of course, the cinema. Gangster, cowboy and black American jazz movies were the most important fashion influences.(94)

The central element of clothing style was the tsotsi trousers. The bottoms were extremely narrow, resting either at the ankles or around the shoes. One variation was called "the bottom" which had a normal width most of the way down and tapered sharply to a very narrow bottom.(95) Tsotsis "used to clip the bottoms to make the bottoms narrow".(96) According to ex-tsotsi, Henry Miles, "some people wore their pants so narrow you had to use vaseline on your legs to pull it down".(97) Stan Motjuwadi recalls, however, that the bottoms gradually widened during the late 1950s in

accordance with American fashions; "they became less and less zoot." by the end of the decade.(98) If a township male adolescent wanted to identify with the tsotsi subculture he would be under great pressure to at least get hold of a pair of tsotsi trousers. Norris Nkosi tells the story of how, as a young teenager in 1949, he pleaded with his mother to buy him a pair of tsotsis. She refused, arguing that he was too young to wear long pants, let alone identify himself with tsotsi youths. In desperation, he used to steal his brother's pair which he would wear after school. Equipped with his tsotsis, he would join his friends selling things and picking pockets on the trains.(99) Whereas the trousers established identity, there were a cluster of style variations which added to the trousers. The most common of these modelled itself on the American gang henchman. According to Drum, the average tsotsi wore "tight-fitting zoot trousers, wide-brimmed hats, loud shirts and ties."(100) In another description of a tsotsi, "Spike was wearing the tsotsi rig, with very narrow 'sixteen-bottom' trousers, a long floppy coat, a bright scarf tucked into it and a slouch hat."(101) Another variation was the cowboy look: black zoot trousers, black shirt, cowboy hat.(102)

Probably the next most important item on the agenda was the hat. In hatware the style was less precise but generally a broad brimmed hat such as a Stetson or a peak cap were preferred. Tsotsis liked to wear hats low over their eyes.

Shoe styles were also diverse. The more stylish gangsters bought expensive imported shoes, usually with pointed toes. For the small-fry tsotsis, simple takkies were popular, worn with turned-up tongues.(103)

Style was also reflected in the choice of personal and gang names. Nicknames were powerfully influenced by the movies so that names such as "Stiles" and "Zorro" were popular. If a boy's real name was Humphrey, he would almost inevitably be called "Bogart", James would be called "Jesse James" and John would be called "Dillinger".(104) Gang names seemed to be selected in order to be as offensive as possible to the dominant culture. Names often reflected an identification with society's "natural" enemies. Names such as "Gestapo", "Berliners" and "Germans" went beyond the pale in identifying with the Nazis; the "Mau Mau" gang sprouted up at the height of white hysteria about the violent Kenyan rebellion; the "Apaches" made it clear who they backed in the tussle between cowboys and Indians; the "Satan Boys" and "Gas Devils" made it clear where they stood in the tussle between "good" and "evil". The "Benzine Boys", famed for setting fire to their victims after dousing them in benzine, and the "Slagpaal" gang clearly used names with provocative connotations of brutal violence. The "Dead End Kids" boasted their delinquency and lack of upward social mobility.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the tsotsi subculture was its own language, tsotsitaal. The language

was an urban hybrid based largely on Afrikaans but with large Xhosa/Zulu and English inputs. Tsotsitaal was made up of roughly 36% Afrikaans, 13% vernacular, 9% English and 42% of ambiguous or unknown origin. The meanings of many of the words were shifted from those of the original language and the syntax was incosistent, generally oscillating between Afrikaans and Xhosa/Zulu syntax.(105) The extensive use of Afrikaans in tsotsitaal reflected the subcultural tendency towards incorporating dominant cultural symbols and then subverting or inflecting them. Tsotsitaal was more than simply a medium for communication; it was an important element of cultural style. It was the "lingua-franca" of township youths. The language reinforced tsotsi identity. South African linguist C. T. Msimang comments:

> There is no doubt ... that tsotsitaal is used as a register. It is abandoned where the tsotsi wants to maintain the distance between himself and members of the out-group; and he will use it to maintain identity and solidarity with members of the in-group. Distance is maintained in order to snub members of the out-group as well as to endorse his attitude towards them.(106)

Different levels of proficiency in the language indicated different levels of urban and subcultural familiarity. A well established tsotsi had to be able to do more than "get by" in tsotsitaal. Subcultural status was attached to speaking the language with flair and dexterity, to familiarity with the latest linguistic nuances and innovations.(107) Tsotsis from Sophiatown and Alexandra apparently looked down upon tsotsis from Orlando because

the latter spoke a tsotsitaal which was considered old-fashioned. The Orlando tsotsitaal had a far greater Zulu content. The Sophiatown tsotsis called the Orlando tsotsis "kalkoene" ("turkeys") because they "talked like kalkoene". Nevertheless, the Sophiatown and Orlando versions of the language were mutually intelligible, if only with difficulty.(108) So tsotsis would use tsotsitaal to compete with each other for subcultural status but, at the same time, the language delineated the boundary between the in-group and the out-group.

The language, then, was used by the tsotsis to insulate and protect themselves in the face of a dominant social order which demanded proficiency in English or Afrikaans to achieve upward social mobility. Mastery of the dominant language is a powerful cultural weapon. Tsotsitaal was, in a sense, another "magical" subcultural response to cultural subordination: the tsotsis developed their own language over which only they achieved mastery.

Dagga-smoking, drinking alcohol in abundance and gambling, although by no means unique to the tsotsis, were further important anti-social rituals which helped to define the subculture. They were rituals which flew in the face of clean-living, cautious, adult middle-class respectability. Youths who could not de onstrate a familiarity with these rituals were considered "square".(109)

Conclusion

In 1962 Absolom Vilakazi observed the tremendous popularity of tsotsi style amongst urban African youth. He explained this phenomenon in the following way:

> The tsotsis have thrived and become attractive to some young people because, quite frankly, they have been culturally exciting! They have a language of their own which is very earthy, racy and something of a secret language, and therefore fascinating to the young. They are tough; they have demonstrated to everybody that "crime does pay"... They are defiant of traditional values and spurn middle-class Christian morality and the whole culture of what they refer to, in Durban, as Ositshuzana, ie: the "Excuse me" people; or those who try to live according to refined social standards.. Besides, the tsotsis have a touch of modernity about them and their methods. While they are quick with a knife, they also can draw and use a gun, and have become quite sophisticated in their methods of operation. In all these things they strike a responsive chord in the young people.(110)

Although "apolitical" and "anti-social", the tsotsi youth subculture on the Witwatersrand represented a challenge to cultural consensus in urban South Africa during the 1940s and 1950s. Despite sharing a common baseline of experiences with the broader parent ghetto culture, the response of permanently urbanised African male youths to political, economic and cultural subordination was distinctive. The tsotsi subculture, through its value system, style and ritual, agressively denied hegemonic consensus. Tsotsi values, such as brazen rejection of the law and glorification of violence, criminality and hedonism, were defined in direct antagonism to the consensus value system. Tsotsi style and ritual often drew on imagery familiar to

the consensus culture but inflected and subverted the symbolic structure of those images.

NOTES ON CHAPTER THREE

(1) See Tourikis, P, "The Political Economy of Alexandra Township: 1905 - 1958", unpublished Honours dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1981 for another attempt to explain tsotsis in broader class terms. He argues that the tsotsis were part of a parasitic lumpenproletariat which survived through pillaging both the petty bourgeoisie and the working class. His argument is economistic and class reductionist. He fails to focus on the youth specific nature of the subculture, nor does he look at cultural resistance or style.

(2) John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts, "Subcultures, Cultures and Class" in Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (eds), Resistence Through Rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain, Hutchinson of London 1976, pp9-74.

(3) Cohen, P., "Subcultural conflict and working class community" in Hall,S. , Hobson,D., Lowe,A. and Willis,P. (eds), Culture, Media, Language, Hutchinson 1980; Brake, M., The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subculture, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1980; Humphries, S., Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working Class Childhood and Youth 1889 - 1939, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981; Hebdige,D., Subculture: The meaning of style, Methuen 1984

(4) Williams, R., Marxism and Literature, Oxford University Press 1978, p112.

(5) See Anderson, P., "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", New Left Review, 100, 1976, pp 43-44.

(6) Cohen, P., "Subcultural conflict and working class community", p82

(7) See Cohen, A.K., Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1956, pp26-36. Cohen's book was pathbreaking in its time. Although he never places subculture in the context of class struggle, he shows a tremendous sensitivity to working class deprivation and a healthy disrespect for the American Dream. He argues that working class youth tend to develop alternative, and generally "negativistic", value and status structures as a response to their exclusion from social privilege.

(8) Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The meaning of style, p18.

(9) Clarke et al, "Subcultures, Cultures and Class", p55. See also Hebdige, Subculture, p85.

(10) Boggs,C., Gramsci's Marxism, Pluto Press 1976, p65.

Tsotsi gangs, particularly the famous Sophiatown ones, have often been romanticised and characterised as "social bandits". Hobsbawm's formulation, however, is entirely inappropriate to the tsotsi subculture. Apart from the fact that Hobsbawm's "social bandits" were almost exclusively rural, they were self-consciously champions of the downtrodden. They self-consciusly took from the rich to give to the poor; they were popular amongst the rural masses and protected the poor and powerless from the victimisation of the authorities. Tsotsi resistance was far more subtle: tsotsis tended to steal from the rich and poor

alike to give to themselves; township residents generally feared and despised them. They were apolitical and they never posed a coherent threat to state power. Nevertheless, their values, style and ritual represented a significant challenge to cultural hegemony. See Hobsbawm, E, Bandits, Delacorte Press 1969.

(11) Mattera's father was, for instance, a property owner. Kort Boy, the famous American gangster, was ambiguously from a petty bourgeois background; his father was a blacksmith and his mother was a shebeen owner. Nevertheless, in a classic case of township class ambiguity, his family of seven occupied a one bedroomed house! Interview, "Kort Boy" (George Mbalweni) in P. Stein and R. Jacobson (eds), Sophiatown Speaks, Junction Avenue Press, 1986. Peggy Bellair's mother was also a fairly successful shebeen owner who managed to put Peggy through school.

(12) Mattera 5/6/88 and 10/7/88 is fond of the term "ghetto" to describe Sophiatown. Two other informants, Babes Mbawu and Ben Ngwenya, also used the term. "The ghetto was like a school," observed Ngwenya who was born in Sophiatown in 1938. Interview, Babes Mbawu and Ben Ngwenya, Johannesburg 20/4/89 and 27/4/89.

(13) See for example Phil Bonner, "The Transvaal Native Congress 1917-1920" in Marks, S. and Rathbone, R. (eds), Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African class formation, culture and consciousness 1870-1930, Longman, 1982 and David Goodhew, "'No Easy Walk to Freedom': Political Organisation in the western Areas of Johannesburg between the Two Worl Wars", paper presented to the African Studies Institute Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 29 May 1989, pp4-5.

(14) Don Mattera, interview with Tom Lodge, 1979; Mattera 10/7/88; Don Mattera, Memory is the Weapon, Ravan, 1989.

(15) Magubane 7/9/88; Mdlalose 20/4/89; Nhlapho 9/5/89; Moloi 26/3/88; interview, Queeneth Ndaba, Johannesburg 15/9/88.

(16) Moloi 26/3/88.

(17) Bothma MA thesis, p37.; Miles 4/4/89 and 11/4/89.

(18) Cornelius Chiloane, interviewed by Edwin Ritchken, Soweto 16/8/89 and 5/1/90. Chiloane was involved in a small Sophiatown gang in the 1950s whose membership consisted of youths who originated from one particular district of Lebowa.

(19) Moloi 26/3/88; Magubane 7/9/88; see also the discussion on age hierarchy in Bothma, MA thesis, pp30-33.

(20) Magubane 7/9/88; Peggy Bellair2/6/89; Motjuwadi 22/9/88; Miles 11/4/89; Manana 21/9/88.
See the feature on Alexandra ganhs in GCP 26 July 1959, pp12-15. One extract is of particular pertinence here: "Older men, realising ways in which they could exploit the younger ones, muscled in on this racket ..."

(21) See for example: Phil Bonner, "Family,Crime and Political Consciousness on the East Rand 1939-1955", JSAS, Volume 15, No 1, 1988; Phil Bonner, "'Desirable or

Undesirable Sotho Women?' Liquor, prostitution and the migration of Sotho women to the Rand, 1920-1945", paper presented to the African Studies Institute seminar, Johannesburg, 9 May 1988; la Hausse,P, ''Mayihlome!'; Towards an understanding of Amalaita gangs in Durban, c1900-1930", paper presented to the African Studies Institute seminar, 27 April 1987; Matthew Chaskalson, "The Road to Sharpville", paper presented to the African Studie Institute seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, September 1986; Eddie Koch, "Doornfontein and its African Working Class 1914-1935, a study of popular culture in Johannesburg", MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1983; Jeremy Seekings, "Why was Soweto Different? Urban development, township politics and the political economy of Soweto, 1977-1984", paper presented to the African Studies Institute seminar, 2 May 1988; Mike Sarakinsky, Alexandra: From "freehold" to "model" township, DSG 1984, Dissertation series No 5; Peter Tourikis, "The Political Economy of Alexandra Township", unpublished Honours dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1981.

(22) These issues are discussed in depth in Chapter One.

(23) Tourikis, "The Political Economy of Alexandra Township", pp79-83.

(24) Intermediary Archives Depot, Johannesburg, West Rand Administration Board archive (IAD WRAB), file 351/1, "Some Aspects of Urbanized Native Life in the Larger Cities", memorandum, WJP Carr, 1 November 1957.

(25) Church of the Province Library, University of the Witwatersrand (CPL), Ellen Hellman Papers (EHP), file 51, "The Sociological Background to Urban African Juvenile Delinquency", 16 August 1953, p1 and p8.

(26) Drum, October 1951.

(27) Golden City Post (GCP), 6 July 1958.
Can Themba's short stories and journalism provide a great deal of detail on tsotsi criminal brazenness. See Patel,E, (ed), The World of Can Themba, Ravan Press 1985.

(28) GCP 27 March 1955; GCP 30 December 1962; Drum May 1953.

(29) PQ Vundla, a prominent Advisory Board member in the 1950s, actually identified influx control as a major cause of tsotsiism.
IAD WRAB, 351/1, minutes of conference between the Witwatersrand Deputy Commissioner of the SAP, Area Officers, Members of the Non-European Affairs Committee and Advisory Board members, 14 December 1955.
See IAD WRAB, 351/1, extract of minutes from Jabavu Advisory Board meeting, 20 February 1956.
See also Dingake, M., My Fight Against Apartheid, Kliptown Books 1987, pp29-30.

(30) CPSA 1419 EHP, File 51, memorandum: "Bantu Youth in Our Cities", 26 April 1951, p15.

(31) Patel,E. (ed), The World of Can Themba, p124.
Complaints about parental compliance are a prominent theme in minutes from Advisory Board meetings, IAD WRAB, 351/1. This issue also came up in interviews with Godfrey Moloi

26/3/88 and Don Mattera 5/6/88. See also Dlamini,M Robben Island: Hell Hole, Spokesman 1984, pp89-99.
(32) Mattera 5/6/88. Many tsotsis, it seems, actually participated in the campaign, particularly in Sophiatown. This is corroborated in an interview with Ntatho Motlana, Johannesburg, 2 October 1986.
(33) Samson,A, Drum, Collins 1956, pp101-102.
(34) IAD WRAB, 351/3, "The Nsibanyoni Gang", memorandum written by Lucas Nkosi, received by NEAD in April 1940.
(35) Moloi 26/3/88; Nkosi 25/9/88; Miles 11/4/89.
(36) CPL, EHP, file 51, CV Botha(sic), "How Tsotsis are Made", Industrial Review of Africa, February 1953, quoted in "The Sociological Background to Urban African Juvenile Delinquency", memorandum by Ellen Hellman, 16 August 1953.
(37) The Star, 21 January 1957.
(38) IAD WRAB, 351/1, Extract from the minutes of a conference between the Witwatersrand Deputy Commissioner of SAP, Area Officers, Members of the Non-Europeaan Affairs Committee and Advisory Board members, 14 December 1955.
(39)GCP, 13 November 1960.
(40) Patel,E (ed), The World of Can Themba, "Terror in the Trains", p112.
(41) Motlana 2/10/86; Mattera 5/6/88; Motjuwadi 22/9/88; Magubane 7/9/88.
(42) Mattera 5/6/88.
(43) See, for example, IAD WRAB, 351/3, letter from Superintendant, Orlando West No 2 ( AT Johnson) to Senior Superintendant, Orlando, 1 July 1957.
(44) Territorial fights were highlighted by virtually all my informants. There are also numerous references to gangfights in Drum, GCP and BW.
(45) Tourikis, "The Political Economy of Alexandra Township", pp79-93.
(46) Phil Cohen, "Subcultural conflict and working class community", p86.
(47) This was a common theme throughout most of my interviews.
(48) Moloi 26/3/88; Motjuwadi 29/9/88; Modisane, Blame Me on History, pp67-68. See Chapter Two for an attempt to disaggregate the different types of tsotsi gangs.
(49) IAD WRAB, 351/2, Juvenile Court statistics 1949-1960. (No figures available for the 1940s). It is impossible to estimate, of course, how many incidents of these crimes never even reached the courts.
(50) Mattera 26/3/88; Peggy Bellair 2/6/89.
(51) Drum, April 1955. See also GCP, 8 May 1955.
(52) GCP, 26 July 1959.
(53) Drum, November 1951.
(54) GCP, 7 September 1958.
(55) GCP, 24 January 1960.
(56) GCP, 23 August 1959.
(57) Interview, Godfrey Pitje, Johannesburg, 23 September 1986; Motlana 2/9/86; Moloi 26/3/88; Mattera 5/6/88. See also Bonner,P, "Family, Crime and Political Consciousness" and Glaser,C, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth

League", pp84-91. This issue is explored in more detail in Chapter Five.
(58) Moloi 26/3/88; Mattera 5/6/88; Nkosi 25/9/88; Mbawu and Ngwenya 27/4/89. This issue is explored in more depth in Chapter Five.
(59) Drum, November 1951.
(60) Dlamini, M, Robben Island: Hell Hole, pp89-90.
(61) Moloi 26/3/88.
(62) Drum, November 1951.
(63) Government Publications Library (GPL), University of the Witwatersrand, Report of the Riots Commission, A van de Sandt Centlivres, 1958, paragraphs 97 and 99.
(64) GPL, Interdepartmental Committee on Native Juvenile Unemployment, SP Viljoen, 1951, pp6-7; Verslag van die Interdepartementele Komitee insake ledige en [illegible]rkende Bantoe in stedelike gebiede, M.C. Botha, 1962.
(65) Rand Daily Mail, 27 November 1956.
(66) IAD WRAB, 285/7, extract from minutes of a meeting between NEAD and Native Youth Board deputation, 28 September 1950.
(67) Drum, November 1951. For a string of references to the tsotsi "non-work ethic" see BW Readers' Forum, April-June 1945.
(68) See Glaser,C, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League", pp68-69 and Verslag van die Komitee insake ledige en nie-werkende Bantoe in stedelike gebiede, introductory section. See also the section on schooling in Chapter One.
(69) Moloi 26/3/88.
(70) Drum, November 1951.
(71) See, for example, IAD WRAB, 351/1, extract from meeting of Mofolo Advisory Board, 5 December 1957; IAD WRAB, 351/1, letter from resident of Orlando East II, WS Ndlovu, to manager Johannesburg NEAD, 6 July 1959.
(72) Godfrey Moloi (Otto Town Gang), Peggy Bellair (Americans) and Norris Nkosi (Spoilers) all described themselves as unusual tsotsi gangsters in that they all attended school while being active gang members. The fact that they all completed their schooling probably goes some way in explaining their relative success and prominence in later life. Although fully-fledged gang members, they tended to be cerebral enough to keep out of more serious danger. As Nkosi wryly commented: "We used to push the illiterate ones in front of us with the guns." They survived their violent gang years and received the benefits of both education and a wide range of old gang connections. Mdlalose, Magubane and Nhlapho all had strict parents who kept them at school until matric but, although they adhered to many elements of tsotsi style, they were never gangsters.
(73) See Glaser,C., "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League", pp67-69 and Bonner,P., "Family, Crime and Political Consciousness", pp394-409.
(74) IAD WRAB 351/1, extracts from Advisory Board meetings throughout 1950s.

(75) Report of the Riots Commission, 1958, paragraph 72.
(76) Drum, May 1958.
(77) GCP, 31 July 1955. For an account of the community response to the tsotsis, see Glaser,C, "Students, 'tsotsis and the Congress Youth League", pp74-79.
(78) Samson,A, Drum, p99.
(79) CPL, South African Institute of Race Relations archive (SAIRR), file B23, memorandum on Native juvenile delinquency, 1938.
(80) IAD WRAB 351/3, "A preliminary survey of juvenile gangs in Orlando" and "The Nsibanyoni Gang", memoranda by Lucas Nkosi, February 1940 and April 1940.
(81) The Star 15 January 1954. See also Dlamini, Robben Island, p88.
(82) IAD WRAB 301/1, NEAD Cinema Branch, cinema show returns, March 1954.
(83) Samson,A, Drum, p102.
(84) Miles 4/4/89. Interestingly, Miles comments that other African township fashion, beyond South Africa, was well represented in Zonk and Drum. See Erwin Manoim, "The Black Press in South Africa 1945-1953", MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1983, pp62-94.
(85) Moloi 26/3/88; Miles 11/4/89.
(86) Samson,A., Drum, p100; Dlamini, Robben Island: Hell Hole, pp89-90.
(87) GCP, 13 November 1960.
(88) BW 16 June 1945, letter from Sgt. Rameetse.
(89) BW 12 May 1945, letter from Daniel Ntaopane of Johannesburg.
(90) Hugh Masekela, interviewed in Drum, June 1983.
(91) Miles 4/4/89; Samson, A., Drum, pp101-102.
(92) Motjuwadi 22/9/88.
(93) Miles 4/4/89.
(94) Stan Motjuwadi 22/9/88 emphasised the influence of black American movies
(95) Bothma, MA thesis, p46.
(96) Nkosi 25/9/88
(97) Miles 4/4/39
(98) Motjuwadi 22/9/88
(99) Nkosi 25/9/88
(100) Drum, October 1951.
(101) Samson,A, Drum, p98.
(102) See description of Abel in Dlamini, M., Robben Island: Hell Hole, pp89-90.
(103) The description of clothing style is a composite picture drawn from a number of interviews. See also Bothma, MA thesis, pp46-47, for a thorough description of tsotsi clothing style in Pretoria around 1950.
(104) Moloi 26/3/88; Nkosi 25/9/88.
(105) See B.V. Khumalo, "Sources and Structures of Tsotsitaal", unpublished Honours dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, April 1986, p11 These figures are based on a contemporary study. However, it seems as though tsotsitaal has not shifted drastically amongst those who still speak it.

(106) Msimang, "Impact of Zulu on Tsotsitaal", South African Journal of African Languages, 7, 3, July 1987, p84.
(107) Nkosi 25/9/88; Motjuwadi 22/9/88; Mdlalose 20/4/89.
(108) Motjuwadi 22/9/88. Although the language has undergone many changes since the 1950s, a more Zulu based form of tsotsitaal is still discernable in Orlando. A language close to the old tsotsitaal is still spoken in townships such as Meadowlands which housed displaced Sophiatown residents. Peggy Bellair identified the Orlando tsotsitaal as being part and parcel of Orlando's general backwardness in style: "They were always behind [Sophiatown and Alexandra] in style; they were still drinking sorghum beer when everyone was drinking beer in Sophiatown."
(109) In Drum November 1951 a tsotsi recalled how as a 14 or 15 year old mugger "Always we had something to drink or smoked dagga to give us a big heart." See also BW 2 March 1940, p16, in which a connection is drawn between dagga, alcohol and juvenile delinquency; BW 17 August 1946, letter from W. B. Mkhasibe; BW 7 April 1945, letter from J.D.N. (quoted in full earlier in the thesis); BW 28 April 1945, letter from Mr Pooe of Sophiatown; BW 14 August 1954, p1 article on Germiston's Fast Elevens gang; CPSA AD 843 SAIRR B23, memorandum on Native Juvenile Delinquency, 1938; IAD NRAB 351/3, "A preliminary survey of juvenile gangs in Orlando", February 1940 and the "Nsibanyoni Gang", April 1940, both by Lucas Nkosi of the Orlando Boys' Unit; Samson Drum, p99; Bothma, MA thesis, pp47-49; Miles 4/4/89 and 11/4/89. Miles points out, interestingly, that the Spoilers of Alexandra made a great deal of their money through illegal liquor and dagga sales. For gambling specifically, see Drum October 1951; Drum November 1952; GCP 31 July 1955; Moloi 26/3/88; Mdlalose 20/4/89; Mbawu and Ngwenya 20/4/89 and 27/4/89. It is clear that the running of gambling "schools" was a profitable part of the operations of many of the bigger gangs.
(110) Absolom Vilakazi, Zulu Transformations, University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg 1962, p78.

CHAPTER FOUR:

# THE MARK OF ZORRO
## Sexuality and Gender Relations in the Tsotsi Subculture on the Witwatersrand

There were five key elements in the identity of tsotsi gangs on the Witwatersrand. Tsotsis were black, generally working class, urbanised, young males. In other words, their identity could be defined in terms of race, class, geographic location, generation and gender.(1) This chapter explores the masculine identity of the tsotsi subculture. The masculine identity is a social construct which exists, almost definitionally, in antithesis to the feminine identity. A study of masculinity, then, becomes a study of gender relations. How, I will ask, was tsotsi masculinity defined and what role did women play in the subculture? Why were females strikingly absent from the central concerns of gang life? These questions can only be answered through a systematic gender analysis of the subculture.

### Subculture and Sexuality

Surprisingly little has been written on the specific issue of sexuality in Twentieth Century youth subcultures. It is surprising on two accounts. First, on a purely observational level, it is clear that the assertion of

masculinity is a central feature of these subcultures. It is also clear that females appear to be marginal to youth subcultures, whether in post-war Britain and the United States, Weimar Germany or post-independence Zaire.(2) Second, over the last two or three decades, particularly in the United States and Britain, substantial bodies of literature have been generated on both youth gang subcultures and gender/sexuality. Yet the two issues hardly ever seem to intersect in a systematic way. Although the issue of sexuality unavoidably permeates many studies of youth subcultures, it appears as though only two worthwhile pieces have been written on the specific intersection of sexuality and youth subculture: the first is a paper entitled "Girls and Subcultures" by McRobbie and Garber (1976); the second is a chapter entitled "The invisible girl: The culture of femininity vs masculinism" in Mike Brake's The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subculture (1980).(3)

Brake argues that it is essential to focus on sexuality because "on the whole, youth cultures and subcultures tend to be some form of exploration of sexuality".(4) Both articles are concerned with the "invisibility" of girls from youth subcultures. McRobbie and Garber are not satisfied with the argument that females are simply "peripheral" or "marginal".They prefer to characterise the female's position as subordinate. Females, they argue, "are central and pivotal to a subordinate area, which mirrors,

but in a complementary and subordinate way, the 'dominant' masculine arenas".(5) In other words, youth subcultures are dependent on the role of females, despite the fact that females are excluded from the more prestigious, high-profile and power struggle elements of the subcultures. Males are the active subjects while females are the passive, but necessary, subordinate objects within the subcultures.

"Girls are present in male subcultures," Brake agrees, "but are contained within them, rather than using them to explore actively forms of female identity."(6) Women tend to be the rewards, the trophies for male successes. Apart from providing sexual and domestic services to males, they are the symbols of status to be won or lost in the male-exclusive spheres such as fighting. Perhaps the most important role of females is to provide the baseline of antithesis, to provide a model for what males are not, because "you cannot really define masculinity apart from femininity".(7) Women, then, are often understood to be marginal to subcultures because they do not figure in the sensational, high-profile, high-status spheres of the subculture. McRobbie and Garber's observations appear to have some validity in the case of the tsotsi subculture. Nevertheless, their argument should not be overstressed because there is a very genuine element of female marginality in youth subcultures: girls spend much less time in the gangs and their gang membership is far less

formal. Time is a key variable here: it is essential to ascertain how youths allocate their time in order to understand youth subcultures. Whereas unemployed young males have an enormous amount of free time at their disposal, girls are drawn far more effectively and strictly into the domestic sphere. As Frith points out: "Parents control girls' spare time much more closely ... girls have to assume an apprenticeship for domestic labour which begins at home".(8) These broad observations on youth subcultures, I will show, have strong resonances with the tsotsi subculture on the Witwatersrand.

Masculinity is, of course, a shifting concept. Male prestige and status are defined in different ways from culture to culture and from era to era. In middle class culture, for instance, professional skills, intellect and earning capacity are emphasized, whereas physical skill and strength tend to be emphasized in working class culture. Common to all versions of masculinity, however, is male assertiveness and fierce inter-male competitiveness alongside relatively passive, domestically oriented females. Most forms of masculinity also involve a need to control and be "in control", whether intellectually or physically.(9) This paper will attempt to illuminate the specific nature of tsotsi sexual identity.

McRobbie and Garber and Brake focus on the continuities in sexual socialisation between the parent culture and the

subculture. Sexual roles and stereotypes inculcated through the home and school environments, and reinforced by the mass media, are retained in youth subcultures. Rather than acting against sexual hegemonic norms, youth subcultures tend to, if anything, exaggerate them. Sexual stereotyping and role differentiation seem to be all the more starkly enforced.(10)

As I have shown in the previous chapter, most subcultural behaviour seems to involve a reaction against the hegemonic cultural order, a denial of social consensus. Why, then, in the sphere of sexual identity, do youth subcultures tend to conform? One possible way of answering this is to argue that youth subcultures do not really conform sexually. Witness, for example, promiscuity and disrespect for marriage and family life. In fact, marriage, or an ostensibly monogamous commitment, usually signals the exit from a youth subculture. But this argument begs the question of sexual identity: masculinism vs femininity. Not only is the stark separation of gender identities radically conformist, but the active/passive, public/domestic, aggressive/nurturing poles conform to hegemonic sexual stereotypes. Promiscuity represents a challenge to moral or religious norms rather than norms of sexuality. Conformist subcultural sexuality, it seems, can only be explained by tracing the historical continuities in sexual socialisation.

Continuities in sexual socialisation

Following the general pattern of youth subcultures, tsotsi notions of sexual identity conformed to those of its parent ghetto culture as well as the wider consensus hegemonic order. It is difficult to find a general explanation for youth subcultural conformity in the area of sexuality, but, in the case of tsotsis, perhaps one tentative explanation can be advanced before moving on to tracing specific historical continuities. I have suggested earlier that the tsotsi subculture had a fairly clear identity in terms of race, class, generation and gender. As black, working class youths, tsotsis were structurally subordinate in terms of race, class and generation. But, as males, tsotsis were structurally dominant. Gender was the one sphere in which they found themselves "naturally" dominant. Hence the need to assert their masculinity and sexual difference. They defended their one area of privilege vigorously.(11) An analogy can perhaps be drawn here with the white working class in South Africa: subordinate in class terms, yet dominant in racial terms, the white working class is anxious to assert racial difference in order to preserve its terrain of superordination.

The tsotsi phenomenon, as a recognisable subculture, only really emerged on the Witwatersrand in the early- to mid 1940s. It is important to stress that tsotsis were permanently urbanised youths who tended to have minimal recollection of, or contact with, the countryside. The

emergence of the tsotsi subculture coincided with the emergence of a large second generation urbanised youth population on the Witwatersrand. This constituency reached substantial proportions in the early 1940s, following a massive escalation of permanent urbanisation in the second half of the 1930s. Although tsotsis were alienated from the custom and culture of the countryside, there were noticible continuities between rural age regiment systems and urban youth gang organisation. It is reasonable to assume that the recently urbanised parents of tsotsis retained substantial elements of rural socialisation and that their attitudes towards parenthood had not shifted significantly. Although the social context had changed dramatically with the dwindling of extended family networks and tribal controls and the innovation of wage labour, parental attitudes and expectations remained fairly constant. Newly urbanised parents had experienced the tightly organised, traditional age regiments which allowed adolescent boys to explore their sexuality and assert their independence while simultaneously reinforcing generational hierarchy and other traditional values and preparing them for the responsibilities of adulthood. Although these youth groups were largely self-organised and allowed its members a substantial amount of freedom, a regulated framework was placed upon their social and sexual activities. (See, for example, the Mayers' account of intlombe, the "red" Xhosa youth initiation practice, William Beinart's recent study

of the indlavini and Peter Delius's work on early twentieth century Pedi society).(12) So adolescent boys were expected to be independent, to cluster in groups outside of the home environment and to assert their masculinity. Girls, on the other hand, were expected to remain close to the home environment, to carry out domestic chores and learn domestic skills. In the absence of traditional age regiments, and virtually unsupervised by parents, male urban youths asserted their masculinity in their own way: they gathered together in gangs with their own distinctive style and ritual. But, in the cities, generational hierarchy broke down. The parents lost control.

This rural/urban continuity is important to the issue of urban youth sexuality in two ways. First, rural socialisation provided the baseline for gender identities. As in the countryside, adolescent girls were expected to be passive, domesticated and marginal to the social hierarchy. As in the countryside, boys were expected to be independent, assertive competent fighters who were active outside of the household. Second, the independence and free time available to young boys ensured that males, and not females, would establish the parameters of the new urban youth culture. Females were drawn into a male dominated subculture, on male terms.

Westernised urban images and influences served only to reinforce rural sexual stereotypes. Girls' schools encouraged female domesticity and submissiveness; movies

and comics, which were so influential in tsotsi style and imagery, provided numerous machismo role models for boys and conventionally beautiful, and helpless, role models for girls; advertisements in magazines and on billboards encouraged a tough, independent image of masculinity; sports, particularly boxing and soccer, which were extremely popular in the townships and which excluded females, encouraged male physical prowess and competitiveness.

The tsotsi masculine role model

The tsotsi masculine identity hinged around fighting skill, independence, daring and law-breaking, stylishness and success with women. Adeptness in these areas determined a tsotsi's status and prestige as a "man".

A man had to be a good fighter, not only for protection, but also to earn respect. Boxing gymnasia were extremely popular in the townships; if there were no formal facilities around, youths would work out in backyard facilities.(13) A young man's status and reputation was enhanced through winning fights. Gang leaders were generally the best fighters. Mattera recounts a story of how he, as gang leader of the Vultures, defeated the leader of another gang in a one-to-one fight. This precipitated the incorporation of the members of the defeated gang leader's gang into the Vultures.(14) Their respect was transferred to the victorious fighter. The notorious

Alexandra gangster, "Zorro", developed a large following of adoring young boys because of his skills in the martial arts. He was virtually unbeatable in hand-to-hand combat.(15) An Alexandra ex-tsotsi commented that at the age of 13 to 15 "Our heroes were the boys who could steal and stab. The more stabbings they did, the bigger they were. The biggest shot of all was the one who had killed somebody - either with a knife or a gun".(16) Movie images, of course, reinforced these attitudes. It was inconceivable to have a hero who was a poor fighter. The toughest, most violent screen characters became their role models. Nicknames such as "Jesse James", "Dillinger" and, of course, "Zorro" abounded amongst the tsotsis.

To be independent a tsotsi had to have his own means of income. Money was necessary to attract women and keep up with the demands of subcultural style. Wage labour, as I have shown in a previous paper, was scorned. Young men who worked from 9 to 5 were considered "sissies".(17) It was considered demeaning and degrading to work for someone, especially a white. It was also necessary to assert financial independence from parents, who, in any case, generally could not afford to support their sons' often extravagant tsotsi lifestyle. Stealing or gambling, then, were considered the only acceptable masculine ways of obtaining money. It followed that success in stealing became a status symbol in itself. Being independent also involved separating your life as far as possible from the

family and the household. The household was the terrain of girls. Urbanised adolescent boys tended to come home only to sleep or have meals (at which they were serviced by their mothers or sisters). Those who were successful enough at being independent avoided even this.

Particularly daring feats of law-breaking were admired. Pickpocketing and mugging were commonplace for tsotsis. Armed robberies, murder and fighting with police were highly prestigious activities. A real tsotsi had to show that he was not scared of the police. In this respect, it was "Zorro", one of the great tsotsi idols, who again epitomised tsotsi machismo. In the mid 50s, I was informed, he hijacked a police car. During the ensuing car chase he radioed through to all other police cars, telling them of his whereabouts and challenging them to come and get him. He warned them that he was "Zorro"; that he was armed and dangerous. There appeared to be no motive for this stunt other than to create a stir and enhance his reputation.(18)

In order to be an acceptable male within the subculture, a young man had to be "with it", he had to be in style. He had to dress and speak stylishly, he had to hold his liquor well and smoke dagga and he had to be seen at the right places.(19) As far as clothes were concerned, the most admired men were those who could imitate American gangster style, as portrayed in American movies, most effectively. This involved obtaining flashy and expensive clothing which

usually could only be achieved by the bigger, established gangs such as the Americans or the Spoilers. Gangs were extremely fashion conscious and competitive about their clothing. Members of the Americans apparently ordered imported clothing through up-market clothes outlets such as Markhams and Levisons. They would make a deal with these outlets not to sell any more of these items in Johannesburg in order to create exclusivity.(20) A flashy limousine made in the USA would be a highly prestigious possession. American movies set the trends in tsotsi fashion. As Don Mattera puts it: "If you didn't talk like an American, or have an American name or something, you weren't in that set".(21) Fittingly, it was the Americans gang which represented the height of tsotsi fashion on the Witwatersrand. All the poorer, less famous gangs tried to emulate their style. Of course, most of them could not afford to do this. Nevertheless, the basic elements of style had to be there. The tightfitting zoot trousers were essential. And speaking tsotsitaal was essential. Every self-respecting tsotsi had to be familiar with tsotsitaal on pain of being branded a "sissie" or a "moegoe" (a country bumpkin). Like clothing, tsotsitaal was subject to fashion shifts. In order to be "with it", a tsotsi had to be familiar with all the latest slang and language innovations. Although most urbanised township girls were also generally familiar with tsotsitaal, being out of touch with the language did not involve a threat to their sexual identity.

As in all male-dominated cultures, possession of women represented a crucial status symbol. The beauty and quantity of a tsotsi's girlfriends were an indicators of his success in other fields of masculine accomplishment. Fight victories inevitably attracted women. "The conquest obviously brought lots of girls and having lots of women at the time said who you were."(22) High fashion also attracted women, thus it was the Americans who succeeeded in getting the really prestigious catches such as Miriam Makeba and Dolly Rathebe. In Sophiatown "many of the prettier girls, even at 16 or 17, would end up with the Americans, because the Americans were flashier, they wore the best clothes, they had the most money".(23) Tsotsis competed furiously over "beautiful women" which often led to attractive women being harrassed. "You were in trouble if you were a beautiful woman," comments Queeneth Ndaba.(24) It was particularly important for a gang leader to have an attractive and sought after girlfriend. Inevitably, "the prettiest girls were ... lovers of gang leaders".(25) It was also prestigious for tsotsis to have children as a sign of their manhood. Thus Norris Nkosi was extremely proud to have a child at the age of 16 with his 15 year-old girlfriend. "We used to boast about our kids," says Nkosi.(26) It was, however, unusual for a tsotsi to help support his children.

From as early as the late 1930s, township administrations

as well as the white liberal establishment tried to promote the Boys' Club and Boy Scout movements as an alternative to tsotsiism. According to the constitution of the Dube Boys' Clubs Association, "The general aim of the Association shall be to promote the mental, physical and spiritual well-being of boys".(27) In effect, they were trying to create an alternative masculine role model for township youths, a model which emphasized social responsibility and godliness. Although the African Boy Scout' Association claimed a nation-wide membership of over 10 000 by 1953 (28), the movement's impact on the tsotsi subculture appears to have been negligible. The Boy Scout constituency overlapped almost entirely with the schoolgoing constituency; the movement seemed to have little success in recruiting outside of the schools.(29) This is not surprising, since it promoted a masculine image almost in antithesis to the tsotsi image. The ideal Boy Scout was law-abiding, hard-working and God-fearing. He rejected alcohol, dagga, promiscuity and violence; he respected adults and accepted adult supervision. There were only two areas of commonality: one was an emphasis on physical fitness and health; the other was a promotion of the domesticity and passivity of girls (as epitomised in the Girls' Club and Girl Guides movements). Tsotsis rejected the Boy Scout image because their particular brand of machismo was inextricable from a subcultural challenge to hegemonic cultural norms.

The absent girls

If township girls and young women were in fact marginal to the tsotsi subculture, how did they allocate their time? All indications point to the fact that unemployment was worse amongst female youths than amongst male youths on the Witwatersrand.(30) Although jobs were available as domestic servants, domestic service was extremely unpopular amongst township girls. They did not like the loneliness and isolation entailed in working in the white suburbs. A few young women became teachers and nurses but the numbers were insignificant in overall terms. A handfull of young women made a career for themselves in the entertainment world; they were amongst the few women who made a name for themselves in the townships.(31) Many girls were involved in full-time or occasional prostitution, work which usually went hand in hand with waitressing at shebeens. Young women who were formally employed were very much the exception. As I have shown previously, township children tended to leave school at a very early age; this applied to girls and boys alike. Nevertheless, girls were generally kept off the streets. Unlike boys, girls were tied to the household. In a memorandum written in the early 1950s, Ellen Hellman summed up the situation:

> Occupational opportunities for female juveniles, apart from professional openings, such as teaching and nursing, barely exist apart from domestic service. There is little unemployment among female juveniles [because] ... although there are practically no recreation facilities open to non-school going girls, they are kept busy in the home, have less leisure time than the boys and are

consequently not so affected by this disability.(32)

"Fathers and mothers were more strict with their daughters," observes Don Mattera. They usually were kept at home and did housework.(33) Gertrude Twala recalls that, as a girl in her early teens growing up in Orlando in the late 1950s, her parents would never let her out at night. Her parents tried to stop her coming into any contact with the tsotsis, though it was often unavoidable. She would have to do a lot of work in the household. Sometimes a friend of hers would come over and spend the night. This seemed to be a fairly common pattern amongst her female peers.(34) Lynette Leeuw, who was a teenager in Krugersdorp during the 1950s had similar experiences. There was a great deal of work to be done in the household, she recalls. She had to fetch water and wood (at which points there was often unavoidable contact with tsotsis), clean the house and help look after the younger kids.(35) According to Norris Nkosi, parents would allow their daughters to go out at night as long as they had finished off their household chores and were accompanied by a boy whom they knew and trusted.(36) It was in this way, it would appear, that girls made contact with the gangs.

Apart from domestic duties, many teenage girls were tied to the home because they were already parents. Girls often fell pregnant. Generally, their boyfriends made little contribution to bringing up the babies; teenage mothers would stay with their parents and their children would

become part of their parents' households.(37) Teenage girls were young enough to fall under the discipline of their parents although they were very often parents themselves.

The feminine identity in the tsotsi subculture

Girls spent very little time in the gang as such. They were outside of the mainstream of gang activity. They never got involved in gang fights and it was extremely unusual for them to be involved in activities such as mugging or gambling. The girls would be present when there was a "do". "They were the gangsters' molls. They moved around with them at parties."(38)

Girls, or young women, involved in the gangs were generally referred to as "molls". They were the personal girlfriends of gang members. They went around with their boyfriends to gigs and parties. They had to entertain the tsotsis and come across as attractive as possible so as to bolster the masculine egos of their boyfriends. They were "showpieces". "The poor creatures," comments Mattera in retrospect, "they had no options really ... they were also victims."(39) Molls were sometimes used as spies. If a member of a rival gang took an interest in one of them, her boyfriend sometimes encouraged her to get involved with the rival in the hope that she would get access to gang secrets and strategies. This infidelity was tolerated because the boyfriend continued to feel in control of his girlfriend

and the rival was being duped.(40)

Some girls were drawn peripherally into tsotsi criminal activity. They were known as noasisas. They were used as scouts, shoplifters and decoys.(41) They would distract pickpocketing vitims or help to "case the joint" before robberies. Mattera remembers one Sophiatown noasisa named Stololo. She was a beautiful young woman with large breasts. She would go up to a shopkeeper and distract him by "opening herself up". She would scream that the shopkeeper was trying to rape her. During the commotion the tsotsis would take the till.(42) The noasisas, though, were left out of the prestige spheres of criminal activity: planning robberie holding the gun or knife, seizing the loot. The men in control. The activities of the noasisas were acceptable precisely because they were peripheral.

On occasions, it seems, girls were involved in inter-gang fighting but, once again, they were a side-show. They would only fight girls from other gangs. They would take on the rivalry of their boyfriends or brothers.(43) Apart from a few exceptional women, on whom I will focus in the final section, it was unheard of for a woman to fight a man in a gang war.

Clothing styles involved a very clear differentiation between males and females. There was certainly no androgynous experimentation in the tsotsi subculture. All

the elements of style that were associated with the subculture were worn by men alone: the tightfitting zoot trousers, the floppy overcoats, the wide-rimmed hats, the flashy shirts and ties. Female styles were far more varied. They wore skirts and dresses, never trousers. "Pants weren't in" for women yet. As with the males, their style was influenced by the movies. "There were trendsetters" who would try to keep in touch with the latest Hollywood fashion.(44) There was no particular style, then, which clearly identified females as being part of the subculture, or members of a specific gang.

Females who were involved with the gangs accepted the masculine status and prestige structures. In other words, they accepted as prestigeous the same achievements that the males did. In effect, they acknowledged their own low status; their own status could only be defined indirectly, according to the status of their boyfriends, their possessors. It was prestigeous to have a boyfriend who was a good fighter, who was stylish, who was, in short, respected by other men. Mattera describes the rise of his gang, the Vultures, in Sophiatown during the mid 1950s:

> Territorial gains had been made. Younger gangs had been usurped. The police had been put in their place. The girls were moving after us ... these were the guys you had to marry, these were the guys you had to be lovers with.(45)

Godfrey Moloi recalls that the women who hung around with the gangsters in Orlando during the 1940s and 1950s saw non-gang members as "sissies".(46) According to Motjuwadi,

the molls "would have no respect for a guy who worked at a nine-to-five job for a pittance". Generally, the girls of Sophiatown "didn't respect nine-to-five men as much as those who lived by their wits".(47)

Although gangsters were extremely demanding and often brutal towards their girlfriends, there were definite benefits attached to having a gangster as a boyfriend. Apart from the prestige, it often offered a high standard of living and, more importantly, protection from other gangsters. As long as the girlfriend accepted that she "belonged" to the gangster and remained faithful to him, she would receive presents of food and clothing and she would be protected from the harassment and molestation of other gangsters.(48) As Mattera puts it:

> Some of the women became property of the guys. So much so that if you were seen talking to that girl you would be attacked, either by the gang or by the guy himself. Because some of the women <u>wanted</u> to be property. There was security in being property. And there was clothes, money, food ...(49)

Motjuwadi makes a similar observation:

> And sometimes he [a gangster boyfriend] might even be nice and gentle to her. He could buy her some of the nicest things which an ordinary worker can't, he can take her to the movies when other guys are going to work and they attend parties. And the important thing is that no guttersnipe can take chances with her because she belongs to someone who is respected.(50)

Queeneth Ndaba was once sought after by one particularly nasty gangster. She was "saved", she feels, only because another gangster, a member of the Otto Town Gang, was in

love with her and protected her.(51)

Objectification and Violence

> Zorro had several places where he kept his molls, the most important of which were two at 7th and 8th Avenues. All the girls who belonged to the gang were branded with the "Mark of Zorro" ... the letter "Z". This mark was scratched on with a knife on the shoulder, arm or forehead. Some of them, still up to this day, carry the "Mark of Zorro".(52)

This extract appeared in a 1958 edition of Drum. In a sense, all women involved in the tsotsi subculture were branded with the Mark of Zorro. The mark was symbolic of the machismo of their movie-inspired overlords, it was symbolic of their objectification and, perhaps most starkly of all, it was symbolic of the violence which underpinned their sexual subordination.

Tsotsi gangsters generally regarded their women as property. According to Mattera, they were seen as "chattle".(53) They were ornaments and showpieces with which tsotsis displayed their own masculinity. Queeneth Ndaba recalls that a women's name would get "suggested" by tsotsis. Before meeting the woman a tsotsi would claim her as property and then seek her out. It would often be considered a favour from one tsotsi to another to "suggest" an attractive woman. Often a tsotsi would pick himself a woman after seeing her photograph or catching a glimpse of her. Generally, the woman had little option but to accept the advances of the man. She was extremely vulnerable unless she was attached to another gangster who commanded

some respect.(54) Tsotsis liked to dress women up the way they (the tsotsis) liked; they would pick out the clothes and adorn their possessions as they saw fit. Women had little option but to accept the image that was imposed upon them. Often they would have to hide these clothes so as to conceal their involvement with tsotsis from their parents.(55)

A gang's possessiveness over women generally coincided with its territoriality. A woman who lived in a gang's territory was assumed to be the property of that gang. A woman would not be allowed to have a boyfriend from a rival gang's area "otherwise the boys come and hit you".(56) "A girl couldn't have boyfriend from the other side." (57) Similarly, it would involve enormous risk for a gangster to wander into another gang's territory to court a woman. "It was showing no respect. You'd get beaten up. Even if no one in the gang was in love with the girl." Only occasionally, perhaps as a favour to a friendly gangster, an outsider would be allowed to court a local woman through a special "gentleman's agreement".(58)

Women were passive recipients of a males' affection. The tsotsis chose their lovers; it was extremely unusual for a woman to make an active choice about her partner. Furthermore, once she was involved with a tsotsi, she was expected to remain loyal and faithful. A relationship could only be terminated through the man's choice. I asked Norris

Nkosi, who was a member of the Spoilers during the 1950s, what would happen if a woman decided she did not love her boyfriend anymore. He replied:

> We hit them. She won't say she doesn't love you. Not during those days ... She didn't have a choice. Our girlfriends, they didn't have a choice. That's why, in those days, our girlfriends had to make sure, if they were involved with somebody, not to do anything wrong, She must know: if I love this man, I love this man. She mustn't say tomorrow I don't love him ... You must make sure that you love this man.

Then I asked him what would happen if the man decided that he did not love his girlfriend anymore. "He's the master of them all," Nkosi replied, "He'll just leave the girlfriend. He'll tell her to vamos." According to Nkosi, it was only considered legitimate for a woman to drop her boyfriend under one circumstance: if the boyfriend went to jail. It was felt that, under these circumstances, the girlfriend was entitled to become involved with another man. In fact, argues Nkosi, the new boyfriend would be doing the imprisoned man a favour. "Rather let her be protected by a decent guy," he reasons, "than leave her totally unprotected."(59) Nkosi's recollections of Spoiler attitudes are substantiated in a 1959 Golden City Post feature on the Spoilers. According to the feature writer, "A Spoiler could just pick out a woman ... She was sure to be his girl - like it or not".(60) But these sexual interactions were certainly not restricted to the Spoilers It was a general tsotsi phenomenon. Magubane has similar recollections about the Berlins of Sophiatown:

> With Berlins, they propose and you refuse, you've

> had it. They hit the hell out of you. You've just got to submit. Say "Yes, I love you" even though you know you don't. It was hard for young girls to grow up in that area.(61)

Queeneth Ndaba, who grew up in Orlando East but spent a great deal of time in Sophiatown during the late 1940s and 1950s, recalls a particular tsotsi method of picking up women. A woman would be walking in the streets. A flashy car driven by a tsotsi would pull up alongside her and the tsotsi would get out. He would open the passenger seat door and stoop to pick up a stone. This was an indication that she had no option but to get in. It was a ritual; in this instance, the violence was suggested rather than carried out.(62)

Women, particularly young unattached women, had remarkably little freedom of movement in the Witwatersrand townships. They were in constant danger of being molested and harassed by gangs of tsotsis (or individual tsotsis). Women never went out at night without male escorts. But during the day women had to go about their daily business: collecting firewood, fetching water, washing clothes and, in the case of many teenage girls, going to school. It was at these points that tsotsis waited for their opportunity to waylay women. Schoolgirls were particularly vulnerable. Throughout the 1950s, the Golden City Post, probably the newspaper most in touch with events "on the ground" in the townships, was punctuated with reports of schoolgirls being waylaid by "gangs of youths". Throughout the Witwatersrand, schoolgirls were threatened, harassed and, occasionally,

raped while on their way to or from school.(63) In July 1959 a resident of Orlando East II, W.S. Ndhlovu, wrote a letter to the manager of the West Rand Administration Board cmplaining that gangs of township youths, with names such as "Benzine Boys", "Sputnik" and "Spoilers", were waylaying schoolgirls. When school came out the gangsters "threaten, molest and sometimes rape" girls of 15 to 17 years old. Ndhlovu followed this letter up in October of the same year complaining that no action had been taken against these young gangsters "even in obvious cases of rape and assault".(64) At one school in Sophiatown the problem was so serious that the headmaster was forced to organise an escort of bigger boys, "weightlifters and boxers", for the girls.(65) Sometimes an individual gangster would fixate on one particular woman, after perhaps having seen a photograph of her, and follow her around. He would watch her every movement, become familiar with her routines and wait for an appropriate moment to pounce. "Desirable" women were particularly victimized in this respect. According to Queeneth Ndaba, it often became a burden to be considered an attractive woman. Eventually she and her friends cottoned on to the idea of walking around in drab clothing. "To look glamorous was too dangerous".(66)

Women were never safe from the gangs, even when escorted by men or in public places. Abduction of women was an extremely common township phenomenon during the late 1940s and 1950s. The Spoilers were notorious for going around to

shebeens and gigs and kidnapping women. They forced young girls into cars and often held them for weeks. They would be taken to hideouts and sexually assaulted. In one incident, a group of Spoilers raided a Reef hospital and abducted several learner nurses for the night. They were intimidated into remaining silent about the incident.(67) Kay Manana, a prominent township musician during the 1940s and 1950s, recalls that Spoilers often disrupted gigs and parties and took girls away with them.(68) This was not a practise confined to the Spoilers; it occurred throughout the Witwatersrand. The ubiquitous Zorro, for instance, was known to have abducted women for up to a week.(69) Even the "more respectable gangs", such as the Americans, would drag a girl away against her will. The Americans would consider it a personal insult if women resisted abduction.(70) One Sunday afternoon in the mid 1950s, Manana and his band, who were stationed in Alexandra, went to play at the Odin in Sophiatown. A few local Alexandra women went along with his band to watch the performance. During the show, one of the Alexandra women was abducted by the Americans. "They wanted to keep her. They wouldn't let her go". Manana and his band went to plead on her behalf. She was begging and pleading not to be left behind. Only out of deference to the musicians the Americans eventually agreed to let her go.(71)

During the tsotsi gang era, rape was more prevalent than usual in the Witwatersrand townships, particularly amongst

juveniles. Between 1936 and 1939, an average of 5 or 6 rape or attempted rape cases appeared before Johannesburg Juvenile Court. By 1950, this figure had risen to 57; between 1953 and 1955, juvenile rape cases reached a peak with figures of 98, 106 and 118 respectively.(72) Of course these figures do not come anywhere close to reflecting the overall extent of juvenile rape on the Witwatersrand. The vast majority of incidents went unreported and without prosecution because of intimidation, personal complications and lack of evidence. Nevertheless, the Juvenile Court statistics do provide some sense of the escalation of the phenomenon during the 1950s. In 1955, Councillor Lewsen, after extensive discussions with Advisory Board members about tsotsi crime in the townships, commented:

> These men tell me - and I believe them - that no decent man or woman is safe in his or her own home. Wives and young girls are raped in the streets and on their way home from work. Some are even raped in their own homes in front of their families, who are too terrified to report to the police for fear of victimization.
>
> These gangsters rule the townships at the point of a knife or pistol ...
>
> They consider themselves invincible and show no fear even for the police. They boast openly that the police are so intent on liquor and pass-law offences that they have no time to give to the activities of the tsotsis.(73)

In September 1955 a teenage girl from Orlando was assaulted by two 20 year old local Orlando tsotsis. They pinned her down and said: "This girl is cheeky". Then, with a knife, one assailant scarred her severely on her face and breast.(74) It was a seemingly motiveless assault. The girl

was paying for the crime of being "cheeky". She had probably resisted their, or some other tsotsis', advances. Or she had spoken back to them. "Cheekiness", or insolence, essentially involves a breach of understood or "natural" hierarchy. When "natural" hierarchies are challenged, rebels are disciplined. Rape and other forms of sexual assault are assertions of power, assertions of hierarchy.(75) Ultimately, violence lurks behind every hegemonic status quo but, in the tsotsi subculture, there was unusually little subtlety in the enforcement of sexual hegemony. The sanction of violence and coercion was always highly visible.

Were women merely passive victims of male domination? Were young women able to build any defense mechanisms, to improve their strength and bargaining power within the subculture? There is little evidence to suggest that young women established any kind of effective defense networks. Their only protection came from within the family, within the household. Church-based woman's associations and stokvels involved older, married women. However restrictive and repressive itself, marriage, withdrawal from the youth subculture, was often a young woman's best line of defense. Marriage represented a shift from the street into the domestic sphere. Here a woman had some protection and bargaining power, particularly if she earned crucial supplementary family income through beer brewing, washing or prostitution. But within the tsotsi subculture itself,

save for a few individuals, it is difficult to find evidence of young women being anything but passive victims. More research needs to be carried out in this area.

The rogue women

There were a few individual women in the Witwatersrand townships who took tsotsis on at their own game. They were tough, independent fighters who managed to forge for themselves a certain amount of respect and personal discretion over their sexual lives. They were prepared to defend themselves with their fists, knives and guns. In order to retain their independence and sexual freedom, they had to assume what amounted to a "masculine" identity. In Sophiatown these women were referred to as "brekgat" or "wildeperde", interestingly enough terms almost synonomous with "virgin". In other words, they were women who were able to exercise sexual choice and prolong their virginity if they wanted to. They were thought of as "women who don't want to be touched by men".(76) For the most part, they were loners. There was no sense in which they tried to organise women against their oppression. They resisted only on a personal level.

At least one Witwatersrand gang had a "women's wing": the Berliners of Sophiatown. It appears to be the only instance in which a gang actively organised and trained women to fight alongside the men. The women in the "women's wing" were not molls; they participated in fights and they wore

the gang tattoo, the swastika, along with the men.(77) The women's wing, however, fell under the command of the larger male gang in much the same way as the "youth wing" (for those less than 14 years old) did. It did not seem to involve any kind of exploration of female sexuality, nor did it in any way challenge the dominance of men within the gang. Nevertheless, at least two well-known "wildeperde" emerged from this women's wing. The one was Mamang, who was regarded as the boss of the women's wing; the other was a woman called Sinna.

Mamang was a boxer, weightlifter and gambler. She was a tough fighter. Peter Magubane recalls that she once felled him with a powerful blow. As far as Magubane could make out "Mamang was no one's lover".(78) Sinna, who came from neighbouring Meadowlands, was known as "Madipela". Mattera remembers her clearly:

> She was a member of the Berliners Gang ... and she fought side by side with the men. No men messed around with Sinna. Sinna was too powerful. And beautiful ... Sinna was never touched by men ... nobody dared to propose to Sinna. You had to be a special kind of a guy.

After the Sophiatown removals, Sinna returned to Meadowlands, which was an extremely dangerous and violent place at the time. People gathered around her for protection and she eventually established a new gang which ruled over the area for some time.(79)

Balissa was another Sophiatown "wildeperd". There were a few women who "liked to be free like Balissa," recalls

Mattera.

> She was a four-and-a-half, five foot girl ... Balissa was a free spirit. She hit men with rights ... Balissa carried a knife, she gambled, she moved free, she went to shebeens, she had a drink. No man touched Balissa ... she was a free spirit ... she belonged to no guy. And I would like to think that, even until 1955, Balissa was a virgin. She was not a loose woman. She knew what she wanted out of life and she had to be strong.

In the late 1950s, Balissa became involved with a man with whom she eventually had children.(80)

One informant, Henry Miles, remembers a "tough lady" called Sponono who led a gang which operated in 8th Street Alexandra during the early 1950s. Sponono was "short, fat and stout... but she was the fastest thing with a knife". She was about thirty years old when she led the gang, which was made up of males ranging from their late teens through to their late twenties. The gang was based at her house in 8th Street which was used as both a shebeen and a gambling den. Sponono never settled down with one man. Men were apparently scared of her and rarely risked refusing her advances. "The boss takes who she wants". Men respected her knife skills and nobody wanted to be "left holding their intestines".(81)

Perhaps the best known of these "free spirits" was a woman who operated in the late 40s and early 50s known only as "Bitch Never Die". She fought with men. Bitch Never Die was a loner, though she sometimes seemed to have a few "side-kicks who hung around her". Most men respected her,

recalls Stan Motjuwadi, "No men wanted to be humiliated. She was a real toughie. If she fancied you, she just took you".(82) According to Lynette Leeuw, "she did everything that the men did"; she used to smoke, drink and use a knife. "Even the men were scared of her." Other women were confused and non-plussed by her; she did not have children or family and never married. She was "a real wild creature who belonged to nobody".(83)

In an environment dominated by men, then, it was conceivable for a woman to make a space for herself, to establish a certain amount of respect and sexual freedom. But she had to fight for it, literally. And she would probably always be regarded as an outcast and eccentric.

The expression of an aggressive masculinity was integral to the tsotsi identity. Any analysis of the subculture which underplays the construction of sexuality and gender relations will fail to really grasp what it meant to be a tsotsi. By definition, tsotsis were men but women were not absent from the subculture; almost without exception, they were drawn in on male terms to reinforce tsotsi notions of masculinity. A tsotsi was a man but his masculinity was unconvincing if he did not have a woman to dominate.

NOTES

(1) See Chapter Two for a detailed discussion on subcultural definition.

(2) A powerful machismo spirit and the absence of females are recurrent themes in studies of youth subculture. For post-war American examples, see Cohen, A.K., Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956; Gibbens, T.C.N. & Ahrenfeldt, R.H. (eds), Cultural Factors in Delinquency, Tavistock Publications, 1971. For an excellent overview of post-war British subcultures, see Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (eds), Resistance Through Rituals, Hutchinson of London, 1976. For an interesting examination of youth cultures in post-First World War Berlin, see Rosenhaft, E., "Organising the Lumpenproletariat: Cliques and Communists in Berlin During the Weimar Republic" in Evans, R.J. (ed), The German Working Class 1888 - 1933, London: Croom Helm, 1982. For a study of youth gangs in Kinshasa during the early post-independence period, see La Fontaine, J.S., "Two Types of Youth Group in Kinshasa (Leopoldville)" in Mayer, P. (ed), Socialization: The Approach from Social Anthropology, Tavistock Publications, 1970.

(3) McRobbie, A. and Garber, J., "Girls and Subcultures" in Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (eds),Resistance Through Rituals; Mike Brake, The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.

(4) Brake, The Sociology of Youth Culture, p vii of Introduction.

(5) McRobbie and Garber, "Girls and Subcultures", p211.

(6) Brake, The sociology of Youth Culture, p141.

(7) Easthope, A., What a Man's Gotta Do. The masculine myth in popular culture., Paladin Grafton Books, p7.

(8) Frith, quoted in Brake, The Sociology of Youth Culture. p141.

(9) See Easthope, What a Man's Gotta Do, pp35-60.

(10) The British subculture known as the Mods, which was a major presence in the country during the late 1950s and 1960s, was perhaps something of an exception in this respect. Girls were certainly present in the subculture and they participated in the style of the subculture. Nevertheless, men still dominated the movement and most of the sexual stereotypes were consistent with other subcultures, though it manifested itself somewhat less harshly. The quasi-Punk subculture which clustered around David Bowie during the late 1960s, early 1970s , was unique as a subculture in that it explored bisexuality to some extent. This should perhaps not be exaggerated, however, since this exploration manifested itself more in terms of style than practice. Although the style was often clearly androgynous, males dominated the subculture in much the same way as males dominated other subcultures.

(11) It could perhaps be argued that tsotsis were structurally dominant in that they were urban. Certainly the tsotsis themselves perceived it that way. It remains

consistent to my argument that tsotsis always emphasized their "urbanness". They were extremely scornful of youths from the countryside who they saw as inexperienced and naive.
(12) Mayer, I. and Mayer, P., "Socialization by Peers. The Youth Organization of the Red Xhosa" in Mayer,P (ed), Socialization; William Beinart, "The Origins of the Indlavini: Male Associations and Migrant Labour in the Transkei", draft of paper for Festschrift to Philip and Iona Mayer edited by P. Mc Allister, C. Manson and A. Spiegel, Cape Town 1990 (forthcoming); Delius, P, "Sebatakgomo: Migrant Organisation, the ANC and the Sekhukhuneland Revolt", JSAS, Volume 15 No 4.
(13) Interviews, Peter Magubane, Johannesburg 7/9/1988 and Norris Nkosi, Soweto 25/9/1988.
(14) Interview, Don Mattera, Eldorado Park 10/7/1988.
(15) Nkosi 25/9/88; Drum August 1955.
(16) Drum November 1951.
(17) Interview, Stanley Motjuwadi, Johannesburg 29/9/1988
(18) Nkosi 25/9/88 and Motjuwadi 29/9/88. Both informants told me this story independently. It is unclear whether the police finally caught Zorro.
(19) See Chapter Three for a more detailed account of tsotsi subcultural style.
(20) Nkosi 25/9/88 and Motjuwadi 29/9/88
(21) Interview, Don Mattera, interviewed by Tom Lodge, Johannesburg 1979
(22) Mattera 1979
(23) Mattera 1979
(24) Interview, Queeneth Ndaba, Johannesburg 15/9/1988.
(25) Mattera 10/7/88
(26) Nkosi 25/9/88.
(27) IAD WRAB 219/4, Constitution of the Dube Boys' Clubs Association.
(28) IAD WRAB 219/4, Clipping from Rand Daily Mail, 7 October 1953.
(29) Interview, Jacob Nhlapho, Johannesburg 12/5/1989; interview, Arthur "McCoy" Mdlalose, Johannesburg 27/4/89.
(30) Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Native Juvenile Unemployment on the Witwatersrand and in Pretoria, chaired by S.P. Viljoen, 1951, parag36
(31) CPSA SAIRR Quintin Whyte Papers, Memorandum: "Delinquent Urban Youth: Recent delinquents", undated (c1954), p10.
(32) CPSA EHP File 51, Memorandum: "Early School-leaving and African Juvenile Occupational Opportunities", undated (c1951).
(33) Mattera 10/7/88
(34) Interview, Gertrude Thwala, Johannesburg 21/9/88.
(35) Interview, Lynette Leeuw, Johannesburg 23/9/88.
(36) Nkosi 28/9/88
(37) Mattera 10/7/88, Nkosi 25/9/88, Thwala 21/9/88.
(38) Motjuwadi 29/9/88. Nkosi and Magubane's recollections are similar.
(39) Mattera 10/7/88

(40) Interview, Godfrey Moloi, Soweto 26/3/88; Nkosi 25/9/88
(41) Drum November 1951
(42) Mattera 10/7/88
(43) Thwala 21/9 88; see also an article on tsotsis in Golden City Post 7 September 1958.
(44) Motjuwadi 29/8/88
(45) Mattera 1979
(46) Moloi 26/3/88
(47) Motjuwadi 29/8/88
(48) Leeuw 23/9/88
(49) Mattera 10/7/88
(50) Motjuwadi 29/8/88
(51) Ndaba 15/9/88
(52) Drum August 1955; this story was borne out by Godfrey Moloi, who was unaware of the Drum feature. Moloi added that Zorro would often forget about "his girls" but claim them again some time in the future if he noticed the "Z" scratched on them.
(53) Mattera 10/7/88
(54) Ndaba 15/9/88
(55) Ndaba 15/9/88
(56) Thwala 21/9/88
(57) Magubane 7/9/88
(58) Motjuwadi 29/8/88
(59) Nkosi 28/9/88
(60) Golden City Post 26 July 1959
(61) Magubane 7/9/88
(62) Ndaba 15/9/88. Queeneth Ndaba's friend, Patricia, who was sitting in during this interview, actually reminded Queeneth about this ritual. They both seemed to have witnessed it independently.
(63) See Golden City Post 3 April 1955; 23 June 1957; 28 September 1958; 28 June 1959. These incidents took place in Germiston, Elizabithville (Orlando), Evaton and Orlando East respectively.
(64) IAD WRAB 351/1, Letters from W.S. Ndhlovu to the Manager, 6 July 1959 and 26 October 1959.
(65) Motjuwadi 29/9/88
(66) Ndaba 15/9/88
(67) Golden City Post 26 July 1959; see also an article which appeared on 28 September about a splinter of the disbanded Msomis from Alexandra who were wreaking havoc in Evaton. This group also reportedly abducted women.
(68) Interview, Kay Manana, Johannesburg 21/9/88.
(69) Moloi 26/3/88; Lynette Le[illegible] has similar recollections about nameless tsotsi gangs.
(70) Motjuwadi 29/9/88
(71) Manana 21/9/88
(72) IAD WRAB 351/2, Juvenile Court Statistics 1936-1960. Figures are unavailable 1940 until 1948.
(73) IAD WRAB 351/1, photocopy of article from The Star 8 November 1955.
(74) Goluen City Post 11 September 1955, p15.
(75) For a good overview of the issue of rape, power and

sexuality, see Susan Brownmiller, Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape, Toronto: Bantam Books, 1976.
(76) Mattera 10/7/88
(77) Magubane 7/9/88
(78) Magubane 7/9/88
(79) Mattera 10/7/88. Sinna eventually became a town councillor. "She was used by the state," in Mattera's words. She apparently now lives somewhere in Zone One.
(80) Mattera 10/7/88
(81) Interview, Henry Miles, 4/4/1989 and 11/4/1989.
(82) Motjuwadi 29/9/88
(83) Leeuw 23/9/88

CHAPTER FIVE:

"WHEN ARE THEY GOING TO FIGHT?"
Tsotsis, Youth Politics and the PAC

During the 1940s and most of the 1950s youths played very much a peripheral role in township politics on the Witwatersrand. The vast majority of urbanised African youths were absorbed to a lesser or greater extent into the politically unorganised and largely anti-social tsotsi subculture. Organisations such as the Congress Youth League (CYL) drew its support from a numerically marginal stratum of youth based in secondary school. Youths associated with the tsotsi gang subculture tended to express their political and economic frustration through specific forms of subcultural style and ritual and through spontaneous violence directed against symbols of authority and subordination. It was only in the very late 1950s that the broader youth constituency started to become interested in formal political organisation. They were particularly drawn to the newly formed PAC which seemed to strike an appropriate chord of machismo and anti-establishment aggression. The PAC never recoiled from mobilising the volatile, violent and politically undisciplined tsotsi

element. The period 1959-1960 represents an important transitional phase in South African youth politics, indeed, in anti-apartheid politics more generally. In the short period that the PAC operated legally, it succeeded in drawing substantial numbers of the broader urban youth constituency into formal political organisation for the first time. Although the 1960s witnessed massive state repression and apparent political acquiescence, a new style of highly militant, youth-dominated opposition politics was incubating in the rapidly sprouting Bantu Education schools.

This paper focuses specifically on the Witwatersrand area and, although I have pieces of evidence to suggest that some of these patterns were duplicated in other major South African urban centres, it would be unwise to assert national generalisations from this case study.

This paper is divided into three sections. In the first section I will focus on the tsotsi subculture's lack of interest in formal politics throughout the 1940s and most of the 1950s. This will also involve an investigation of the relationship between the ANC and the tsotsi youth gangs. In the second section I look at the tsotsi subculture's informal forms of political and cultural resistance throughout this period. In the final section I examine the political mobilisation of urban youth from around 1959, particularly by the PAC.

# I

By the late 1930s urban youths were noticeably absent from the mainstream of African resistance politics. In 1938 H. W. Nxumalo, writing for the Bantu World, lamented: "Why can't youth organise themselves to form their own movements? Why can't youth be represented in the All African Convention, in the African National Congress and also in other movements?" Youths, he complained, were idle and lazy.(1) Township teenagers, generally unemployed and out of school, were increasingly attracted to an expanding gang subculture which, by the early- to mid 1940s, had developed into the tsoti subculture. The subculture, which incorporated the bigger, organised criminal gangs shading through to small streetcorner defense and frienship networks, distanced itself from political organisation.(2)

In 1944 the Congress Youth League was established to mobilise the urban African youth constituency and radicalise the ANC from within. But, although the CYL established a substantial support base within a number of secondary schools, the organisation never really identified tsotsis as a potential support base. Tsotsis, in turn, were not attracted to the CYL's rather elitist style of politics.(3) Throughout the 1940s, then, apart from an element of educated and somewhat older youths drawn to the CYL, township youths kept their distance from political organisation. Reflecting this pattern, an indignant Bantu

World reader wrote in 1946:

> Most of our youths are addicted to sigomvan and other concoctions, and the educated amongst them keep company with undesirables. Most of our youths know little or nothing of the affairs affecting the race; at meetings called for our interests, youths are conspicuous by their absence.

Another reader expressed similar views in 1950:

> One wonders how much influence Congress has over African youths. I have in mind the vast numbers of young Africans between eighteen and thirty years. As far as I can see, only the older people take an interest in African political organisation.
> ... It is true that we have the Congress Youth League today, but does it enjoy the support of the entire youth?

He went on to say that the CYL should try to appeal more to the "ordinary youths".(4)

For most of the 1950s tsotsis remained distant from political organisations. It was extremely unusual to find people less than twenty years old attending ANC rallies.(5) It was always "older people" who attended meetings at Freedom Square in Sophiatown. One ex-tsotsi informant, Henry Miles, comments: "Only the fathers and the grandfathers used to go to meetings but none of the youngsters. They weren't interested."(6) According to another ex-tsotsi, Godfrey Moloi, politicians seemed very remote, highly educated and respectable.(7) The gangs got on with their own subcultural rituals and inter-gang rivalries. "We weren't interested in politics; we were interested in making love." says ex-American, "Peggy Belair".(8) "Politics in those days," observes Peter Magubane, "was not a child's game. It was for the adults.

It was not like today; teenagers never ventured into politics."(9)

Although ANC members tended to understand the socio-economic context of the tsotsi phenomenon and blame "the system" rather than tsotsi individuals, they generally found tsotsi culture alien and threatening during the 1940s and 1950s. They recoiled from the violence, irresponsibility and ill-discipline of the tsotsis. Nevertheless, there were a number of ANC activists, particularly in Sophiatown, who made a great effort to "rehabilitate" individual tsotsis and draw them into constructive political activity. Noteworthy here are Robert Resha, P. Q. Vundla, George Siwisa and Nelson Mandela. According to Don Mattera, "these people really cared". They would try to get the street thugs to read about politics and channel their energies into organisational activity. Although their success was limited, a number of tsotsis did become involved in the local ANC branch. Mattera himself was such an example. Resha and Mandela were easily accepted by gangsters because they were physically imposing personalities. Resha had many underworld connections and Mandela was a skilful boxer. They were not entirely culturally alien to the tsotsis.(10) It is important to draw a distinction between mobilising and rehabilitating. With hardly any exceptions, only individual youngsters who effectively shed their tsotsi identity were drawn into ANC structures. The tsotsis, as a constituency, were regarded

more as a menace to the community than as a potential support base. It is not surprising, therefore, that the ANC often supported and participated in local civil guard movements aimed primarily at wiping out the tsotsi scourge.(11)

II

Although the bulk of township youth had no dealings with political organisations, it would be incorrect to assume that they lacked a political consciousness. Their daily experience was packed with hardships and injustice and they certainly had some sense, however incoherent, of a white oppressor. They experienced poverty and overcrowding and were well aware of the vast discrepancies of wealth in the country; there were virtually no jobs available for city-bred youths and those jobs that were available were the most menial and worst paid; schooling beyond the sub-grades was generally unavailable or too expensive. The most politicising experience of all, however, was pass law harassment. Throughout the 1940s, and even more acutely in the 1950s under the Nationalist government, township youths were constantly threatened by the prospect of being "endorsed out" of the cities.

During the 1950s, urban youths became eligible to register and take out passes at the age of sixteen (during the

1940s the registration age was still eighteen). Registration, apart from being an infuriatingly complicated and often humiliating bureaucratic procedure, often exposed rather dubious urban status. The result was that numerous youths chose not to register even though they were considered criminals without a "dompas".(12) Even with a pass, a city-bred youth could be endorsed out of town if he failed to find employment. In 1957, a Mr Matshiqi of the Bantu Lads' Hostel remarked at a meeting of the Johannesburg Planning Council for Non-European Social Welfare that there were "hundreds of youngsters who were forced by registration laws to become fugitives." He went on to say that "it is boys such as these that start gangs." (13) Also during 1957, the Golden City Post ran an expose' on the Elandsdoorn and Pilansberg youth labour camps. The writer explained the precariousness of a township youth's urban status.

> ... A boy leaves school with or without his parents' consent (there is no compulsory schooling) and obtains a work-seeking permit which gives him seven days to find a job.
> If he is unsuccessful his permit is renewed for a further seven days, with a warning that if he does not find work this time his permit may / will be withdrawn.
> Often it is withdrawn, but some are given a further chance of one or two weeks.
> Once the permit is withdrawn, the boy cannot look for work. Then the boy, discouraged, stays away from the Pass Office and roams the streets until he is picked up by the police as a "vagrant".
> Or he may go back to the Pass Office to try again and gets "arrested" when his reference book is examined.

In an earlier extract the writer comments:

> Thus the mere failure by a minor to produce a pass or to show that he is employed or a scholar, becomes proof of delinquent tendencies.
> Such a boy is convicted for vagrancy and sent to a youth camp, in many cases without the knowledge of the parents.(14)

Township youths, then, were almost inevitably politicised. As Stan Motjuwadi put it:

> Township kids shared something in common. From birth... what happens to a township kid, what he sees - pass raids, people being arrested for pennies, the general experience of the township kid in the old townships - politicised him whether he liked it or not.

So, although the average township youth did not participate in politics during the 1940s and 1950s, "he was a smouldering volcano. All he needed was something to spark it off. It has always been like that." (15)

Tsotsi youth found the ANC's methods of political resistance incomprehensible but the tsotsi subculture engaged in its own forms of cultural and political resistance. I have shown in Chapter Three how tsotsi style, ritual and status structures were defined in antagonism both to the hegemonic white culture and to the largely passive, respectful and acquiescent culture of their parents. Apart from its anti-establishment style and language, the tsotsi subculture separated itself from mainstream society through its willingness to engage in criminal activity directed both at whites and township residents, through its rejection of the work ethic, through the glorification of violence.(16) Recalling the activities of the Americans in Sophiatown in the 1940s and 1950s,

Motjuwadi observed:

> You see, some of them regarded themselves as freedom fighters - in their own warped way... If he rolls a white business which exploits his brother he thinks he's struck a blow for liberation... They thought that to refuse to work for a white man... they regarded it in itself as a political statement.(17)

The Americans of Sophiatown were a great deal more sophisticated than the average street corner tsotsi gang. They were probably the only gang of the time, for instance, which avoided attacking local residents and it is possible that some of its members had some coherent ideas about "social banditry". For the most part, tsotsi cultural resistance was unarticulated, incoherent, inconsistent. It was gut-level and angry. The tsotsi's primary concern was to survive on the streets; to forge personal power and status within his harsh and brutal subculture.

It was the violence inherent in the tsotsi subculture which most decisively made it irreconcilable with ANC politics. Tsotsis found ANC passivity baffling, even undignified; the ANC, in turn, recoiled from tsotsi violence and volatility. Tsotsis regarded police as the universal enemy; they were prepared to fight with police physically. Throughout the 1950s in particular there were numerous incidents of tsotsi-police violence, usually not related to a directly political issue. In 1950, for instance, a riot broke out in Newclare when police were brought in to deal with illegal possession of liquor. "Young hooligans" were reported to have waged a long battle through the afternoon and night

mainly against police.(18) During the Sophiatown removals there were a number of violent engagements between street gangs and police.(19) In 1958 Moroka tsotsis even invaded the local police station to release a fellow gang member who had been arrested for sexual assault. The police manning the station only just managed to lock themselves in a room and escape out the back way before the tsotsis smashed down the locked door. The arrested youth was freed.(20) Don Mattera, in a rather over-romanticised but nevertheless revealing way, recalls his impatience as a gangster during the 1950s with ANC non-violence.

> Young people... when you saw a cop, you saw an enemy... The politicians had a nice way of approaching things. They looked for memoranda, they had petitions, they talked to you... Our memorandum was a knife and a gun. We petitioned ourselves in blood.
>
> .... As a thug, I couldn't see why they were allowing the police to run ramshod over them, why there was no physical resistance other than the thumb raised in the air, the khaki uniforms marching in the streets and singing their ditties.
>
> ... I remember going to my first meeting in Becker Street [ANC members were trying to 'rehabilitate' Mattera by the late 1950s], hearing all these people chatting away and arguing. And I remember thinking: 'When are these people going to fight? When are they going to fight?'(21)

Youths, then, clearly felt a political anger when they engaged police who entered the townships to deal with beer brewing, pass offences and general "unrest" incidents. Youths, for instance, were prominent in riots related to these issues in Krugersdorp in 1949 and Newclare in 1949 and 1950.(22)

There is some scattered evidence to suggest that the tsotsi element did occasionally participate in ANC campaigns during the 1950s but, with the possible exceptions of the Sophiatown removals and the Bantu Education boycott in Benoni and Brakpan, gangsters were never actively recruited to do so.(23) Although ANC methods were rather baffling to the tsotsis, many of the gangsters certainly felt a spontaneous sympathy for some of the ANC campaigns.(24) In an unorganised and undisciplined way they would intervene to further the interests of campaigns as they saw fit. In at least one case, it would appear, gangsters were offered money by individual activists to help enforce a boycott.(25) During the Sophiatown removals the interests of gangsters and the ANC overlapped. Ocasionally gangs would get drawn into campaigns temporarily through personalised connections between gang leaders and activists.(26)

Even if they were not actively and openly recruited, tsotsis proved to be extremely useful allies, particularly in boycotts. They would provide an element of physical coercion from which the ANC, with its principled rejection of violence in the 1950s, would shy away. Thus during tram and bus boycotts they would often prevent passengers from boarding.(27) During the potato boycott, Mattera recalls that his gang would smash the windows of fish and chips shops that failed to adhere to the boycott.(28) Possibly the most effective tsotsi intervention came in the Bantu

Education boycott. In 1955 the manager of the Johannesburg NEAD reported on an incident in Western Native Township in which a thirteen year old was stabbed by a gang of youths ranging in age from nine to fifteen years old. "...The stabbed lad refused to take part in the school boycott; he was a good boy and was thus set upon by the criminal element."(29) According to Bonner, a rehabilitated ex-tsotsi who became a key activist in the Benoni branch of the Congress Youth League used his old gang contacts to draw tsotsis into the Bantu Education boycott. The Benoni tsotsis were extremely effective in preventing schoolchildren from attending school.(30) This appears to be the only clear example of sustained and orchestrated gang involvement in ANC activity. Interestingly, the Bantu Education boycott was more sustained and successful in Benoni than in all the other urban centres.(31)

In Sophiatown the fiercely territorial youth gangs and the ANC found itself united in opposition to the removals. This was despite the fact that the ANC had a history of support for the local Civil Guard movement whose main concern it was to eradicate tsotsi gangsterism.(32) The gangs sensed that if their turf were taken away from them they would be powerless and, ultimately, disintegrate. Throughout the 1950s, particularly in the late 1950s, gangsters were involved in ongoing street battles with police and removal teams.(33) Although the ANC understood the importance of the youth gang constituency in its struggle against the

removals, the organisation had its work cut out to restrain youths from armed resistance. In 1953, when the Sophiatown removals had become a very real prospect, a revealing lead story appeared in the Bantu World. The large headline read "MACHINE GUNS, RIFLES, REVOLVERS HIDDEN IN SOPHIATOWN" with the sub-head "The People Follow the Congress Lead in Non-Violence".

> Minister Swart was right. There is an arsenal of machine-guns, rifles and revolvers in the Western Areas. There are people who are prepared to use them but the African National Congress will have nothing to do with them.
> For the past couple of weeks, Sophiatown has been a battleground for the souls of the youth.
> The violent section have demanded action.
> But Congress has fought for non-violence and the people have followed its lead.
> The battle was fought again over the weekend.
> Young men poured into Sophiatown from all over the Reef.
> They gathered in secret in many rooms. The wordy battle raged for hours.
> They demanded violent action to check the Removal.
> Congress people pleaded with them to stick to the non-violent line.
> Meanwhile big forces of police patrolled the streets, the railway stations of the Western Areas, the bus stops and the street corners.
> The weekend passed without violence.(34)

Although the ANC and the tsotsis often worked together to mobilise against the removals, cultural and strategic tensions ran deep. Throughout the 1950s the ANC leadership, with a few exceptions, failed to tune in to the wavelength of the massive youth gang constituency. The ANC was remarkably patient, disciplined, non-violent, intellectual and, for the most part, it had tremendous respect for Western democratic values. The youth gangs were impatient,

undisciplined and angry. Although they were deeply influenced by American media images, they were utterly scornful of white westernised values. They were politicised but indifferent to political practice. The ANC remained an organisation "for older people".

III

Powerfully influenced by the "Africanist" ideas of Anton Lembede and A. P. Mda, the ANC Youth League was established in 1944 with the specific aim of radicalising the ANC from within. The CYL effectively seized control of the ANC at the annual conference of the organisation in Bloemfontein in 1949. The CYL's Programme of Action was officially adopted. By the early 1950s the CYL leadership had moved into the leadership positions of the ANC. Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, amongst others, rose to prominence at this time. Although a certain organisational dynamism was injected into the ANC, many of the principles of the original CYL were overturned, particularly the rejection of alliances with sympathetic whites, coloureds, Indians and Communists. Once the CYL had achieved its objective of radicalising the ANC to an extent and the leadership structures had shifted, the original CYL lost direction. Its policies became indistinguishable from those of the parent body and it simply became the wing of the ANC which concentrated on recruiting younger people. But a simmering

tension gradually emerged within the CYL between those who were loyal to the parent body and those who saw themselves as loyal to the original principles of the CYL. A faction within the CYL, based largely in the Orlando East branch under the leadership of Potlako Leballo, felt that the ANC was out of touch with the youth constituency. The CYL, this faction felt, had to continue its task of radicalising the ANC from within. On the one hand, it argued that the ANC should not cooperate with non-Africans and all government-linked "puppet institutions" such as Advisory Boards. On the other hand, it advocated more assertive political mobilisation including, if necessary, the volatile youth constituency. The Orlando branch of the CYL linked up to a wider "Africanist" faction within the ANC. This faction was co-ordinated by a secret Central Committee established as early as 1952/3. The committee was led by the powerful and highly popular chairman of the Alexandra branch of the ANC, Josias Madzunya. By 1955 Madzunya had established a reputation as a radical Africanist and both he and Leballo were expelled from the ANC. The Orlando East branch was suspended. Madzunya and Leballo and their followers were considered to be irresponsible and racially exclusivist. Many ANC members, particularly Youth Leaguers, rallied around these expelled leaders and a major breakaway, which lead to the emergence of the PAC, was precipitated. In April 1959 the PAC was officially inaugurated under the leadership of Robert Sobukwe, a highly intellectual and

charismatic follower of the old Lembede school. Sobukwe had made a tremendous impact in the couple of years he had spent on the Witwatersrand following his move from Standerton.(35)

By August 1959, only three months after its inauguration, the PAC claimed a signed up membership of almost 25 000 of which roughly half came from the Transvaal.(36)

The PAC was essentially an organisation for young men. Gail Gerhart emphasises this point.

> ... It must be noted that, without doubt, age and not class was the most distinguishing characteristic of the PAC's following. At every level of organisation, from the national leadership down to the least regimented non-card-carrying supporter, the people associated with the PAC were at least a decade younger on average than those in the ANC. The PAC, it was sometimes said, needed no youth league because it was itself an organisation of youth from top to bottom.(37)

This observation was supported by a number of my informants. "People who joined the PAC were mostly young guys"(38); "The PAC was made up predominantly of young people - they signed up many youths"(39); "The young people were the PACs"(40). Gerhart goes on to assert that it was the tsotsi element which was particularly attracted to the PAC.

> If any single group could be described as distinctively PAC in orientation, it would be the broad category of Africans known in some contexts as "location boys" and in others as tsotsis. ... Usually more educated than lower class workers, yet unable to break into the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie, they are scornful of the low status and low paid employment available to them, and engage in rackets, con games and thefts of every description. Those who are unemployed may group into gangs of juvenile

> delinquents... and participate in crimes of violence. ... They are "embittered, frustrated, aggressive, non-conformist, suggestible, and prone to violence," Kuper§ notes, and "they reject the polished behaviour of the educated elite," the so-called "excuse me" type of older educated urban African. With little to lose materially and much to gain from the removal of job and wage discrimination, they are a politically volatile element and one which was drawn strongly to the PAC.(41)

Tom Lodge, in his Doctoral thesis on the PAC, disputes this assertion of Gerhart. He insists that the PAC failed to develop a real mass following outside of the Western Cape and that Gerhart's picture is distorted because she relied on information from ex-leaders of the Transvaal ANC.(42) But Lodge himself fails to sustain this argument in his thesis. He shows, in fact, that, although the Western Cape was far better organised, there were a substantial number of PAC and, later, Pogo cells in Pretoria, the West Rand townships and the Southern Transvaal. The Sharpeville PAC branch was particularly effective in mobilising support amongst the youth. Of the 68 functioning Pogo cells in South Africa between April 1961 and April 1963, 22 were in the Transvaal and 16 in the Western Cape.(43) Lodge also agrees that urban youths were a particularly important constituency of the Transvaal ANC: "Noticeable by their absence from the list of identifiable Transvaal PAC members are industrial or service workers and hostel dwellers. Here the PAC was a movement of the young, the urbanised and the lower middle class ..."(44) Lodge is probably correct in asserting that, apart from one or two exceptions such as Sharpeville, the structured, organised membership of the

PAC was insubstantial in the Transvaal. Nevertheless, his evidence, if anything, adds weight to the claims of many of my informants that the PAC commanded widespread sympathy and support amongst the Transvaal urban youth.(45)

The PAC immediately struck the right chord with the tsotsi youth. Tsotsis were particularly attracted to the PAC's emphasis on "action" and confrontation. Although the organisation officially distanced itself from violence, there was an unstated admiration for violent resistance. According to Gerhart "there seemed to be an assumption that violence was inevitable, or even desirable. Unlike the ANC, for which non-violence was a recognised policy, the PAC pointedly left its options open regarding methods of struggle."(46) The PAC rhetoric made more sense to the aggressively anti-establishment tsotsi subculture. Although tsotsis did not necessarily identify with the intellectual concept of Africanism, they identified with the PAC scorn for Africans who imitated the White middle class. There was also an appealing simplicity about PAC ideology. They painted the struggle in very clear "black vs white", African vs "settler" terms. The PAC "shared the same sense of urgency and frustration, the same explosive anger as the younger generation."(47)

Whereas the ANC acted within a scrupulously legal and respectable framework, the PAC were not averse to breaking the law and offending the white liberal establishment. Short of finances, the PAC would quietly encourage tsotsis

to steal equipment for producing leaflets or steal a car to further organisational objectives.(48) This made sense to tsotsis.

The PAC also tapped into a powerful machismo strain within the tsotsi subculture. Young women were horrifically objectified and abused and systematically pushed to the periphery of the subculture.(49) The PAC did not see a role for women in political resistance. Its membership was almost exclusively male; it considered a woman's league unnecessary.(50) This duplicated the pattern of urban youth gang membership and, once again, it made sense to tsotsis.

During 1959 and 1960 the PAC embarked on an intensive recruitment drive. Although amongst the youth the PAC concentrated on school pupils, the organisation also succeeded in attracting members of urban street gangs. In other words, the PAC was effectively challenging the ANC Youth League in its traditional stronghold and simultaneously penetrating the tsotsi constituency. As the ANC anticipated, the tsotsis were extremely difficult to bring under organisational discipline. Although the PAC clearly made a significant impression amongst the tsotsi element on the Rand, tsotsi participation in PAC structures tended to remain fluid and informal. The PAC's organisational achievements were far more tangible amongst school pupils PAC executive members Peter Molotsi and

Matthew Nkoana as well as Joe Tlholoe, who used to organise PAC youth in Orlando, identified school students as their key constituency.(51) Moses Dlamini recalls how, in 1955, prior to the formal PAC split, politicised pupils at Orlando High School had already become sympathetic to the Africanist wing of the ANC:

> At Orlando High School where I was schooling, we discussed these issues with other students who were also following the political trends. Some students who knew leaders of both factions of the ANC in Orlando East, went to see them to get some clarification on key issues in the liberation struggle. We debated these reports and decided that the Africanists were right. Somewhere between 1953 and 1955, the ANC leadership, without the mandate of the people, had made major policy changes and steered the struggle on a rightist course.(52)

Tom Lodge shows that the PAC during 1960, though illegal, set up effective cells in Pretoria schools such as Kilnerton and Atteridgeville, often through the assistance of sympathetic teachers.(53) Stanley Mogoba, who used to be a PAC member in Pretoria, recalls that there was a particularly powerful PAC presence at Kilnerton.(54)

Although formally the schools were the most important recruiting grounds for the PAC, the organisation did attract the lumpen youth. In fact, this pattern of recruitment started before the formation of the PAC. During the late 1950s increasingly marginalised Africanists in Orlando and Alexandra, who later became PAC cadres, were already making an impression amongst tsotsis. Two of my informants recall the work of an activist by the name of Ben Mapisa, a boxing trainer who worked out at a gymnasium

in Orlando.(55) He was a strong man who carried a gun around with him. He was respected by the tsotsis of Orlando. He was a "capable and intelligent" man who attempted to politicise the gangs. Initially a member of the Orlando CYL, he became "a scout" for the PAC. Mapisa apparently recruited young men at his gymnasium. "While people were practising boxing, they would be holding a caucus".(56) Mapisa would also call gangs together and speak to them; he would try to redirect their energy towards politics. He would tell them to identify the white establishment as the enemy rather than other gangs. He was apparently particularly successful in recruiting members of the Otto Town and Boom Town gangs.(57)

Robert Sobukwe was himself an extraordinarily powerful personality. He was charismatic, "dynamic" and influential, particularly in Orlando.(58) Like Mapisa, his personal influence was established amongst the township youth prior to the establishment of the PAC, while still a member of the ANC.(59) Norris Nkosi, an Orlando tsotsi during the 1950s, recalls the huge impact of Sobukwe amongst the youth during 1959 and 1960. Sobukwe used to address numerous meetings and young men would flock to listen to him speak.

Although scholars were probably the biggest constituency of the PAC, the organisation clearly drew in tsotsi youth on a large scale. PAC activists went "scouting on the weekends". They would tell gangsters: "Stop molesting people and come and listen to this gospel."(60) Joe

Tlholoe recalls that from the time of the Africanist breakaway in late 1958, Africanist and, later, PAC activists engaged in intensive door to door campaigning in Orlando. In 1959 the Orlando branch of the PAC called two warring gangs to a house meeting. The activists attempted to bring about a truce and encourage the gangsters to become politically involved.(61) "In the little time [the PAC] had," observed Stan Motjuwadi, "it was phenomenal how the youth responded to Sobukwe's call."(62)

Josias Madzunya established a large following amongst youth in Alexandra. Madzunya was a leading personality in Alexandra township; along with Sobukwe and Leballo he was one of the three leading figures in the Africanist camp during the late 1950s. He was a large, bearded, imposing figure who wore a battered black overcoat regardless of the weather. He was a strong advocate of physical resistance, for example, during the Sophiatown removals. Despite his expulsion from the ANC, he played a key role during the 1957 Alexandra bus boycotts.(63) According to ex-leader of the Spoilers, Bum Thabethe, Madzunya used to recruit youths on streetcorners; he was apparently highly influential amongst Alexandra's unemployed youth.(64) Joe Tlholoe recalls that Madzunya was known to have a particular rapport with street youth.(65)

In 1959 the PAC established a powerful and highly organised presence in the Vereeniging townships. In mid 1959 PAC

activists arrived from Johannesburg to set up branches in Sharpeville, Bophelong and Boipatong. They had remarkable success, particularly in Sharpeville. Activists operated systematically and cautiously, setting up probably the best organised PAC branch in the Transvaal.(66) It is significant that the PAC were effective in Sharpeville. The township had an enormous constituency of angry, volatile youths which provided fertile ground for PAC activity. Lodge describes this Sharpeville youth constituency as it appeared in 1959:

> Sharpeville's population comprised nearly 21 000 children, nearly 7 000 adult women and 8 600 men. It was therefore a predominantly youthful population. In the late 1950s youth unemployment was an increasing problem. The main local industries with their requirements for cheap heavy manual labour preferred to recruit from the reserves and industrial wage-levels and conditions did not appeal to township school-leavers. To exacerbate this in 1959 there were not enough high school places in Vereeniging to accommodate Junior Certificate holders. According to The World "scores of youths roamed the streets..."(67)

The Sharpeville branch leadership was "quite young". Although the leaders tended to be employed and compar atively well-educated, they clearly drew support from the wider local youth constituency.

Stanley Mogoba claims that the PAC branch in Pretoria had a lot of support from the "young tsotsi element". Christmas was traditionally a bloody period in the Pretoria townships on account of tsotsi crime and gang rivalry. In 1962, according to Mogoba, Christmas was noticeably more peaceful because the tsotsis had become politicised.(68)

As early as 1950, it seems clear that the South African state feared the potential politicisation of the tsotsi constituency. The state recognised tsotsi gangs as a major social control issue and started to anticipate the devastating consequences should this violent and volatile constituency become politicised.(69) In a recent paper, Jon Hyslop suggests that the Bantu Education system was set up largely as a solution to the problems of social control of the urban youth. Not only did the state want to curb the massive crime levels in the townships but it also feared the potential political mobilisation of the lumpen youth.(70) The urban youth, particularly the tsotsi element, appeared to be the primary target of the post-Sharpeville State of Emergency. In April 1960 the Golden City Post reported the following:

> Systematically and with massive forces of heavily-armed men, the police have raided their way through most of the densely-populated African areas in South Africa during the past week.
> They are not raiding for "passes", the deputy commissioner of Police for the Witwatersrand, Colonel J.C. Lemmer, told POST - they are trying to clean up "out-of-works, criminals and loafers." (71)

"Out-of-works, criminals and loafers" were almost invariably synonomous with tsotsis in administrative jargon. In July 1960 the Golden City Post ran a series of articles about thousands of youths being arrested on the Witwatersrand. On July 17 it was reported that about 15 000 youths were being held in the giant Modder B jail, a converted disused mine compound which the government purchased from ERPM in December 1959. Youths were arriving

from throughout the Reef, from as far afield as Pretoria, Krugersdorp, Springs and Nigel. Every day, it was reported, about 100 youths were released after having been thoroughly screened while about the same number were being taken in every day. Many of the "released" were sent to farm jails or returned to the reserves where they, or their parents, were born. Youths were generally detained under Section 4 of the Emergency Regulations. Some of them had spent up to two months in Modder B without being charged.(72) A Post writer described the goings-on at Modder B vividly.

> Seven or eight truckloads of prisoners thunder in and out every day - some of them being brought in for detention or "screening" by a special enquiry inside the jail, presided over by three magistrates, some of the prisoners being taken away for release or to join the labour gangs on the farms.

It was reported that a very large proportion of the approximately 14 000 Modder B detainees were under the age of 21. Common criminals and pass offenders were apparently separated from the political detainees.(73) Lodge points to similar operations carried out in Pretoria's townships. "During 1960 and 1961 anticipating political unrest and to check a growing wave of youthful gangsterism the police subjected Vlakfontein and Atteridgeville to massive pass raids on occasion deploying eight hundred men."(74) It seems clear that this massive clampdown on township youth, although not always directed at people who were overtly political, was closely linked to the political control objectives of the State of Emergency. The timing of this clampdown could also suggest that the state perceived the

extent to which the PAC had penetrated the wider youth constituency.

In late March and April of 1960 a new wave of tsotsi gang violence swept through the townships. Waves of tsotsi violence were common to the townships but, for the first time, a political dimension crept into tsotsi activity.(75) During the chaotic early days of the State of Emergency the tsotsi's criminal and political activities were intertwined and ambiguous. On 3 April the Golden City Post, under the frontpage headline "BOY THUGS TAKE OVER from political leaders in the Townships", ran the following story:

> Vicious young thugs cashing in on the crisis have virtually taken over the townships in the past few days.
>
> In savage outbursts of violence they have in the past week been responsible for hundreds of assaults, at least one murder of an African cop, and scores of rapes.
>
> ... Taking advantage of the confusion arising out of the crisis, and the fact that many houses have been left unprotected, they have used Pan Africanist and A.N.C. slogans as 'fronts' for their activities as they continue to rob and pillage on the majority of the Reef's larger towns.
>
> ... Although usually well-behaved, the high school boys from an Orlando school were involved in various stonings and attacks.
>
> They later told POST that they had been joined by the now notorious Berlins and Apaches of Orlando East.
>
> Apparently on the stay-away day these gangs forgot that they were enemies in a common purpose of assaulting innocent people.
>
> POST learned that most of the thugs responsible for this terror are loafers who do not possess reference books... (76)

According to the article, the offices of the Peri-Urban Health Board in Alexandra were attacked by a gang of tsotsis called the Red Knife Boys. They attempted to burn

the building down. The Peri-Urban Health Board was not only a symbol of state authority but an institution which dedicated itself to wiping out the tsotsi menace in Alexandra. A crack police unit operated under its authority which the tsotsis called the "Peri-Urbans". Lodge describes the tsotsi violence on the Rand during the ANC and PAC sponsored post-Sharpeville and Langa stay-away:

> Despite the ANC's insistence on the peaceful conduct of the stay-away, in the late afternoon of the 28th §of March§ violence broke out in many parts of Soweto as 'tsotsi' gangs attaked homecoming workers who had ignored the strike call. Large groups of teenagers gathered outside the railway stations and manned road blocks to stone alighting passengers. Municipal buildings were set alight and the rediffusion radio system's wiring ripped out. As the Tsotsis' attacks continued into the night the railway service was suspended the remaining commuters spending an uncomfortable night on the platform.("7)

What emerged in the wake of PAC mobilisation, Sharpeville and the declaration of the State of Emergency was the first foreshadowing of today's so-called "com-tsotsis". Thousands of tsotsis responded to the PAC's call, particularly the anti-pass campaign. But they were extremely difficult to control. Non-violence, accountability and coordinated political action were alien concepts to the tsotsi subculture. The situation got completely out of hand during the State of Emergency when numerous leaders who were respected and admired by the tsotsi cadres were detained. The possibility of placing these angry and brutalised street gangs under some kind of political discipline and accountability fell away. The gangs saw no contradiction between their usual criminal activities and their new

political motivations. Even the PAC, who initially seemed to embrace these youths enthusiastically, were forced to condemn the post-Sharpeville activities of the tsotsis. A PAC spokesman, William Jalobe, stated: "We strongly condemn the fact that these irresponsible youths are using violence on innocent people."(78) Philip Kgosana, reflecting on PAC activity in 1960, argued that the Western Cape branch was much more organised than in Johannesburg "where the discipline was so lacking ... with its large criminal element" that was so difficult to control.(79)

The PAC and, to a lesser extent, the ANC once it had adopted the armed struggle, retained their large support base amongst the urban youth after the organisations were banned. Once the organisations went underground and dozens of members were given long jail sentences, organisational coherence disintegrated altogether but interest in Pogo and Mkhonto we Sizwe remained high amongst the urban youth in the early 1960s.(80) Throughout the 1960s, a steady trickle of youths made the decision to leave the country and join the exile movements.(81) Michael Dingake recalls that 1962 was a particularly successful year for Mkhonto recruitment; there was an "overwhelming response" from the youth.(82) According to Mattera, ex-gangsters joined the exiled ANC in large numbers during the 1960s. Twenty to thirty members of his old Vultures gang, he claims, became active members of the ANC including George Hutton, Hosi Tsile and Bernard Komane. The influx of ex-gangsters into

the ANC, he adds, influenced the ANC from within and moved the organisation in a more violent and militant direction. They reinforced the policy of armed struggle. "The violent arena was not new to the gangster. He could kill now for a more worthwhile cause."(83)

Of course, those that joined the exile movements represented a tiny fraction of the urban youth. For the bulk of urban youth in the 1960s the key political and social terrein shifted from the streets to the Bantu Education schools. Bantu Education involved a dramatic lowering of educational standards but it also dramatically increased the availability of schooling for Africans. Hyslop shows that Bantu Education played a major role in bringing about the political quiescence of the 1960s, despite simmering grievances against the system.(84) Nevertheless, the new education system started to forge an unprecedented nity, a common set of experiences and grievances, amongst the township youth. Mass schooling helped to weld together the fractured and internally antagonistic youth constituency; a process which, it could be argued, helped to establish the groundwork for the eruption of 1976. Nothing like the outburst of mass youth militancy in the PWV area in 1960, however, was repeated for the remainder of the decade.

NOTES

(1) Bantu World (BW), 7 May 1938, "The Problems of Youth" by H.W. Nxumalo.
(2) See Chapter Three for a detailed discussion on the political nature of the subculture.
(3) For a more detailed look at CYL recruitment and organisational strategies, see Glaser, C, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League 1944-1955".
(4) BW 17 August 1946, Readers' Forum, letter entitled "Bantu Youth Rebuked" by W.B. Mkhasibe of Cleveland; BW, Readers' Forum, "Congress and African Youth" by Simon A. Moloabi of Thaba 'Nchu.
(5) Interviews: Godfrey Moloi 26/3/88; Peter Magubane 7/9/88; Gertrude Thwala 21/9/88; Norris Nkosi 25/9/88; Peggy Bellair (Ephraim Sinnle) 2/6/89; Henry Miles 10/4/89; Arthur "McCoy" Mdlalose 20/4/89; "Babes" Mbawu and Ben Ngwenya 27/4/89.
See also interview, Don Mattera, Johannesburg 1979 (Tom Lodge).
(6) Miles 11/4/89
(7) Moloi 26/3/88
(8) Magubane 7/9/88
(9) Peggy Bellair 2/6/89
(10) Interview, Don Mattera 5/6/88. Interestingly, Siwisa later brought his Sophiatown branch of the ANC into the Africanist camp after the divisive 1958 ANC Congress. Interview, A.B. Ngcobo, 4 April 1964 (Dan Jones and Tom Karis), Carter and Karis Collection, Reel 13A.
(11) Glaser, C, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League"; Interviews, Nthato Motlana 2/9/86 and Jacob Nhlapho 9/5/89
(12) Kuzwayo 23/5/89; See also Michael Dingake's account of the Sophiatown gangster, Vivian Dladla in Dingake, My Fight Against Apartheid, pp29-30.
(13) IAD WRAB 214/3, Minutes of the first AGM of the Johannesburg Planning Council for Non-European Social Welfare, 26 March 1957.
(14) Golden City Post (GCP) 1 September 1957 and 8 September 1957.
(15) Motjuwadi 29/9/88
(16) See Chapter Three
(17) Motjuwadi 29/9/88
(18) BW 4 February 1950; see also BW 11 March 1956
(19) Mattera 1979; Mattera 10/7/88; see also BW 19 February 1953.
(20) IAD WRAB 351/3, Letter from the Senior Superintendant of Moroka/Jabavu to the Manager, Johannesburg NEAD, 22 January 1958.
(21) Mattera 10/7/88
(22) UG 47/1950, Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into Acts of Violence Committed by Natives at Krugersdorp, Newlands, Randfontein and Newclare, Chaired by J. deVilliers Louw, 1950; BW 4 February 1950; CPSA AD 1502

SAIRR, Quintin Whyte Papers, Bb2, Paper delivered by Quintin Whyte entitled "Delinquent Urban Youth: Recent Devlopments", undated (c1953); see also Glaser, C, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League" and Bothma, MA Thesis, p45.
(23) See Glaser, C, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League" for a more detailed examination of the relationship between the CYL and Youth gangs.
(24) Magubane 7/9/88; Mattera 10/7/88
(25) Mattera 1979
(26) Interviews: Godfrey Pitje 23/9/86; Es'kia Mphahlele 29/9/86; Nthato Motlana 2/10/86
(27) Pitje 23/9/86; Motjuwadi 29/9/88; Mattera 10/7/88
(28) Mattera 1979
(29) IAD WRAB 351/1, Minutes of Conference attended by Deputy Commissioner of the SAP Witwatersrand, Area Officers, members of the NEAD Committee and members of the Advisory Board, Johannesburg 14 December 1955.
(30) See Bonner, P., "Family, Crime and Political Consciousness".
(31) See GCP 17 April 1955. Of the 26 schools participating in the Bantu Education boycott on the Reef at the time of this report, 11 were in Benoni.
(32) Motlana 2/10/86
(33) Mattera 10/7/88
(34) BW 19 February 1953, p1, lead story.
(35) For a more detailed account of the CYL in the 1950s and the emergence of the Pan Africanist movement, see Gerhart, G. M., Black Power in South Africa., University of California Press, 1978, pp 138-172 and Glaser, C, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League 1944-1955", pp9-58. On the role of Central Committee and Josias Madzunya, see Tom Lodge, "Insurrectionism in Southern Africa: The Pan Africanist Congress and the Poqo movement 1959-1965", D Phil, University of York, Centre for Southern African Studies, April 1984, pp 124-125 and Carter and Karis Collection (microfilm), Reel 13A, Matthew Nkoana, interviewed by Dan Johns, Cairo, 13 April 1964.
(36) The Africanist, November 1959
(37) Gerhart, Black Power, p 221
(38) Mbawu and Ngwenya 27/4/89
(39) Motjuwadi 29/9/88
(40) Nkosi 25/9/88. Joe Tlholoe, A PAC organiser in Orlando during 1959 and 1960, confirms that the PAC was a predominantly youthful organisation. Interview 13/8/90, Johannesburg (interviewed by Steve Lebelo). Tom Lodge, "Insurrectionism in South Africa", p206, agrees that the membership of the PAC in the Transvaal was predominantly youthful. He observes: "From the often sparse details provided by trial reports and newspaper reports it seems that the Transvaal membership was generally youthful - the vast majority being in their teens and early twenties - and if they were not still in school were usually employed in white collar occupations." See also Nkoana 13/4/64 and Peter Molotsi, interviewed by Gail Gerhart, August 1969.

(41) Gerhart, Black Power, pp 223-224. She quotes Kuper, L., An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class and Politics in South Africa, Yale University Press, 1965, p425.
(42) Lodge, "Insurrectionism", footnote, pp15-16.
(43) Lodge, "Insurrectionism", particularly pp205-206 and chapters on the Pretoria and Sharpeville PAC branches.
(44) Lodge, "Insurrectionism", p207.
(45) See E.A. Brett, "African Attitudes", SAIRR Fact Paper No 14, 1963 for an interesting comparison of ANC and PAC support in the PWV area in 1960/61. Brett surveyed African men in the PWV area between November 1960 and February 1961. His sample of 150 included 25 school pupils, 40 university students and 85 professionals, the bulk of whom were teachers and clerks. Brett found that 57% of those surveyed favoured the PAC while only 39% favoured the ANC. Sobukwe was cited 57 times as the most important African leadership figure as opposed to 40 for Luthuli. Philip Kgosana, a young PAC executive member, came in third with 5 while Mandela and Tambo picked up only two mentions apiece. His survey, of course, ignored unemployed youths who were all the more likely to favour the PAC. Inexplicably, his survey also ignores the vast bulk of ordinary working class people. The survey is obviously thin and technically dubious but nevertheless suggestive of the dramatic rise in PAC support by 1961.
(46) Gerhart, Black Power, p220; Molotsi, August 1969. See also Brett, "African Attitudes", p3. According to Brett's study, the willingness to accept violence was found to be positively correlated with support for the PAC. This was summed up strikingly in the words of a schoolboy who supported the PAC: "Africans should attempt to influence the Government. There is only one method, V.I.O.L.E.N.C.E. We outnumber the Europeans 5-1 and with good weapons at our disposal we can wipe them out in no time." See also Benjamin Pogrund, Sobukwe and Apartheid, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1990, p96.
(47) Gerhart, Black Power, p 222. Stanley Mogoba, who used to be a PAC activist in Pretoria, emphasised the simplicity of the PAC appeal to youth; interview 21/7/90 (interviewed by Fran Buntman). See also interview with Jordan Ngubane, Swaziland 5 March 1964 (interviewed by Gwen Carter), Carter and Karis Collection, Reel 13A. Ngubane quoted the words of his thirteen year-old son who joined the underground Ohlanga task force of the PAC: "The PAC doesn't mince words. We say, this is our land and those who stole it from us will pay for it. We'll push them into the sea and take what is our own and restore it to its rightful owners. I am PAC because I believe in this."
(48) See Gerhart, Black Power, p 225
(49) For a description and analysis of tsotsi machismo, see Chapter Four.
(50) Gerhart, Black Power, p 221. See also Pogrund, Sobukwe and Apartheid, p96. Pogrund recalls that there were virtually no women at the inaugural congress of the PAC in stark contrast to ANC gatherings.

(51) Carter and Karis Collection (microfilm), Reel 12A, conversation with Peter Molotsi, Dar es Salaam, 10/8/1963; Molotsi, August 1969; Nkoana 13/4/64.
(52) Dlamini, Robben Island, p143. Joe Tlholo 13/8/90 tells a very similar story about the politicised youths at Orlando High.
(53) Lodge, "Insurrectionism", pp336-341.
(54) Mogoba 21/7/90.
(55) Interview, Queeneth Ndaba 15/9/88; Nkosi 25/9/88
(56) Nkosi 25/9/88
(57) Ndaba 15/9/88. According to Nkosi, Mapisa faded from politics when he became "disillusioned" and joined the ZCC.
(58) Peggy Bellair 2/6/89; Nkosi 25/9/88; Motjuwadi 29/9/88; Mbawu and Ngwenya 27/4/89. See also Gerhart, Black Power, pp 182-193.
(59) Mbawu and Ngwenya 27/4/89
(60) Nkosi 25/9/88
(61) Tlholoe 13/8/90 and 15/8/90
(62) Motjuwadi 29/9/88
(63) See Lodge, "Insurrectionism", pp124-125; Molotsi 10/8/63; Molotsi, August 1969; Carter and Karis, Reel 11A, biographical notes on Josias Madzunya.
(64) Thabethe 18/1/90.
(65) Tlholoe 13/8/90
(66) See Lodge, "Insurrectinism", pp133-136.
(67) Lodge, "Insurrectionism", p133.
(68) Mogoba 21/7/90
(69) See the deVilliers Louw Report, UG 47/1950.
(70) Hyslop, J, "A Destruction is Coming", p2
(71) GCP 17 April 1960
(72) GCP 17 July 1960. See also GCP 3 July 1960, 10 July 1960 and 7 August 1960.
(73) GCP 31 July 1960
(74) Lodge, "Insurrectionism", p341.
(75) See GCP 3 April 1960, p1; GCP 15 May 1960, p10; GCP 7 August 1960.
(76) GCP 3 April 1960, p 1
(77) Lodge, "Insurrectionism", p173; see also Rand Daily Mail 29 March 1960 and Norman Phillips, The Tragedy of Apartheid, David McKay, New York 1960, pp31-37. Lodge also points to a similar wave of violence in Pretoria, p336.
(78) GCP April 1960, p1
(79) Carter and Karis Collection (microfilm), Reel 11A, Philip Kgosana, conversation with Bob Hess, Addis Ababa, 15/8/63.
(80) Nkosi 25/9/88; Mattera 10/7/88; Leeuw 23/9/88; Motjuwadi 29/9/88
(81) Nkosi 25/9/88; Mattera 10/7/88; Leeuw 23/9/88
(82) Dingake, My Fight Against Apartheid, p68.
(83) Mattera 10/7/88
(84) Hyslop, J, "A Destruction is Coming".

# CONCLUSION

Although juvenile crime clearly continued to be a major problem in Johannesburg's townships throughout the 1960s(1) and although urban African criminals are often called "tsotsis" to this day, the tsotsi subculture, as such, gradually dissolved during the 1960s. There is no necessary contradiction in asserting both the survival of the term "tsotsi" and the dissolution of the tsotsi subculture. It is not at all uncommon for an extinct subculture to leave a cultural residue behind it. For example, elements of punk style have been absorbed into "straight" European and American urban culture despite the subculture's dissolution and the adjective "punk", describing a certain kind of anti-establishment style and behaviour, has entrenched itself in the English language. The distinctive style, the pattern of gang formation and, perhaps most importantly, the generational element of the tsotsi subculture are all extinct. Nevertheless, like the punks, the tsotsis left a great deal of cultural flotsam in their wake.

The subculture lost its distinctiveness on a number of

fronts. Throughout the 1960s the narrow trousers became less and less fashionable amongst township youth. Trouser bottoms widened until, by the late 1960s, the hippie bell-bottoms became very popular.(2) The tsotsi subculture lost its distinctive language not through the disappearance of tsotsitaal but through the reverse process: tsotsitaal became so widely spoken in Johannesburg's townships that it lost its generation specific character.(3) Inter-gang territoriality and violence was less common though a number of gang wars continued to flare up in the early 1960s.(4) Famous "big-time" gangs disappeared in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Old Western Areas gangs such as the Americans, Berliners and Vultures failed to regroup effectively after the Western Areas removals.(5) The Spoilers and Msomis of Alexandra and The Black Swines and Pirates of Orlando were smashed in massive police crackdowns. Five of the Msomi leaders, including the notorious Shadrack Matthews were hanged in 1959. Leaders of the other gangs were given long prison sentences because they had all had previous convictions. None of these gangs were able to survive the removal of leadership.(6) This seemed to rip the heart out of the subculture; it lost its role models and style generators. By the mid 1960s there were very few youth gangs in Johannesburg's townships which had retained a tsotsi identity.(7) Although there appear to be important continuities, criminal youth gangs which emerged around the middle of the 1960s, such as the notorious Hazels of

Orlando, clearly belonged to another gang genre. A thorough examination of township youth gangs in the 1960s and beyond, however, is beyond the scope of this thesis.

There does appear to have been a general decline, although by no means disappearance, of township youth gang activity during the 1960s. Two important impulses drew urban youths away from street life into other spheres of activity: expanded schooling and wider employment opportunities.

Towards the end of Chapter Five I pointed out that although Bantu Education brought about a drastic decline in educational standards, it did succeed in providing, for the first time, mass schooling for African adolescents. By the late 1960s secondary and higher primary school facilities had expanded dramatically. In 1960 roughly 46 000 Africans attended secondary school across the country. By 1970 this figure had risen to about 122 000.(8) In Johannesburg during the 1960s noticeably more township adolescents were going to school than during the 1950s.(9) It is possible that education was seen as a better investment at this stage; that better-paid jobs with decent working conditions were beginning to open up to Africans with higher levels of education.

Employment opportunities for urban youths expanded during the 1960s as a result of the general economic boom and continued state efforts at combatting urban youth unemployment. According to informants township youths in

Johannesburg found work, particularly unskilled work, more easily during the 1960s.(10) In 1960 and 1961 the Juvenile Employment Section of the Johannesburg NAD claimed some success in finding jobs for gangsters and ex-gangsters. In September 1960 W.J.P. Carr expressed confidence that juvenile unemployment would be brought down to "reasonable levels" in the near future.(11) The Botha Commission of 1962 which looked into African urban unemployment devoted a great deal of attention to youth unemployment. The commission argued that youths from the rural areas were taking away potential jobs of city-bred youths. To combat this problem the commission recommended a more effective process of screening out young rural workseekers from the cities. The commission argued that this would ease the competition for juvenile employment in the urban areas.(12) Interestingly, Godfrey Moloi claims that urban youths started to find jobs more easily in the 1960s because influx control was applied more rigorously.(13)

Some of my informants argue that a political youth culture started to emerge in the 1960s as a counter-attraction to gang culture. This possibility is explored in Chapter Five. Although the ANC and PAC were banned and formal political opposition was effectively crushed under the state of emergency, they claim, there was a raised level of political awareness amongst the township youth throughout the 1960s.(14) Henry Miles claims that youths read newspapers and kept up to date with political issues; many

were keenly interested in the African independence movement.(15) According to Don Mattera "the political influences came very strong in 1962/'63/'64. This helped to break up the gangs ..."(16) There is little concrete evidence to back up these assertions. What form this emerging political youth culture took in the 1960s, if it took any form at all, is the subject for future research. Certainly the trickle of young men into the armed wings of the PAC and ANC accounted for a numerically insignificant proportion of township youth, particularly on the Witwatersrand. Apart from a burst of activity in 1959-60, there is little evidence to suggest that a significant political youth culture emerged in the Rand townships prior to 1976. Against a backdrop of massive state repression and a boom economy, which simultaneously helped to offset material grievances and ensure that there was much to lose from political involvement, acquiescence seems to have been the order of the decade.

The term "tsotsi" is very commonly used in contemporary South Africa; it is a loose term for an African criminal or trickster. In the last few years the variation "com-tsotsi" has emerged to describe township youths whose activities shade through from the politcal to the criminal; from toyi-toyiing at rallies, to violent enforcement of boycotts and stay-aways, through to out-and-out looting. For most contemporary observers the historical meaning of the word has been lost. The tsotsis constituted a specific anti-

social urban youth gang subculture which had its origins in the 1930s in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand area. The subculture took on a distinctive form in the early 1940s and spread to all the key South African urban centres. The subculture, which was extraordinarily prevalent amongst urbanised youth on the Rand, caused a profound generational rift in African urban society. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s tsotsis were an indivisible element of township life in South Africa. Although the subculture dissipated during the first half of the 1960s, it left a legacy to urban South Africa. Tsotsitaal, albeit in a variety of modified forms, is probably the most widely spoken language on the streets of Soweto today. The influence of black American culture has clearly remained powerful amongst township youth. It could also be argued that the aggressive anti-establishment style associated with contemporary African youth politics has its origins in the tsotsi subculture.

NOTES FOR CONCLUSION

(1) A glance through the Golden City Post news pages between 1960 and 1964 indicates that juvenile crime, though somewhat less prevalent than during the 1960s, remained a major news issue throughout the first half of the 1960s. See also extracts from Advisory Board meeting minutes in IAD WRAB 351/2. 1961 seems to have been a particularly bad year for juvenile crime. Advisory Boards complained of gang warfare and delinquency in Pimville, Jabulani, Chiawelo, Orlando, East Native Township and South West Bantu Township. Interestingly, I found few references in the WRAB files to juvenile crime after 1961.
(2) Motjuwadi 29/9/88; Nkosi 25/9/88.
(3) Tsotsitaal is neither a stable nor a homogenous language. There have been many shifts in the language since the 1950s and I gather from people who speak tsotsitaal that there are numerous geographically specific dialects in Soweto alone. It is clear that middle aged people speak the language today, especially outside of their immediate domestic environment.
(4) See, for example, IAD WRAB 285/7, letter from the Juvenile Employment Officer to the Manager NAD Johannesburg, 24 May 1961. According to the Juvenile Employment Officer, there was continuous gang warfare in early 1961 between the Vikings, the German Spoilers and the Eleven Boys in Pimville, Zola, Phiri, Dlamini and Moletsane. Interestingly, the Juvenile Employment Section actively intervened to bring about a ceasefire between the gangs and then attempted to find jobs for the gangsters.
(5) Mattera 10/7/88. See also M.S. Lebelo, "The 'Locations in the Sky' Act and the Limitations of the Local State in the Era of High Apartheid: Ethnicity and Class in Early Soweto, 1960-1975", Masters Seminar, Department of History, University of the Witwatersrand, 7 August 1990.
(6) Mbawu and Ngwenya 27/4/89 and Thwala 21/9/88 recall that the Black Swines and Pirates were crushed by police during the early 1960s. The leaders were given long prison sentences and the gangs disappeared entirely. The Rope Gang, which emerged as a major force in Alexandra in the vacuum created by the Msomi and Spoilers crackdown in 1958/9, was smashed in 1962. See Rand Daily Mail 29 March 1962.
(7) Moloi 26/3/88; Motjuwadi 22/9/88; Thwala 21/9/88.
(8) Colin Bundy, "Street Sociology and Pavemebnt Politics", p311 (these figures are rounded off).
(9) Motjuwadi 22/9/88; Moloi 26/3/88; Leeuw 23/9/88.
(10) Mdlalose 37/4/89; Miles 11/4/89; Moloi 26/3/88.
(11) IAD WRAB 285/7, letter from W.J.P. Carr, Manager NAD Johannesburg, to Town Clerk, 28 September 1960; IAD WRAB 285/7, letter from Johannesburg Juvenile Employment Officer to the Manager NAD Johannesburg, 24 May 1961. See also IAD WRAB 285/7, letter from Bantu Affairs Commissioner to the Town Clerk, 11 August 1960, in which the Boksburg scheme for African juvenile employment is highly praised.

(12) Ver[illegible]van die Interdepartementele Komitee insake ledige en [illegible]rkende Bantoe in Stedelike Gebiede, 1962; see particularly the introduction and paragraphs 82-83.
(13) Moloi 26/3/88
(14) Mattera 10/7/88; Miles 11/4/89; Magubane 7/9/88; Moloi 26/3/88.
(15) Miles 11/4/89
(16) Mattera 1979.

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