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FROM NINEVITE TO COMTSOTSI: TOWNSHIP GANGS, DIVIDED COMMUNITIES AND URBAN VIOLENCE IN TWENTIETH CENTURY SOUTH AFRICA

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FROM NINEVITE TO COMTSOTSI: TOWNSHIP GANGS, DIVIDED COMMUNITIES AND URBAN VIOLENCE IN TWENTIETH CENTURY SOUTH AFRICA

Despite the unprecedented level of public concern with violent crime in the "new South Africa", surprisingly little effort has been made to explore the historical roots of urban gangsterism. Since their establishment, the segregated black residential areas commonly referred to as townships have proved a fertile breeding ground for criminal gangs. Moving beyond the standard approaches which characterise gangs as either social bandits or destructive predators, this paper suggests that gang/community relations were fluid and ambiguous and that to understand why gangs have been (and remain) such a prevalent presence in the townships we need to appreciate the fragmented nature of township society and the ways in which gangs reflected, exploited and exacerbated urban fault lines. Finally, a comparison between criminal violence on the Rand in the 1940-1980 period and the more recent political conflict between supporters of the ANC and Inkatha will attempt to demonstrate how divided communities are vulnerable to gang violence.

In the post-apartheid era, concern over violent crime has reached a fever-pitch. Contemporary news reports stress the dangers of urban living and give the impression that the current "total onslaught" is a criminal one, while the government declares the eradication of criminal organisations a national priority. Thus, it seems apposite to examine the historiography of

African criminal gangs for insights into the reasons such groups have prospered and to come to a better understanding of the contested nature of township life.

By all accounts the townships, squatter camps, hostels and mining compounds which have comprised the urban living space for Africans in twentieth century South Africa have always been plagued by high levels of violence. State policies which impoverished blacks and encouraged political and social divisions laid the groundwork for such a conflict-ridden environment. Moreover, the invasion of black residential areas by state forces intent on enforcing race-based laws that sustained white-rule and to quell political dissent initiated much of the violence. Finally, various state security agencies, most notably the South African Police (SAP), did little to discourage "black-on-black" crime, and in many instances encouraged and sponsored gangsters.[1] The focus of this paper, however, is the violent activities of African criminal gangs which have been a feature of urban life in South Africa since at least the turn of the century.

The Zulu-based Ninevites who operated on the early Witwatersrand terrorised the inhabitants of the urban black locations[2], while attacks on unsuspecting individuals by the gangs of "kitchen boys" known as Amalaitas in early twentieth century Durban 'remained a ubiquitous feature of suburban labouring life.'[3] The Rand mining compounds of the 1920s and 1930s were plagued by the Mpondo Isitshozi gangs which 'established a reign of terror on the paths leading to and from the mines.'[4] A resident of

Johannesburg's Western Native Townships reflecting back on the early 1930s recalled that, 'The most dreaded gang in those days were the [Pedi-dominated] Amalaitas... They used to beat up people mercilessly.'[5] The late 1930s and 1940s witnessed the birth of the "tsotsi" phenomenon as the rapidly growing population of urbanised youth turned to violent crime. Indeed, Glaser claims that by the 1950s 'the majority of permanently urbanised black youths in South Africa's key urban conglomerate, the Witwatersrand, was involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in tsotsi gangs.'[6] After consulting with the Native Advisory Board, a member of the Non-European Affairs Committee of the Johannesburg City Council made the following report on the effect of violent crime in the townships in 1954 :

> Wives and young girls were raped in the streets and on their way home from work. Some were even raped in their own homes in front of their families who were too terrified to report to the police for fear of victimisation. These gangsters ruled the townships at the point of knife or pistol. They robbed the people in the trains to and from their work, in the bus queues, and in their homes. They assaulted innocent victims in the street and terrorised one area after another. They considered

> themselves invincible, and showed no fear even of the police.[7]

Because of the depredations by tsotsis and other gangs, which the police were unable or unwilling to control, numerous groups formed defensive associations which clashed with the gangsters and further fuelled the spiral of violence. As these defensive associations expanded and grew more powerful, they engaged in predatory behaviour which rendered them indistinguishable from the gangs they originally mobilised against.[8]

Youth gangs such as the Black Swines and the Pirates established a strong presence on the Rand in the 1960s, while the Hazels reigned supreme in the 1970s.[9] And although it seems that youth gangs were thrown on the defensive by politicised students following the 1976 riots in Soweto, they re-emerged in the form of the "jackroller" gangs of the 1980s and 1990s. In contemporary South Africa, criminal gangs and syndicates regularly make the news as a result of gang battles and various spectacular heists. The 1990s have also witnessed the birth of high profile vigilante groups, most notably Cape Town-based People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (Pagad), which has engaged in violent confrontations with mobsters and the police.

Political conflict between the African National Congress (ANC) and the state, and the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), engulfed many of the townships on the Rand and much of KwaZulu-Natal in the 1980s and 1990s, providing opportunities for criminal gangs to legitimise their activities

under the cloak of political action. The atmosphere spawned by intense conflict often blurred the line between politics and crime and encouraged predatory behaviour. For example, a 1992 report concluded that '[t]he justly dreaded gang of criminals operating in the Durban townships - the *amasinyoras* - has its genesis in disaffected youth who learnt their morals and craft in political violence... With the passage of time, political violence against the state and competing political organisations is degenerating into outright crime.'[10]

Research to date has been largely limited to the gangs on the Rand, primarily in the 1940s and 1950s,[11] while gangs active in earlier periods like the Ninevites and the Isitshozi have also received some attention. Other than Johannesburg gangs we have La Hausse's work on the Amalaita gangs of early twentieth century Durban, Mayer's observations of tsotsis in 1950s East London and Pinnock's history of the coloured gangs of Cape Town, along with Scharf's study of the surge in gang activity in the African townships of Cape Town in the 1980s. What is clearly needed is studies of gangs on the Rand in the post-1960 era, as well as a great deal more work on gangs in other urban centres for all periods. Gang violence in Bloemfontein, Cape Town, Durban, Kimberley, Port Elizabeth and Pretoria has featured prominently in press reports since the 1950s[12] and gangs have received extensive coverage in the post-apartheid years, yet none of these groups has been the subject of academic analysis. What follows attempts to establish patterns and suggest fruitful avenues of inquiry despite these lacunae.

Many analysts have depicted African gangsters as social bandits battling the repressive state on behalf of the oppressed masses, while others have stressed the predatory aspect of gang activity - either gangs represented their communities in the struggle against injustice[13] or they preyed on their fellow Africans.[14]

To privilege a gang's relationship to the government and its agents as the defining characteristic of that gang (whether the gang be classified as anti-state, apolitical or allied with the government) overlooks the complex manner in which gangs fit into their communities and the variety of roles they played in the townships. This approach also ignores the issue of identity. A gang's identity was forged as a result of numerous factors - its relations with rival gangs, the methods by which gang members supported themselves, specific rituals and cultural idioms, ethnicity, age, territorialism and so on - designed to contextualise the world of the townships, an environment in which the white-ruled state was an important, but by no means the dominant, influence. Gang identities, which shaped activities and community relations, were forged to meet the needs and correspond with the worldviews of gang members struggling to survive in hostile surroundings. Establishing a presence in the community often meant that a gang's primary preoccupation was with rival groups within the townships, not with the larger political questions of the day. This is not to argue that gangs defined themselves exclusively through relationships with competitors or did not consciously resist the agents of the state, only that a host of influences contributed to gang

identity and determined gang activities. In other words, it is very unlikely that gangs defined themselves or were regarded by different groups in the community, primarily according to their place on the "resistance continuum".

Analysts preoccupied with the destructive impact of gangs also obscure the multi-faceted roles different gangs performed within the townships. Although the vast majority of gangs were predatory in some respect, they often engaged in activities or represented ideals that were appreciated and applauded by some township residents.

A central focus of this article is to re-examine this binary approach to come to a more nuanced understanding of the fluid, complex and often contradictory roles gangs have played in the history of urban South Africa. Rather than categorising criminal organisations according to their perceived level of resistance, or concentrating solely on the pernicious effect of gang activities, it is argued that the relationships between criminal gangs and the various sectors of the African population were shaped by a myriad of local circumstances and conflicting agendas, and as a result were profoundly ambiguous. Although gangs sometimes served the material, social and psychological needs of many urban Africans, township residents were also the most frequent victims of gang violence. Furthermore, because township populations were socially fragmented and gangs reflected (and shaped) these divisions, this violence was not completely arbitrary. Different gangs and rival factions within communities engaged in constantly shifting alliances and feuds contingent on a variety of factors, a state of affairs which greatly

complicated gang-community relations. The fractured nature of township society allowed gangs to operate along the fault lines which divided communities and made it extremely difficult for urban populations to act in a unified manner against the social menace which gangs represented.

Additionally, virtually every study dealing with African gangs and township life has emphasised poverty and anomie as the central factors resulting in a high incidence of violent crime in black areas. While it is essential to keep in mind that government policies which enriched and empowered whites at the expense of blacks provide the larger framework within which gang violence must be situated, it is necessary to examine the specific forces that influenced gang formation, development and activities. Poverty and anomie explain the existence, but not the nature,[15] of criminal gangs - for this we have to look to the groups themselves. To understand gangs and their actions we need to examine the character of township life and to explore the relationships between gangs and different sectors of urban communities. The gangsters' ability to exploit the divisions within urban society has been crucial to the prevalence of ganging and has been largely overlooked in the literature.

To more clearly understand why urban gangs have flourished in South Africa it is essential to locate such organisations within the communities which birthed and sustained them and to investigate why these communities were vulnerable to the proliferation of criminal violence. Thus, the following must be considered: the formation, composition and activities of the various

gangs, and gang-community relations with specific attention to such issues as gender, ethnicity, generation, culture, class and identity formation. Finally, a comparison between the criminal violence on the Rand which dominates the literature and the more recent political conflict between supporters of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) will illustrate how socially fragmented communities are susceptible to gang violence.

GANG FORMATION, COMPOSITION AND ACTIVITY

The gangs studied to date have been overwhelmingly composed of the most marginalised male members of urban society - migrants and youth. 'Performing the roughest, most menial and worst paid tasks in the mines and domestic and municipal services, the migrants were at the bottom, but to some extent outside, of the status system of urban African society.'[16] As black, working-class youths, Glaser categorises tsotsis as 'structurally subordinate in terms of race, class, and generation.'[17]

Migrants typically 'sought islands of security within the prevailing anarchy of the towns and did so most often by clustering together with those from their home region.'[18] "Homeboy" networks could provide loans, employment leads, access to housing, and physical protection for their members. The last was extremely important to newly arrived migrants who, unschooled in the ways of the city, were favourite targets of urban criminals.[19] Specifically because township life posed such a threat to

migrants' physical security, a number of these associations mobilised for defensive purposes.

Although the Ninevites preyed on fellow Africans, in the gang's formative years in the 1890s its members were also known to administer rough justice to white employers who had mistreated African workers.[20] The Amalaita gangs of early twentieth century Durban provided a sense of security and identity for migrant youth set adrift in the cities, and although they engaged in violent behaviour, many Africans did not consider them criminals because it is remembered that they did not steal from their victims.[21] And while the Isitshozi were feared and hated for their predatory activities, members claimed that they originally formed to protect themselves from the assaults of Basotho miners.[22]

The most infamous (and long-lived) of these first generation gangs is the MaRashea or Russians which was also established as a defensive association in the 1940s. However, like the Ninevites and the Isitshozi before them, the Russian gangs soon extended their efforts in a fashion detrimental to the surrounding community. Fellow Basotho, along with other Africans, were victimised by the large scale extortion schemes and protection rackets favoured by the Russians as a method of revenue raising.[23]

While migrant gangs tended to mobilise as defensive associations which provided security and a sense of identity for their members, none of the gangs featured in the literature limited their activities to defensive functions. As the gangs consolidated and became increasingly powerful, they

invariably adopted a more aggressive posture and turned to criminal activities for economic gain, as well as fighting with rival gangs for control over urban space and women.[24] This defensive-to-predatory transformation was not limited to migrant gangs - other groups such as the Msomis in Johannesburg and Cape Town's Globe Gang which were established as community defenders also ended up preying on fellow residents.[25]

Youth gangs shared some similarities with migrant gangs - the quest for physical security and identity, clashes with the police, and the attempts to establish control over territory and resident females, for example - but differed in age, occupation and the extent to which they were urbanised. Most migrants were adult, employed and retained psychological, social and material connections to their rural homelands,[26] while tsotsis rejected the idea of waged labour, supported themselves primarily through criminal exploits and were products of their urban environment.

As a rule, neither the migrant gangs nor the tsotsis supported African nationalist movements such as the ANC or the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC).[27] In fact, in the 1950s, the ANC sometimes came into conflict with the gangs, which 'were regarded more as a menace to the community than as a potential support base'[28], and often assisted local initiatives to stamp out gang activity.[29] Antagonism between gangs and the ANC and its affiliates was also a feature of the struggle in the townships in the 1980s. 'The emergent gangs of Soweto seem to have had a particularly hostile relationship with the

political organisations and activists operating in the township, which has been punctuated by repeated overt and usually fierce conflict.'[30]

GANGS AND COMMUNITY

It is clear that some township residents suffered because of the depredations of criminal gangs, not only were people robbed, raped, assaulted and murdered, the fear of being victimised severely curtailed religious, social and political activities.[31] Furthermore, large-scale gang battles threatened the well-being of innocent people caught in the middle of warring factions. Gang violence against girls and women was particularly horrific. Rapes, abductions and other forms of assault and harassment were commonplace activities for many gangs.[32]

Given the destructive impact of such gangs, it is not surprising that some community members banded together in civilian guards to counter the criminal menace. Goodhew's study of the civic guard movement in the Western Areas of Johannesburg in the 1930-62 period indicates that communal policing initiatives aimed at curbing crime enjoyed the support of 'the bulk of the population' who feared and hated the predators in their midst.[33] Youth gangs in particular were targeted by a variety of groups ranging from students, the Makgotla movement (traditional courts which apprehended, tried and punished offenders, usually by flogging), and different civil guards.[34] Thus, on the surface, it appears that urban Africans were constantly victimised by gangs and had no reason to regard them as

anything other than a plague, little different from the police. Indeed, the multiple oppressions of African communities caught between the violence of these gangs and the brutality of a police force which regularly terrorised the urban locations is captured poignantly in Mongane Serote's description of a 1950s township:

> Alexandra was pitch dark in those days. And there were Spoilers who made sleeping a terrible inconvenience. I do not know how the Spoilers broke down doors, but they did, and then they took everything: wardrobes and the clothes on them, tables, money, even lives. They were feared. There were the Msomis, equally brutal, more efficient and better organised. The Spoilers and the Msomis brought the movies out of the movie houses into the streets of Alexandra, for real, guns, blood and all.
>
> There were the police. They came on horseback, in fast cars, in huge trucks, and shot for real; they came in saracens and with machine guns and banged on doors... there were beer raids. There were pass raids.[35]

Without discounting the mayhem gangs inflicted upon location residents, a deeper examination of the relationship between African gangs and the larger urban African population reveals a more ambivalent state of affairs. It is unlikely that urban gangs could have flourished in South Africa without a significant degree of support from different segments of the urban community. This support constantly shifted in emphasis, from mere tolerance to outright alliances, and different gangs enjoyed support from different segments of the community at different times, contingent upon a variety of social, economic and political factors. It is important to recognise that because of the fractious nature of life in South African cities, criminal gangs were not viewed solely as a destructive force.

Gangs were an indelible feature of the social fabric of urban communities and cannot be regarded as a separate element to be examined in isolation. To begin to understand how such groups fit into the urban social milieu it is first essential to establish that urban black communities were intensely heterogeneous and riven by divisions and tensions. Gangs both reflected and shaped these fault lines and the manner in which gangsters related with and were perceived by various groups within the larger community was heavily influenced by issues of generation, culture, gender, ethnicity, and class.

To a large extent, gangs mirrored the divisions in black urban communities - youth versus elders, "townsmen" versus "tribesmen", male versus female, ethnic group versus outsiders and the desperately poor versus

the relatively well off - but gang activity also moulded these fissures and often exacerbated existing disputes. For example, gang clashes frequently resulted in innocent victims being caught up in the violence which then intensified, assumed a cyclical dynamic and further entrenched fault lines. As a result more people joined gangs for protection or revenge and the cycle was perpetuated. This course of events is described by one of Bonner's Russian informants: '[I]t did not matter whether you belonged to a group. As long as you were a Mosotho you were a victim. For security and protection you had to join the group.'[36]

The struggle between migrants and urbanised youth on the Witwatersrand was a deadly one that racked the townships with violence, especially, it seems, in the 1940s and 1950s and again in the wake of the 1976 Soweto riots. Tsotsis were dreaded by migrants, while newcomers to the city were resented and disparaged by resident youths. Guy and Thabane report that their informant repeatedly stressed Russian - tsotsi enmity: 'Fighting the botsotsi is a continuing theme in Rantoa's account. His animosity towards these criminals who prey on the traveller and the isolated individual is deep, as is his fear of being caught by one of these thugs unprotected... Hatred for the botsotsi is just as intense and Rantoa's victories over them are recounted with relish.'[37] This Russian-tsotsi antipathy fuelled violence in the townships and claimed victims who were members of neither group. Urban workers and youth were often indiscriminately attacked by Russians, while tsotsis were likely to assault 'anyone speaking Sesotho or wearing a blanket.'[38] Such

conflicts inevitably exacerbated the divide between the fully and the transitionally urban. Mayer reports similar tensions in 1950s East London where the "town-rooted" and the "country-rooted" constituted a deep social division that occasionally exploded into open conflict.[39]

The migrant-urbanised youth enmity has been sustained over the decades. Just as many Russians reacted violently to attempts by ANC supporters to enforce stayaways and boycotts in the 1950s, migrants did not submit meekly to the August 1976 stayaway calls. 'The involvement of tsotsis in looting and coercion of workers enraged migrants, who had a long history of victimisation at the hands of youth gangs. Migrants drew no distinction between tsotsis and students and reacted violently and randomly against Soweto youth during August.'[40]

Numerous authors have commented on the prevalence of youth gangs in the urban locations. Generational tension, even hostility, seems to have been a constant feature of township life regardless of the period. All major urban centres suffered from the tsotsi menace to some degree by the 1940s and in many instances "parents" mobilised against the youth who terrorised their communities. Goodhew's examination of the civic guard movement in the Western Native Townships of Johannesburg concludes that it was partially 'a manifestation of hostility in a generational conflict between the older residents and young people who formed the bulk of the criminals. One aim of the residents was the general control of the young.'[41] Mayer notes a similar train of events during the East London "riots" of 1958 when 'mature

men, fathers of families and solid characters' went on a rampage aimed at beating the youthful tsotsis from the streets.[42] Glaser claims that in Soweto:

> ... the rift between the younger and older generation gradually sharpened during the 1960s. The young experienced at first hand the frustrations of inferior education and unemployment. Unlike their parents who had jobs to keep and rents to pay and children to support, they had little to lose and few responsibilities. Anger mounted against their schooling and their social marginalisation, against the poverty and apparent docility of their parents.'[43]

The makgotla movement in 1970s Soweto laid heavy emphasis on "traditional values", which demanded that youth exhibit deference towards their elders. Much of the different makgotla groups' efforts were designed to bring wayward township youngsters to heel. In the words of one supporter who urged her fellow residents to join the makgotla in 1974, 'We are sick and tired of being terrorised by young boys and girls.'[44] Parents frequently reported the crimes of their children to the makgotla courts and consented to their being flogged. Such initiatives highlighted parents' ongoing struggle to control their children in an urban environment which encouraged lawlessness.

Class divisions have long been a feature of township society. Often class antagonisms were closely tied to the rural-urban divide and involved notions of culture and respectability. The Western Areas of Johannesburg consisted of three townships, Western Native Township, Sophiatown and the relatively impoverished Newclare, home of a migrant Basotho population and a Russian stronghold. '[Newclare] represented an island of migrant, "unrespectable" culture at variance with the rest of the Western Areas' and while its more prosperous, "cultured" neighbours enthusiastically supported communal policing, residents of Newclare shunned such initiatives.[45]

The aspirant middle-class disparaged the migrants they regarded as backward, and some migrants were just as adamant in their contempt for settled urbanites they considered pathetic imitations of whites. Sophiatown, for example, was dismissed by the Russians as a place where Africans lived like Europeans.[46] For the Russians it was settled urbanites who lacked culture and Russianism was an attempt to guard their cultural roots in the uncivilised townships.[47]

Another manifestation of the class divide was the hostility between Soweto youth gangs and schoolboys which Glaser reports was especially intense in the 1970s. Gangs which preyed on students were subject to bloody retaliation and 'gangsters were killed and assaulted in a number of school offensives in the 1970s.'[48] Students are said to have gained the upper hand throughout the early 1980s, at least in Soweto, but were once again engaged

in battles with the "jackrollers" who terrorised the townships in the later part of the decade and into the 1990s.[49]

Gang violence also resulted in the polarisation of populations between different ethnic groups. Attacks by the early Isitshozi gangs 'tended to provoke much bigger clashes along ethnic cleavages'[50] and during the 1950s, Bonner claims that the Russians directly contributed to ethnic chauvinism on the Rand - 'the Basotho clashed repeatedly with those they defined as 'Zulu', 'Xhosa' and 'Mpondo' - creating a deep chasm of hostility and misunderstanding between different ethnic groups.'[51]

None of the divisions discussed above were definitive - township populations were not neatly segregated into compartments defined by ethnicity, generation, class, gender or any other classification, nor were the interests of different groups always in conflict - imbricating identities and agendas were as much a feature of township life as were confrontations. That being said, divisions between readily identifiable groups did exist and criminal gangs tended to both reflect and cement these fault lines.

Within the contested terrain of the locations, gangs fulfilled a number of often contradictory functions. The ambiguous nature of the relationship between urban communities and gangs is particularly well illustrated by an examination of gender relations. Although men and women alike had reason to fear the gangs, criminal violence was not gender blind and females were frequently singled out for harassment and rape. Gangs regarded women as property and expended a great deal of energy attempting to control "their

women". A particularly horrific practice was the occurrence of rape and counter rape engaged in by some gangs: 'A vicious Brakpan gang has assaulted 11 young East Rand women in a crazed bid to avenge the rape of the girl-friend of one of their members by a rival mob.'[52] An example of the assumption of absolute male dominance can be seen in Don Mattera's account of how he acquired the common-law wife he first spied at a bus stop in 1956. 'A few minutes later she was mine, like so many girls in Sophiatown and Western Native Township. During those days it was risky to refuse me, the leader of the Vultures gang. It didn't matter whether a girl loved me or not; it was one of the fringe benefits of being a gangster.'[53] Glaser paints a singularly bleak picture of the impact that tsotsi activity had on women living on the Rand:

> Women, particularly unattached women, had remarkably little freedom of movement in the Witwatersrand townships. They were in constant danger of being molested and harassed by tsotsis, singly or in gangs. Women never went out at night without male escorts... 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 band of Spoilers raided a Reef hospital and abducted several learner nurses for the night.[54]

"Jackrolling" is the popular term for gang rape in contemporary Soweto, where it seems women are no safer than in the heyday of the Spoilers. Mokwena explains that, 'Most incidents of "Jackroll" are committed in public places like shebeens, picnic spots, schools, nightclubs and in the streets... A peculiar feature of "Jackroll" is that it is seen as the sport of the tough gangsters.'[55] Sexual violence remains a common gang activity throughout South Africa. In the townships surrounding Durban, 'One gang, called Bhepa Span (which literally means the Gang of Fuckers), used to roam the streets in the early evenings, cellphones in their pockets and pistols in their hands, looking for young lovers. One gangster would put a gun to the guy's head and force him to watch while the rest raped his girlfriend.'[56]

Conversely, association with gangsters provided a measure of physical security, and material and social rewards for select women. '[T]here were definite benefits to having a gangster as a boyfriend. Apart from the prestige, it often offered a higher standard of living and, more importantly, protection

from other gangsters.'[57] The Russians seem to provide a case in point of a highly ambiguous model of gender relations. While Russian men used violence to discipline run-away "wives,"[58] Russian women actively participated in extortion schemes, operated in the informal sector under gang protection, and venerated their men as heroes.[59] Indeed, Coplan claims that 'Russians and their women were mutually supportive and independent counterparts.'[60]

Women and girls also participated in tsotsi activities and were employed as scouts, shoplifters and decoys, sometimes making a handsome living from their criminal proceeds.[61] At least one Witwatersrand gang organised and trained women to fight alongside the men, and one woman, Sponono, reportedly led a male gang in Alexandra during the 1950s.[62]

Although the research done to date supports the view that gangs were overwhelmingly male, and women operated on the peripheries of male gangs, this assertion needs to be subjected to further scrutiny as press reports throughout the 1950s and 1960s are peppered with references to female criminals and gangs. Commenting on township crime in 1958, the *Golden City Post* observed that, 'One of the gangs is an all-woman organisation consisting of young girls and young married women who attack unmarried couples and women and widows who live alone. This gang also disposes of merchandise stolen by the male gangs from shopkeepers in and outside the townships.'[63] Criminal gangs did provide space for some women to rise above material

deprivation, gain social status, and even carve out independent niches for themselves.

Until quite recently, the foremost priority of the police was to uphold white supremacy through the enforcement of racist legislation. Brewer summarises this situation in the 1950s: 'Passes and documents were checked, raids for illicit liquor conducted and illegal squatters evicted, all while murder, rape and gangsterism flourished in the townships.'[64] Indeed, a 1955 report on youth crime in the townships on the Rand recorded that gang members boasted openly that police were so intent on liquor and pass law offences that tsotsis had very little to fear from them.[65] In a letter to the editor of *The World* in 1973, Enoch Sibinda expressed Alexandra residents' exasperation with the authorities: 'These policemen do not do their job well. The only thing they know how to do is knock on your door as early as 4 am, asking for permits. In the streets they stop us to ask for reference books. As for protecting us from thugs this does not seem to be their concern.'[66] When protest against the apartheid regime gathered momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, police efforts were concentrated on crushing political dissent rather than addressing violence within black communities. The intensely antagonistic relationship between township residents and the police resulting from such measures ensured that there was little community co-operation with whatever efforts the police did make to combat violent crime. As Bloke Modisane, a journalist and author who grew up in Sophiatown, declared '...the police are the instruments of black oppression, and if I had to choose

between the tsotsis and the police my vote would be cast for the tsotsis. This is the morality of black South Africa.'[67]

The adversarial nature of community-police relations and the labyrinthine web of bureaucratic offences with which Africans could be charged, guaranteed that the distinction between law-breaking and law-abiding township residents was less than crystal clear. There was no blanket condemnation of convicted criminals precisely because the majority of urban Africans were arrested at some period. As De Ridder's biography of a Sophiatown gangster explains: 'Crime was an accepted way of life in Sophiatown... There was no stigma in being seen associating with criminals - it was a geographical and social necessity.'[68]

Resentment of the authorities who governed Africans' movements, rights of residency and access to jobs, and subjected townspeople to constant harassment as a result of pass and liquor raids, meant that violence directed at the police was likely to be celebrated by many members of the community. Mattera claims that police-gang confrontations highlighted the ambivalent relationship between gangsters and communities. 'The gangs were a great paradox. People couldn't understand why they would rob them, stab them, and then also fight the police. So there was this love-hate relationship.'[69]

Other than battling the police, some gangs engaged in activities including crimes against white, Indian or Chinese owned businesses, brawls with white gangs, and participation in political initiatives that met with varying degrees of popular approval. The American gang of Sophiatown are

fondly remembered for robbing whites in Johannesburg while sparing township residents.[70] Glaser claims that as late as the 1970s, 'Most local gangs [in Soweto]... conducted their criminal activity outside of, and far away from, their home territories.'[71] As a result, some gangs probably did not earn the enmity of the people they lived among.

Additionally, township residents appreciated the material benefits available as a result of gangs' criminal exploits. The editor of *Drum* magazine remembers an African schoolteacher telling him in the 1950s that while the tsotsis were a nuisance, the stolen goods they provided at significant discounts to location residents compensated for the trouble they caused.[72] Mokwena makes a similar observation for contemporary Soweto. 'It is important to remember that the phenomenon of "Ukutabalaza" [theft by various means] ... depends largely on the tacit support of the entire community. The community provides a ready market for stolen goods or "back door goods".'[73]

In the vacuum created by the absence of effective policing, gangs sometimes fulfilled the role of 'informal agencies of social control'.[74] Bonner's informant AB related how in 1946 his youth gang joined with others in Benoni to retaliate against white delinquents who assaulted any blacks who dared to walk on the paved sidewalks. After AB and his associates fought a large scale battle with the whites in which they were joined by a number of black women shoppers, the police began enforcing Africans' rights to walk on Benoni's pavements.[75] Businesses occasionally hired gangs for "protection" when

involved in disputes with competitors; the Russians in particular were often available for such services. In 1950, Indian taxi-owners in Benoni employed Russians to break an enforced boycott of their taxi services; and in the 1980s, an association of QwaQwa taximen hired Basotho gangsters to defend them against the assaults of a rival group.[76] A Bandidos gang member in 1970s Soweto reported that, 'Sometimes we used to escort people going to work and protect them after work against other tsotsis and they would reward us every Friday.'[77] With police protection noticeably lacking, gangs sometimes filled the void and performed valuable services for various businesses and individuals.

The independent, glamorous and defiant nature attributed to select gangsters by township residents provided a powerful psychological example of black autonomy and resistance to white domination. As a result, some urbanites romanticised the gangs as 'culture heroes courageous and clever enough to become wealthy at the expense of whites.'[78] Mokwena reports that township youth of the 1980s and 1990s regarded wealthy gangsters in much the same light, 'as heros [sic] or role models.'[79] QwaQwa taximen familiar with different Russian gangs in the 1980s, 'were enamoured by the mystique of the Russians; they admired their tradition of resistance and survival and spoke proudly of their relationships with individual gangsters.'[80] Fenwick's study of the depiction of gangster figures in *Drum* illustrates popular perceptions of gangsters during the 1950s. At the heart of *Drum*'s portrayal of gangsters was an aura of glamour and rebelliousness - qualities beyond the

reach of most law-abiding township residents. Gangsters prospered in defiance of the white state, they enjoyed wealth, power, prestige and sexual prowess despite their blackness. *Drum*'s treatment of gangsters was reflective of the larger community's attitude towards the gangs.

> *Drum* never denied that these men were brutal criminals. The magazine did, however, celebrate the lifestyle for which they struggled. In the face of a white state that declared black urban living to be illegitimate, *Drum* turned to figures with which they could simultaneously demonstrate the true illegality that was the result of segregation and the vibrancy, power and legitimacy of the black urban culture that housed them.[81]

Given the paucity of legitimate economic opportunities in the townships and the absence of effective policing, gang membership became the best method of survival for some location residents. As a result, certain gangs enjoyed the support of a significant proportion of urbanites - with some achieving the status of a self-contained community. Such is Coplan's description of the Russians:

> In sum, the russians, both male and female, were "encapsulating" themselves, not in homeboy networks or urban residential or occupational relationships, but in an ethnically based, culturally grounded subculture of their own, competing strategically and violently with each other but wrapping their blankets and shaking their fighting sticks at settled urbanites, other ethnic groups and landed Basutoland Basotho alike.[82]

Tsotsis too formed a distinct grouping within the townships:

> Tsotsi style, ritual and status structures were defined in antagonism to both 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, and through the glorification of violence.[83]

As well as offering a type of sanctuary for marginalised males (and some females), gangs were often simultaneously condemned and admired by the people they lived among.

POLITICAL CONFLICT AND GANGS

Analysis of the similarities between the politically-fuelled conflict of the 1980s and 1990s and earlier gang violence supports the view that fighting between the followers of rival political groups heightened intra-communal tensions and fractured African communities in much the same way (and on an even greater scale) as the purely criminal violence of earlier periods. The urban-led protests of the mid-1980s, combined with the rise of state-sponsored vigilantism and the fighting between ANC and IFP backed forces, turned many townships into virtual warzones. All the warring parties recruited criminal gangs to some extent, and not surprisingly were unable to exercise full control over the elements which fought in their name.[84] In this atmosphere the opportunities for criminals multiplied as did the temptation for ostensibly politically motivated groups and individuals to resort to blatantly predatory behaviour. In other words, the larger struggle provided a perfect arena for opportunistic criminal gangs. Durban's KwaMashu township is an extreme example of how the political conflict opened up space for urban gangsters :

> The history of armed banditry in KwaMashu is difficult to reconstruct, mainly because there are so many gangs in each of the township sections. But a rough chronology, constructed from interviews with residents and gang members, shows that the reign of criminal terror has always been associated with a struggle between the African National Congress and Inkatha to control the township.[85]

Reports of the political violence of recent years bears a striking resemblance to earlier reports of criminal violence on the Rand - only the weapons changed. Both political and criminal violence deepened existing fissures in urban communities and invested these divisions with new significance. In many ways for people on the ground, the political violence was little different from the criminal violence of previous years - it was all about identity, security, and control of resources; it broke down along familiar lines of generation, gender, class, and ethnicity, and the authorities inflamed rather than prevented conflict. Comtsotsis (disaffected comrades who engaged in criminal predation to enrich themselves) replaced tsotsis, Inkatha-backed hostel dwellers replaced migrant gangs, ANC self-defence units stood in for civic guards, and vigilantes did much of the dirty work of the police.[86]

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND DIVIDED COMMUNITIES

Just as with the criminal violence of earlier periods, there was a great deal of overlap between rural-urban and generational antagonism in the political conflict that tore apart KwaZulu-Natal and areas of the Rand in the 1980s and 1990s.

> Part of the comrades [sic] self definition has been to distinguish themselves sharply from what they regard as the backward older generation. 'The older generation only know about ancient times and ancient things', Colin N (23 years) argued. 'The youth must correct all the mistakes they have made.' In addition to this emphasis on the mistakes of the older generation, the comrades interviewed described themselves as an urban movement rather than a rural one, dismissively lumping rural black people together with the older generation as 'blind' or 'in the dark' or 'ignorant'... Inkatha's power base lies not only in the support of large numbers of older men but also hostel dwellers with close rural ties and a deep commitment to the old fashioned, rural-based 'Zulu traditions'.[87]

Segal's study of Zulu hostel dwellers on the Rand during the violence of 1990 revealed that these men 'were unequivocal in pointing to the animosity and antipathy of township residents.'[88] Deeply threatened and offended by the actions of the youthful comrades, Campbell suggests that the agenda of the Inkatha supporters was not exclusively anti-ANC, 'but also to put down the cheeky upstart youth who dared to think they could challenge the power of older men.'[89] The similarity between this sort of sentiment and that of the Western Native Township's civic guards and the makgotla groups who wished to bring errant youth back under control is unmistakable. Generational tensions were not limited to the ANC-Inkatha rivalry. The political struggle in the 1980s in which youth were the vanguard of the ANC's quest to make the townships ungovernable further strained relations between the "young lions" and their elders. One result of this process of youth empowerment was that, 'many youths developed a noticeable arrogance which resulted in intense generational conflict between them and elders in the community and the family.'[90]

Hostel dweller's disdain for urbanites and urban life also echoes that of the early Russian gangs. Deeply attached to their rural roots and cultures, both groups shared a grave mistrust of settled urbanites. Commenting on the rift between youth and the more conservative hostel dwellers, Minnaar notes that '[t]his polarisation has been fully exploited by various political groupings for their own ends in the struggle for power and hegemony within specific townships.'[91] Once the violence escalated many hostel dwellers felt

they had no choice but to join Inkatha for protection: 'I joined because they said if you were Zulu, you were Inkatha... All Zulus who live in the hostel were classified as Inkatha and were killed. We were left with no choice but to join Inkatha.'[92] This reluctant identification with an organisation is analogous with Bonner's informant who felt he needed to join the Russians because all Basotho were subject to indiscriminate attacks by the Russians' enemies.

Class tension was an important factor in drawing the conflict lines of political violence in much the same manner as it has helped determine the character of criminal violence. In this narrow sense, vigilante groups which tended to draw their members from the 'embryonic middle-class with an interest in stability and a natural inclination to conservatism' resemble the "respectable" civic guards of the 1950s who wished to protect their pay-packets from predatory youth.[93] The conflicts between townships and squatter camps which exploded in the 1980s and 1990s had some of the same basic elements as the Newclare battles of the 1950s which pitted residents of the poorest areas against their less impoverished neighbours.

The abysmal state of policing contributed to the political violence just as it has always done to criminal violence in the townships. Proof of the absolute failure of the police to bring violent perpetrators to justice is the fact that of the thousands of politically motivated murders between 1990 and 1993, there was a mere eleven convictions.[94] The failure of the police to punish offenders or to provide any measure of protection caused 'many people to seek allegiance with political parties for refuge, vengeance or both...

Political parties have become justice organisations for millions of people because there is a big vacuum that the police are either unwilling or unable to fill.'[95] And just as in the past elements within the police were actively involved in fomenting the violence, this time by supplying vigilantes with weapons, training and protection.[96] Also there were allegations that different factions involved in the fighting on the Rand were able to appeal to ethnic allies within the police for help: 'On this interpretation, Zulu police support Zulu factions while Xhosa police support their Xhosa counterparts.'[97] This sort of partisan policing is reminiscent of the relationship groups of 1950s Russians had with Basotho members of the police force.[98]

Both criminal gangs and their political counterparts of later years placed a high premium on a masculine identity that values fighting prowess and regards violence as the prototypical masculine activity. The tsotsis of the 1940s and 1950s and the comrades and comtsotsis who were instrumental in the violence forty years later, seem remarkably similar in this regard. Tsotsis' masculine identity 'hinged around fighting skill, independence, daring and law-breaking' and 'the glorification of violence'[99], while comrades characterised themselves as fearless, death-defiers, the young lions who bravely battled the forces of the regime.[100]

The domination of girls and women was central to the identification of both tsotsis and comrades: 'A tsotsi was a man but his masculinity was unconvincing if he did not have a woman to dominate'; and amongst comrades 'a real man was one who was able to dominate his girlfriend... male

and female respondents cited the use or the threat of violence as the way that this obedience was insured.'[101] Not surprisingly, women were treated as pawns in the war in KwaZulu-Natal, and attacks on girls and women were just another way to strike out at rival groups: 'D cited a case where a comrade justified a rape by his side because it was done in revenge for a rape committed by the other side.'[102] In Glaser's explanation of the young gangsters' need for gender dominance, the term "comrade" could just as easily be substituted for "tsotsi"

> 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' in the ascendant. Hence the need to assert their masculinity and sexual difference. They defended their one area of privilege vigorously.[103]

While in no way can the Inkatha-ANC conflict be classified as ethnic, ethnicity did become a factor in the fighting on the Reef, with Zulu-speaking Inkatha supporters pitted against squatter and township residents whom they labelled as Xhosa. Segal's interviews with hostel dwellers revealed that, 'For most, the ethnic dimension of the conflict was beyond doubt.' As explained

by her informants: 'Now everyone is Inkatha because Xhosas attacked Zulus indiscriminately... It wasn't political violence to us. It was Zulu and Xhosa violence.'[104] Much as some of the earlier gang battles on the Rand emphasised ethnic divisions, the conflict between ANC and Inkatha supporters in the Johannesburg area encouraged similar fissures.

A final point of comparison - ANC and Inkatha combatants characterised themselves as community defenders battling the evil forces of the rival organisation, this too is reminiscent of many of the gangs formed as protective associations in Cape Town and on the Rand; however, just like the gangs which preceded them, many of the groups embroiled in "political" violence ended up preying on fellow township residents.[105] Inevitably the actions of vigilantes, comtsotsis and their Inkatha-affiliated equivalents further fractured communities as groups acted to resist the criminals.[106]

In his examination of violence involving Durban hostel dwellers, Zulu discovered that in many instances hostilities were not grounded in the larger political rivalry but when the political organisations became involved in the conflict, the violence became much more difficult to contain.[107] Minnaar's area studies of the anatomy of conflicts in specific communities support Zulu's findings regarding the apolitical roots of many disputes. What Minnaar also discovered is that in many cases it was the local actors who appealed to the ANC or Inkatha for support.[108] The often tenuous connection between the actors on the ground and the political hierarchy is well illustrated by the fact that many ANC and Inkatha combatants were unable to

identify the cause for which they were fighting or to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of their political group's programme.[109] This is not to say that people on the ground were puppets manipulated by political masters, only that many participated in the violence to satisfy their own immediate needs.

It is evident that many of the conditions that encouraged ganging and violent crime in earlier years remained in place and helped to shape the political violence of the 1980s and 1990s. The war between the state and competing political organisations both encouraged and provided a cover for local struggles between youth and elders, urbanites and migrants, and the poor versus the desperately impoverished, and occasionally divided communities along ethnic lines, all while men relied on violence as a means of demonstrating masculinity and maintaining their dominance over women. Divided communities fought amongst themselves in the name of the ANC or Inkatha (and various other organisations) with this veneer of politicisation often obscuring older and deeper rivalries. The political conflict fed these rivalries and often caused localised disputes to spiral out of control when the competing parties took vested interests in existing struggles.

While the parallels between gangsterism and political conflict are limited because of the active involvement and sponsorship of the state, Inkatha and the ANC in the latter, the commonalties are unmistakable. The most marginalised male members of urban societies were mobilised by criminal and political groups alike and were at the forefront of the violence. Criminal gangs and political parties promised their members similar rewards

- status, improved physical security, material gain and an opportunity to rise to positions of power, and both exploited the divisions that characterised urban life in the segregated townships where Africans struggled to survive in an environment that fostered conflict. Finally, both criminal and political violence (as far as they are distinguishable) speak to the manner in which township communities were/are vulnerable to internecine conflict.

A more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of ganging and urban violence in South Africa requires an investigation of the fault lines of urban society and the specific roles that gangs play(ed) within their communities. This same approach may suggest avenues for addressing the current crisis. Recognising and attempting to overcome not just the widely acknowledged racial and political divisions, but those of gender, ethnicity, generation, class and culture that permeate urban society, is essential to South Africa's national project to make the country safer for all its citizens.

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[1] For decades the police have co-operated with and assisted gangs when it served the apartheid state's interests. The Basotho Russian gangs, for example, reportedly benefited from biased policing when they battled civic guards, resisted ANC-organised boycotts and stayaways, and hired out as strike-breakers in the 1950s. More recently, the state has armed and trained Inkatha paramilitaries and sponsored various gangs who then informed on and eliminated ANC activists. The current epidemic of gang violence on the Cape Flats has also been attributed to police action in the 1980s when gangsters flourished under police protection in return for acting as political informants. P. Bonner, 'The Russians on the Reef, 1947-57: Urbanisation, Gang Warfare and Ethnic Mobilisation' in Bonner, Delius and Posel (eds), *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935-1962* (Johannesburg, 1993), 181; *The Sunday Independent*, 22 February, 1998.

[2] C. van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914, Volume 2 New Nineveh* (London, 1982), 195.

[3] P. La Hausse, ' 'The Cows of Nongoloza': Youth, Crime and Amalaita Gangs in Durban, 1900-1936', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16 (1), 1990, 108.

[4] K. Breckenridge, 'Migrancy, Crime and Faction Fighting: the Role of the Isitshozi in the Development of Ethnic Organisations in the Compounds', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16 (1), 1990, 63.

[5] *Bantu World*, 20 June, 1953.

[6] C. Glaser, 'The Mark of Zorro: Sexuality and Gender Relations in the Tsotsi Subculture on the Witwatersrand', *African Studies*, 51 (1), 1992, 47.

[7] L. Freed, *Crime in South Africa*, (Cape Town, 1963), 127.

[8] The evolution from defensive association to anti-social predators is typical of organisations as diverse as the Coloured Globe Gang based in Cape Town's District Six, the notorious Basotho gangs known as Russians which were a dominant force on the Rand in the 1950s, and the ZX5 youth gang of 1970s Soweto. Formed in the late 1940s to combat the crime of skollies (tsotsis), Globe members were comprised of the sons of the middle class - shopkeepers, craftsmen and better-off hawkers. However, by 1950, the Globe had become a power unto itself and was controlling criminal activities in the District. Similarly, the Russians came together as a response to tsotsi and Isitshozi assaults but were soon engaged in large scale extortion schemes and battles for supremacy both with competing Russian factions and with various other gangs. The ZX5 'started out as a small defensive gang, but became increasingly territorial and aggressive.' See D. Pinnock, *The Brotherhoods: Street Gangs and State Control in Cape Town*, (Cape Town, 1984), 25-29; Bonner, 'The Russians on the Reef', 161-2; and C. Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics in Soweto, 1958-76'. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1994, 255-6.

[9] For an examination of youth gangs on the Rand in the 1960s and 1970s see Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics'.

[10] M. Morris and D. Hindson, 'South Africa: Political Violence, Reform and Reconstruction', *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 53, 1992, 55. For further information on the involvement of criminal elements in the political struggle of the 1980s and 1990s see: A. Sitas, 'The Making of the 'Comrades' Movement in Natal, 1985-91', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (3), 1992; W. Scharf, 'The Resurgence of Urban Street Gangs and Community Responses During the Late Eighties' in Hansson and van Zyl Smit (eds), *Towards Justice? Crime and State Control in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1990); H. Adam and K. Moodley, 'Political Violence, 'Tribalism' and Inkatha', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 30 (3), 1992; A. Minnaar (ed.), *Patterns of Violence: Case Studies of Conflict in Natal* (Pretoria, 1992); and the *Weekly Mail*: 15-21 September, 1989; 19-25 January, 1990; 8-14 February, 1991; 12-18 April, 1991.

[11] For the post 1950s period in the Johannesburg area there is only Glaser's as yet unpublished Ph.D. thesis and Steve Mokwena's article, 'The Era of the Jackrollers: Contextualising the rise of youth gangs in Soweto' Seminar No. 7, 1991, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Johannesburg.

[12] For example, *The World* published reports of Bloemfontein's Fast Eleven Gang (18 Feb., 1958), the Young Americans, the 85 Gang, the Barbarians and the Pirates in Kimberley (11, 25 Jan., and 1 March, 1958), and Pretoria's Easy Street Boys (7 Oct., 1961). The *Golden City Post* reported on Port Elizabeth gangs such as the Dabula Gang and the Dark Towners (26 Oct., 1958). *Drum* magazine also ran regular features on criminal gangs from Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town during the 1950s and 1960s.

[13] Lodge, for example, in his discussion of Sophiatown gangsters, writes: 'The gangs were popularly characterised as marauders in the white city, as heroes... it was popularly believed that gangs "seldom harm ordinary folk."' In his autobiographical account, tsotsi-turned-author Don Mattera insists that the gangsters of Sophiatown functioned as 'Young Robin Hoods, fighting the strong in the defence of the weak.' Don Pinnock's study of gangsterism in 1980s Cape Town led him to conclude that the gangs 'are constantly on the threshold of resistance. They share with all Cape workers a long and terrible history of poverty and relocation... It is this that has underpinned an understanding ... of gang behaviour among ordinary people.' In his study of social bandits in Africa, Ralph Austen suggests that criminal gangs in South Africa were one of the models for youth which offered 'a degree of non-political resistance to the repressive state.' T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (London, 1983), 102; D. Mattera, *Gone with the Twilight: A Story of Sophiatown*, (Johannesburg, 1987), 104; D. Pinnock, 'Stone's Boys and the Making of the Cape Flats Mafia' in Bozzoli (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict* (Johannesburg, 1987), 433; R. Austen, 'Social bandits and other heroic criminals: Western models of resistance and their relevance for Africa' in Crummey (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa* (London, 1986), 96.

[14] Other analysts, keen to refute the social bandit ideal, have drawn attention to the destructive aspects of gang activity. Goodhew warns that 'historians have tended to

romanticise the gruesome impact of township crime', while Bonner emphasises 'the role of ethnic gangs in providing the nucleus and thrust for the growth of destructive ethnic chauvinism' in the townships. D. Goodhew, 'The People's Police-Force: Communal Policing Initiatives in the Western Areas of Johannesburg, circa 1930-62', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19(3), 1993, 469; Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', 186.

[15] For example, factors instrumental in determining the activities of criminal groups such as composition and identity have no simple linear connection to impoverishment and social dislocation. Rather, as I argue throughout this article, a complex mixture of elements shaped the character of gangs and violent crime in the townships.

[16] D. Coplan, *In Township Tonight* (London, 1985), 62.

[17] Glaser, 'Mark of Zorro', 62.

[18] P. Bonner, 'African Urbanisation on the Rand Between the 1930s and 1960s: its Social Character and Political Consequences', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21(1), 1995, 126.

[19] van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, 181; Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', 166; Freed, *Crime in South Africa*, 116.

[20] van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, 55.

[21] La Hausse, 'Cows of Nongoloza', 91.

[22] Breckenridge, 'Migrancy, Crime and Faction Fighting', 62. The origins of the Isitshozi are obscure and Breckenridge suggests that the gang may have developed in response to the activities of the Ninevites.

[23] J. Guy and M. Thabane, 'The Ma-Rashea: A Participant's Perspective' in *Class, Community and Conflict*, 455.

[24] In an interesting variation of controlling women, the Isitshozi mining gangs 'made strenuous attempts to establish control over [male] sexuality in the compounds.' Breckenridge, 'Migrancy, Crime and Faction Fighting', 60.

[25] Coplan, *In Township Tonight*, 163; Pinnock, *The Brotherhoods*, 25-29.

[26] The Isitshozi were miners, while the Russians of the 1950s were miners, worked in secondary industries and had a number of tailors as members. The Amalaita active both on the Reef and in Durban tended to work as domestic servants. Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', 176; Guy and Thabane, 'Ma-Rashea', 440; van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, 59.

[27] One exception was a short-lived alliance between the PAC and a number of tsotsi gangs on the Rand in 1959-1960. According to Glaser, tsotsis, contemptuous of the ANC's peaceful agenda, were attracted to the more confrontational, incendiary platform of the PAC. However, widespread and seemingly indiscriminate tsotsi violence in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre and the declaration of a State of Emergency caused PAC leadership to condemn the tsotsis. On a few occasions when tsotsi and ANC interests overlapped there was occasion for co-operation. For instance, in Sophiatown, tsotsi gangs and the ANC united to oppose the removals and tsotsis were known to help enforce ANC boycotts and stay-aways on the Rand in the 1950s. C. Glaser, ' 'When are they going to fight?' Tsotsis, Youth Politics and the PAC', in *Apartheid's Genesis*; Bonner, 'Family, Crime and Political Consciousness'; Lodge, *Black Politics*, Chpt., 4.

[28] Glaser, ''When are they going to fight?'', 298. The Russians, for example, frequently opposed ANC campaigns which seemed to have little relevance or benefits for them. Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', 181.

[29] See for example, Goodhew, 'People's Police Force'.

[30] Mokwena, 'The Era of the Jackrollers', 27. See also the *Weekly Mail*, 18-24 January, 1991.

[31] Coplan describes how gang violence at night-clubs and dancehalls caused patrons to stay away, 'destroying dances and concerts in the locations' in the 1950s. Coplan, *In Township Tonight*, 164. In 1954, a group of Johannesburg Russians ran onto the field brandishing knives and guns to stop a soccer game which a visiting team from Lesotho was losing. *Bantu World* 4 September, 1954. See also Goodhew, 'People's Police Force', 455; and Scharf, 'Resurgence of Urban Street Gangs', 236.

[32] See especially, Glaser, 'Mark of Zorro' and Mokwena 'The Era of the Jackrollers', but virtually all accounts of criminal gangs comment on violence against, and objectification of, women.

[33] Goodhew, 'People's Police Force', 469. For a further discussion of community efforts to deal with gangs see, D. Van Tonder, 'Gangs, Councillors and the Apartheid State: The Newclare Squatters' Movement of 1952', *South African Historical Journal*, 22, 1990; and Scharf, 'Resurgence of Urban Street Gangs'.

[34] See Glaser, 'Youth, Culture and Politics' for Makgotla (and migrant) initiatives against youth gangs in 1960s and 1970s Soweto. Glaser claims that students in particular were responsible for putting youth gangs on the defensive in the post 1976 period. 'The Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC) formed special squads... [and] cracked down on gang crime... The effective disciplining of the gangs probably forced non-student youth in the subsequent years to look increasingly to political movements for an alternative sense of belonging.' 337.

[35] M. Serote, *To Every Birth Its Blood* (London, 1981), 22.

[36] Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', 186. A report in *Bantu World* (19 July, 1952) supports this view: 'Two Basuto mineworkers had a narrow escape at Newclare North on Sunday morning when the police rescued them from a mob believed to be members of the Reno Square squatters camp. Neither man knew the Basuto side of the area and so when they alighted from the train, they entered the Northern side of Newclare. They were held up and thrashed by a mob suspecting them to be "Russian" spies.'

[37] Guy and Thabane, 'Ma-Rashea', 444.

[38] Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', 167.

[39] P. Mayer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen* (Cape Town, 1963), 86-89.

[40] Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics', 331.

[41] Goodhew, 'People's Police Force', 454-455.

[42] Mayer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen*, 83-84.

[43] Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics', 104.

[44] *The World*, 8 July, 1974.

[45] Goodhew, 'People's Police Force', 451, 457.

[46] Guy and Thabane, 'Ma-Rashea', 448.

[47] D. Coplan, *In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of South Africa's Basotho Migrants* (Chicago, 1994), 190.

[48] Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics', 309.

[49] *Weekly Mail*: 18-24 August, 1989 and 25-31 May, 1990.

[50] Breckenridge, 'Migrancy, Crime and Faction Fighting', 65.

[51] Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', 186.

[52] *Post*, 4 February, 1962.

[53] Mattera, *Gone with the Twilight*, 3.

[54] Glaser, 'Mark of Zorro', 58.

[55] Mokwena, 'The Era of the Jackrollers', 21.

[56] *Mail & Guardian*, 27 Oct. to 2 November, 1995.

[57] Glaser, 'Mark of Zorro', 55.

[58] P. Bonner, "Desirable or undesirable Basotho women?' Liquor, prostitution and the migration of Basotho women to the Rand, 1920-1945' in C. Walker (ed) *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, (Cape Town, 1990), 249.

[59] Van Tonder, 'Newclare Squatters' Movement', 95. Various newspaper reports of the early Russian gangs stress the active role that women took in encouraging their men in battle and celebrating when they were released from jail.

[60] Coplan, *In the Time of Cannibals*,191.

[61] A. Sampson, *Drum: A Venture Into The New Africa*, (London, 1956), 107-108.

[62] Glaser, 'Mark of Zorro', 60.

[63] *Golden City Post*, 7 December, 1958.

[64] J. Brewer, *Black and Blue: Policing in South Africa*, (Oxford, 1994), 200.

[65] Glaser, 'Mark of Zorro', 59.

[66] *The World*, 14 August, 1973.

[67] B. Modisane, *Blame Me on History*, (London, 1963), 64.

[68] J. De Ridder, *Sad Laughter Memories*, (Johannesburg, 1983) 196.

[69] M. Nicol, *A Good Looking Corpse*, (London, 1991), 59.
[70] Glaser, "When are they going to fight?", 300; Nicol, *Good Looking Corpse*, 73.
[71] Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics', 274.
[72] Sampson, *Drum*, 107.
[73] Mokwena, 'The Era of the Jackrollers', 14.
[74] Van Tonder, 'The Newclare Squatters' Movement', 107.
[75] Bonner, 'Family Crime and Political Consciousness', 411.
[76] Bonner, 'Family, Crime and Political Consciousness', 412; L. Bank, 'The Making of the QwaQwa 'Mafia'? Patronage and Protection in the Migrant Taxi Business', *African Studies*, 49 (1), 1990, 83.
[77] Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics', 240.
[78] Coplan, *In Township Tonight*, 163.
[79] Mokwena, 'The Era of the Jackrollers', 13.
[80] L. Bank, 'A culture of violence: the migrant taxi trade in QwaQwa, 1980-90' in E. Preston-Whyte and C. Rogerson (eds), *South Africa's Informal Economy*, (Cape Town, 1991), 135.
[81] M. Fenwick, '"Tough Guy, eh?": The Gangster Figure in Drum', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22 (4), 1996, 632.
[82] Coplan, *In the Time of Cannibals*, 191.
[83] Glaser, '"When are they going to fight?"', 300.
[84] This is not to suggest that the larger political groups necessarily desired to restrain their followers, only that many combatants pursued an agenda designed to meet their own local needs. The state, Inkatha and the ANC all stood to potentially gain from the continuation of violence. See, B. Freund, 'The Violence in Natal' in R. Morrel (ed), *Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal* (Durban, 1996), 189.
[85] *Mail & Guardian*, 27 October to 2 November, 1995
[86] Of course as with any messy civil conflict, the battle lines were not this simple. A range of actors participated in the fighting and they did not always conform to easily classifiable categories. Anti-ANC vigilantes were almost as likely to be tsotsis as businessmen, the line between comrades and comtsotsis was not always identifiable, some hostel-dwellers were ANC supporters, etc.
[87] C. Campbell, 'Learning to Kill? Masculinity, the Family and Violence in Natal', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (3), 1992, 622.
[88] L. Segal, 'The Human Face of Violence: Hostel Dwellers Speak', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1), 1991, 198.
[89] Campbell, 'Masculinity', 621.
[90] Mokwena, 'The Era of the Jackrollers', 6.
[91] A. Minnaar, "Locked in a Cycle of Violence': The Anatomy of Conflict in Bruntville, (1990-1992)' in Minnaar (ed.) *Patterns of Violence: Case Studies of Conflict in Natal* (Pretoria, 1992), 156.
[92] Segal, 'The Human Face of Violence', 215.
[93] N. Haysom, 'Vigilantes and the Militarisation of South Africa' in J. Cock and L. Nathan (eds) *Society at War: The militarisation of South Africa* (New York, 1989), 191.
[94] T. Ohlson and J.S. Stedman, *The New is Not Yet Born: Conflict Resolution in Southern Africa* (Washington D.C., 1994), 171.
[95] B. Berkeley, 'The Warlords of Natal', *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1994, 88.
[96] See A. Jeffrey, *The Natal Story: 16 Years of Conflict* (Johannesburg, 1997), especially chapter five, for a discussion of government support for Inkatha during the early 1990s.
[97] Segal, 'The Human Face of Violence', 226.
[98] Bonner, 'Russians on the Reef', 183.
[99] Glaser, 'Mark of Zorro', 48; 'When are they going to fight?', 300.
[100] Sitas, 'The Making of the 'Comrades' Movement', 636.
[101] Glaser, 'Mark of Zorro', 62; Campbell, 'Masculinity', 626.
[102] W. Annecke, 'Women and the War in Natal' *Agenda*, no 7, 1990, 19.
[103] Glaser, 'Mark of Zorro', 62.
[104] Segal, 'Human Face of Violence', 217-220.

[105] See Sitas, 'The Making of the 'Comrades' Movement'; and Berkeley, 'The Warlords of Natal' for such self-serving characterisations. The criminal activities of groups associated with both the ANC and Inkatha is dealt with in Morris and Hindson, 'South Africa: Political Violence, Reform and Reconstruction'; Adam and Moodley, 'Political Violence'; Minnaar, *Patterns of Conflict*; and various press reports. For example, a report in the *Mail & Guardian* (27 October to 2 November, 1995) claimed that 'many, but not all, of the [ANC] Self Defence Units turned to crime and they began to prey on the residents they were supposed to protect.'
[106] See for example, S. Collins "Things Fall Apart': The Culture of Violence Becomes Entrenched' in Minnaar (ed), *Patterns of Violence*.
[107] P. Zulu, 'Durban Hostels and Political Violence: Case Studies in KwaMashu and Umlazi', *Transformations*, 21, 1993, 17.
[108] Minnaar, 'Locked in a Cycle of Violence', 143.
[109] Segal, 'The Human Face of Violence', 14; Adam and Moodley, 'Political Violence', 507.