

CONCLUSION

As alluded to in the introduction, this thesis was sparked by Phil Bonner's finding that a fight occurred between white ducktails and their African counterparts (or rivals) the *tsotsis* in 1948. From there, archival documents the majority in the form of official government commissions of enquiry and a number of press cuttings from the local press were located and reviewed. These documentary sources proved to be biased and limited because the voices of 'subculturalists' were silent. After placing an advertisement, requesting information on the ducktails, in South Africa's most widely distributed and read motorcycle magazine – the *Bike SA* – a number of ex-ducktails made contact and enthusiastically shared their histories and experiences with me. The collection of oral testimonies, as this dissertation has demonstrated, provides a solution to the gaps in archival material about white youths. The diverse primary and secondary material that was collected contradicts the opening statement made by an anonymous researcher that a ducktail 'is an inbred naturally bad person of idle and degenerate mind.'

Ducktailism was a multifarious experience of the quotidian in the early days of apartheid South Africa. From the interviews that were conducted, it seems that most former ducktails and Sheilas fondly refer to the 1950's as a period of 'good clean fun'. In its entirety, the subculture survived for a decade. The unique feature of this subculture is that it cut across gender, ethnic and class divides. Guided as it was by popular culture and urban networks, it can be viewed as a trans-national youth culture which branched into a number of local subcultures across the globe (such as the Teddy Boys in the United Kingdom and the *Schwarze Jakken* in Germany). By the early 1960s, the ducktails vanished from South African 'cityscapes'. Some members were conscripted into the army, others eloped and started families, a few became more conservative but a substantial proportion sought solace in the motorcycling fraternity.

In one sense, the ducktail phenomenon was very much about fraternities and the construction of comfortable friendship zones, groups and gangs. This study has argued that the safe subcultural space allowed youths to experiment with their multiple identities and offered a sense of security in a country undergoing radical socio-economic and political transformation.

The deep background in which it was born was characterised by unstable socio-economic conditions followed by the introduction of reconstructionist policies aimed at saving certain sectors of the white community. The privileging of whites intensified after the National Party's victory and most white communities experienced a period of affluence. This encouraged some youths to tap into popular culture and the latest fashion trends thereby enabling them to appropriate certain commodities to construct the ducktail subculture's unique style.

At the same time, the visibility of the movement generated a moral panic and instilled fear in the National Party government and more conformist groups in South African society. The ducktails behaviour was ambiguous. On the one hand, they scorned exemplary behaviour and disrespected the law; on the other hand, they took the parent generation's worst prejudices to a new extreme in the form of their racist and homophobic attacks. The emergence of this apolitical and hedonistic subculture signalled and symbolised a threat to white supremacy, so much so that three government commissions of enquiry were conducted and the moral panic over ducktailism was raised to new heights. The moral panic generated in three different spheres namely the press, research units and in official government commissions of enquiry. After accepting some of the recommendations, legislation was amended to survey and control this group of recalcitrant white youth and police the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate whiteness.

This dissertation has drawn on and expanded on a number of approaches to the study of subcultures. It has built on the research of scholars based at the CCCS and

revisionists of this body of work. Chapter One has called for the adoption of a multi-dimensional approach where subcultural theories need to be broadened to account for the construction of a number of interrelated yet different identities – racial, class, ethnic, gendered and generational ones. The socio-economic and political context of the period, as discussed in Chapter Two, provided the basis for the unfolding of this form of subculture. Its unwritten code of conduct embodied principles of apolitical, hedonistic and living for the moment or for the *joll*. The expression of these mores and ultimately the pursuit of pleasure is told by former ducktails in chapters Three and Four. Chapter Three focussed on the formation of group or collective identities whilst highlighting the points of commonality between ducktail groups. Image, argot, popular culture and ritualistic practices intermeshed and became signifiers of ducktailism. Chapter Four shifted gear to explore individual identities – race, gender, ethnicity and generation – expressed by some members of the subculture. It argued that these identities were multiple, interconnected and at times contradictory. Read together, Chapter Three and Four, contended that the forms of social identities as expressed by these white youths led to their marginalisation and demonised the movement as delinquent and evil.

Ducktail visibility ignited a moral panic where ducktails were demonised as evil juvenile delinquents. Via the metaphor of Ducktailism; working mothers, parental care, Christianity and the state of the nation were questioned and isolated as social problems that were urgently in need of solutions to sustain white supremacy and reinforce morality. Drawing on the work of Edwin Lemert and Stanley Cohen, Chapter Five discussed political and moral censorship and how it shaped the development of a moral panic over ducktailism. The boundaries of what were considered to be appropriate and inappropriate white behaviour was questioned. At the same time, the government commissioned a number of official enquiries into white youth crime and juvenile delinquency. The dissertation contended that ‘specialists’ from mostly Afrikaans speaking universities (in particular well known sociologists) and researcher’s based at the state’s largest research unit, the NBESR were brought in as

advisors on white youth misbehaviour. The close relationship that developed between academics, researchers and members of government departments was covered in Chapter Six. The final chapter provided an analysis of how ducktailism was understood from the government and its representatives' point of view. Racial, religious and patriarchal discourses were deployed to understand this 'amoral' phenomenon. The result was the transformation of the juvenile justice system, the introduction of military conscription, the establishment of new institutions for juvenile delinquents and the popularisation of youth clubs.

On a more subtle level, this study suggested that the National Party government was drafting a blue print of appropriate white youth behaviour and the construction of whiteness. A white identity which would sustain white superiority and dominance over the black majority.

This dissertation contributes towards the much neglected themes of generation - generational relations and the collapse of generational authority. In doing so, this dissertation starts to uncover the previously hidden social history of the 1950s as experienced by a group of rebellious white youths. A number of factors constricted the subculture and ultimately led to its demise whilst at the same time laying the foundation for other subsequent and unique youth cultures.

South Africans, regardless of race, connected and connect with other countries across the globe. This is not a unique feature of the post modern condition as some have recently argued but has been a feature of most societies post (and probably pre-) World War Two. In the 1950s African youth, as Clive Glaser's research shows, tapped into the *Tstotsi* subculture which was adapted from the American Zoot Suiters. Similarly ducktail style was trans-national, drawn from the UK based Teddy Boys and 'hooligans' in the USA. Press coverage and government surveillance led to the petering out of the subculture and sowed the seeds for the germination of another. This took the form of the Hippy Culture or 'Flower Power' as it is labelled here - bell

bottoms, free love and long hair. Another more immediate subcultural style that had its origins in ducktailism was the expansion of the motor cycling fraternity in South Africa. From oral testimonies that were collected for this dissertation the *Brammie Boys* have been cited as the first official Bike Club in Johannesburg. The history of this subcultural formation is one among a number of them that have been wholly ignored in South African historiography. South African cities also witnessed the Mods and Rockers, the Skinheads and Punks, Goths and Ravers and more recently the 'post-subcultural' Electro-Clash Punk trend. All require further investigation and attention to recreate, represent and preserve hidden parts of South African social history and heritage.