

https://dspace.org/

The making of Krugersdorp, 1887-1923

Dugmore, Charles Frederick

2008-08-19T10:00:49Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/5430

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Chapter One: 'Devil's Dorp': Geography and the Making of Krugersdorp, 1887 to 1899

Introduction

Krugersdorp was a violent, transient mining town during the first decade-and-a-half of its existence, from 1887 to 1899. Contemporaries made comparisons between Krugersdorp and the 'Wild West' towns of pioneer U.S.A and called the town the 'Devil's Dorp'.[1] Violence and instability were typical of 'boomtowns' around the world with their characteristic transient and youthful, masculine populations. This, in turn, was partly the product of geography as boomtowns nearly always arose near mineral deposits that were located in remote areas and this made the cost of living so high that only young, single males could afford to work there. In the absence of females and family life, these young males embraced a tough masculine culture that centred on alcohol consumption, gambling and fighting.

Mining towns in South Africa closely followed this pattern and, like their counterparts in Australia, California and Canada, were harsh, bleak places. Geography played a role in other important ways in moulding Krugersdorp into a 'negative space'. For example, its remoteness meant that there was insufficient and ineffective law enforcement in the town, and its denizens thought they could literally get away with murder. Its peripheral position on the Witwatersrand was one of a number of factors that determined why it did not develop as fast as Johannesburg, while its peculiarly low grade ore, and the unusually fragmented nature of its reef, meant that its mines were the poor cousins of their richer Johannesburg counterparts. All of these factors helped to shape Krugersdorp into a dingy, dilapidated and dangerous place, a 'Devil's Dorp' indeed.

This Chapter is divided into four main sections. The first part of this Chapter will describe how Krugersdorp emerged as an unstable mining town that was dependent upon a particularly vulnerable local mining industry where the grade of ore was

[1] *The Standard*, Krugersdorp, 6 September 1902, 'Impressions of Krugersdorp by a returning ex-POW'.

exceptionally low, the reef was fragmented and very narrow even by the Rand's modest standards. The second part of this Chapter will examine how Krugersdorp acquired its reputation as a violent town and will endeavour to assess just how rough it really was compared to other contemporary mining towns and the coastal towns in South Africa. Various reasons for this violence will be explored with an emphasis on the role that geography played in producing an unstable and dangerous town. This Chapter concludes with a fourth and final section that focuses on three key urban institutions that architecturally and spatially both reflected and influenced Krugersdorp's violence and transience: the canteen, the gambling den and the local prison.

Throughout this Chapter the geography of the town, its location in relation to other urban centres, its geology and its remoteness, are important threads. The main contention is that geography helped to shape Krugersdorp into a violent town. This is not to imply that 'geography' itself has causal abilities. Space, location and distance are rather the 'terrain', the context, or the circumstance in which social forces operate. Yet 'place' is, indeed, important in shaping how those social forces operate and can influence the ultimate effects of these forces in certain, subtle directions. In Krugersdorp's case, its geographical context predisposed this town to violence.

Cinderella of the Rand: Krugersdorp's Local Mining Industry

Krugersdorp was laid out as an administrative centre to serve the scattered mining camps that sprang up on the western section of the Witwatersrand Goldfields in 1887, shortly after gold was discovered in this region.[2] The Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek (Z.A.R.) or South African Republic's government, bought 492 hectares of land on a horse-breeding farm called 'Paardekraal' owned by M.P.W. Pretorius for the express purpose of laying out a town. Pretorius was a close personal friend of Paul Kruger, the President of the Boer Republic and he stipulated that he would only agree to sell the land if the town was called Krugersdorp.[3]

---

[2] M.A. Schutte, 'Die Geskiedenis van Krugersdorp', 1887–1900' ('Die Geskiedenis van Krugersdorp'), MA dissertation, Potchefstroom Christian University for Higher Education, 1976, p. 11.

[3] Krugersdorp Public Library (KPL), B. Burger, 'Die Geskiedenis van Krugersdorp tot 1952', unpublished manuscript, p. 7.

A public auction was held and 200 stands were sold on 99-year leasehold on 31 October 1887. A number of middle-class shopkeepers and professionals bought these stands and established their businesses. Stands were pegged into the veld and rough tracks served as roads that ran in straight lines, in a grid formation, between clusters of stands set out in 50 x 50 feet, square sections (so-called 'English stands'). If one happened to glance at the town blueprints or look at Krugersdorp from a distance, the town appeared to be ordered and its spaces were controlled, proportionate and clearly defined, giving a sense of organisation, stability and even prosperity. Appearances were deceptive, however.

Krugersdorp's goldfields were geologically inferior to the rest of the Rand: the reef was narrow, the ore extracted was often of a very low grade and in many places it splintered badly.[4] These problems were not immediately obvious as initial tests produced high yields. For example, one of the first mines to be established was the Luipaard's Vlei G.M. Co. Ltd., in October 1887. It was a very modest venture, occupying just 50 claims and floated on just 35 000 pounds of capital. The mine's alluvial quartz deposits were near the surface and could be quarried rather than mined. This kept operating costs down and ensured that initially the mine was quite profitable. The mine yielded an average of one ounce of gold per ton of ore in its first crushing and it was expected to provide its investors with a 'thumping dividend'.[5] In the remaining months of 1887, a number of similar mines were opened such as the Witpoortje[6] and the Groot Paardekraal.[7]

---

[4] G. Wheatcroft, *The Randlords – the Men Who Made South Africa (Randlords*), George Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1985, p. 147. Wheatcroft reported that Rhodes' Gold Fields of South Africa company bought up several mining properties on the West Rand only to discover that one of them was 'on poor grade ore' and another was 'on a geological fault, a break in the Main Reef series'.
[5] *Eastern Star*, 28 October 1887, 'Mining Notes:Luipaard's Vlei G.M. Co. Ltd'.
[6] *Eastern Star*, 7 November 1887, 'Mining Notes: Witpoortje'.
[7] *Eastern Star*, 18 November 1887, 'Mining Notes: Groot Paardekraal'.

These initial successes prompted investors to establish dozens of similar small mines on the Krugersdorp Goldfields during 1888. The Luipaard's Vlei farm, immediately south of Krugersdorp, was the site of a whole cluster of new mines including the 'Vera',[8] the 'Shamrock'[9] and the 'Great Kruger' (which was a relative giant at the time as it was floated on capital of 150 000 pounds).[10] The owners and investors in these early Krugersdorp mines were often newcomers to the mining industry and were men of modest means rather than the immensely rich 'Randlords' who came to dominate the East and Central Rand during the first mining boom. Perhaps to make up for their relatively shallow pockets, these somewhat unsavoury mine owners tended to 'talk up' the value of their mines to attract speculative capital on a scale that seems to have exceeded anything that happened elsewhere on the Rand.

Such was the frenzied nature of speculation in this region that by 1889 no less than fifty mines had been established on the West Rand. The owners of these mines issued remarkably glowing reports and stressed all kinds of advantages for their particular mines. For example, the Shamrock mine's proprietors claimed that it was a particularly desirable investment because it had a battery that was situated right on the claims themselves so that there would be 'no transporting of quartz from a distance'.[11] The Great Kruger's owners boasted that their conglomerate was 'very soft and easily extracted with pick and shovel'.[12]

Attracted by such rosy accounts, a few of the mining millionaires from the Kimberley diamond days began to take an interest in the West Rand. Among the early investors were J.B. Robinson who bought up claims at Waterfall (Waterval) farm[13] and Cecil Rhodes, whose Gold Fields of South Africa company bought shares in the West Battery

---

[8] *ibid.*
[9] *Eastern Star*, 13 January 1888, 'Mining Notes:Luipaard's Vlei'.
[10] *ibid.*
[11] *Eastern Star*, 13 January 1888, 'Mining Notes: Shamrock'.
[12] *Eastern Star*, 13 January 1888, 'Mining Notes: The Great Kruger'.
[13] *The Star*, 22 February 1888, 'Mining Notes: Waterfall'.

Reef G.M. Co. Ltd. in 1890.[14] Rhodes's involvement in the West Rand was modest, however, and generally the 'heavyweights' of the mining industry steered clear of the town. This was probably because they sensed that Krugersdorp's mines were not all they seemed to be.

Their prescience was confirmed as early as 1888, when various snippets of 'bad news' began to slip out of the region, casting doubts about the quality of the West Rand mines. For example, the Roodepoort Central mine closed down suddenly and unexpectedly. It was reported that 'almost at a moment's notice' the battery had been stopped and all the workers were dismissed. A newspaper report speculated on its cause:

> We have not heard of the cause of the stoppage, but we presume like other companies, the working capital is exhausted, and work must stop, pending other arrangements.[15]

By early 1889 a newspaper article complained that 'share speculation' was becoming 'rife' on the West Rand and was particularly scathing about the King Solomon's mines near Krugersdorp.[16] When the South Standard mine was floated on a capital of 150 000 pounds in April 1889 near Krugersdorp, a newspaper reported that one of the mine's 'Directors' had actually repudiated some of the statements included in the prospectus and objected to the association of his name with the mine. Such odd behaviour meant that the 'venture [should be] regarded as suspicious', warned the newspaper article.[17]

Probably no single mine owner contributed more to shareholder cynicism in regard to West Rand mining properties than the mining magnate J. B. Robinson. In 1889 he launched the Randfontein G. M. Co. Ltd. by sinking the massive sum of two million pounds into this property. The sheer enormity of the mining property simply dazzled

---

[14] *The Star*, 13 November 1890, 'Mining Intelligence: West Battery Reef G.M. Co. Ltd.'.
[15] *The Star*, 23 May 1888, 'Mining Notes: Roodepoort Central'.
[16] *The Star*, 16 January 1889, 'Mining Notes: King Solomon Mines'.
[17] *The Star*, 2 April 1889, 'Mining Notes: New Companies: The South Standard'.

investors at first. It consisted of seven farms spread over 40 000 acres on which 3 000 claims were laid out, providing a mining area of 4.5 square miles.[18] Robinson skilfully fired the imagination of investors so that the market value of the property more than doubled to 4.5 million pounds in a matter of weeks. Robinson appears to have offloaded his own stock at its peak and the value of the shares then plummeted just as rapidly from 2.5 pounds a share to one pound, one shilling and 16 pence in a short space of time.

This was followed by a press report that exposed how shamelessly Robinson had played the stock market and which warned that 'the property has hardly been touched, so that it will take a long time before any results are shown'.[19] The economic difficulties experienced by Krugersdorp's mining industry and the boom-bust cycle it experienced between 1887 and early 1890, was, of course, common to the whole Rand. However, the gap between speculator's claims and the reality on the ground seems to have been much wider here. This seems to have magnified the peaks and troughs into a violent roller-coaster ride for investors and shareholders who had their fingers badly burnt as a result. This may have had the effect of driving away the serious, long-term investors and increasing the proportion of shady, speculative investors interested only in short-term gains, further exacerbating the volatility of Krugersdorp's mining industry.

One of the most serious problems that affected the whole Rand was the unusual geological pattern of the gold reef. The gold-bearing rock was tilted like a 'giant saucer' with one edge near the surface and the other buried deep into the earth. The outcrop mines were quickly mined out, leaving the deeper reef to be exploited with more expensive, deep-level mining techniques. The many undercapitalised, individual miners on the West Rand found that they could no longer exploit their claims through small-scale syndicates, and a large proportion were driven into bankruptcy.

---

[18] R. V. Kubicek, *Economic Imperialism in Theory and Practice: The South African Gold Mining Industry, 1886–1914 (Economic Imperialism)*, Duke University Press, Durham N.C., 1979, p. 127.
[19] *The Star*, 14 June 1889, 'Mining Notes: Randfontein'.

This was, admittedly, a pattern found across the Rand where a 'multitude' of small mining companies. Nearly five hundred companies had their shares quoted on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and over three hundred were officially listed. Many were exposed for the speculative ventures that they were. Certainly, Robinson's mines were not the only ones that 'talked up' their share values without producing any gold, as virtually every mine was in the same situation. Indeed only forty-four mining companies on the whole Rand actually produced any gold at all in 1889.[20] It was, however, the enormity of Robinson's speculative claims and the gains that he made at the expense of many shareholders that made the West Rand mining industry unpalatable for many investors after 1889.

Krugersdorp's misfortunes, like those on the rest of the Rand, were exacerbated by the new phase of deep-level mining that began in 1890. As outcrop mines became mined out, mine owners braced themselves for a different kind of mining operation that was much more labour intensive and required massive capital outlay to prepare the mines sufficiently for profitable exploitation. Investors realised that it would take many months before the new deep-level operations could begin, as heavy equipment had to be bought, transported and erected on the mines.

Labour recruitment schemes would have to be considerably expanded to meet the vastly increased amounts of labour that were required for deep-level mining. This meant that it would be months, if not years, before investors would see a return on their capital, and even longer before shareholders would receive a dividend. Coming on top of the burst bubble of speculation, this news plunged the Rand into economic doldrums, and a recession hit Krugersdorp throughout 1889 and 1890.

The economic downturn was worsened by the discovery that the gold at greater depths was suspended in a pyretic ore that resisted the existing amalgamation techniques and therefore could not be extracted. This news was the final straw for many of Krugersdorp's mines, and a number of them were forced to close down completely at

---

[20] Kubicek, *Economic Imperialism*, pp. 40–2.

this point. These included the Great Kruger, the Edna and the King Solomon.[21] The Morkel,[22] Fleming and Grey's mines were all sold or liquidated at bargain prices at the same time.[23]

By 1892 the town's idle mines included the Midas, Battery Reef, West Battery Reef, Monarch, New Violet, Standard, Rietvlei, Vera and First Netherlands. During this slump Krugersdorp's middle class of shopkeepers, bakers, butchers and chemists were faced with a declining customer base as miners left to work elsewhere on the Rand. In January 1891, the following description of Krugersdorp made its woes clear:

> Business is getting worse and worse. Business is growing worse week after week. Tradespeople appear Micawberlike, waiting for something to turn up, the mines generally dormant all round, and Botha's [the mine Botha's Reef's] last output has had a discouraging effect upon all.[24]

Although it devastated local businesses, the economic slump was beneficial in certain ways because it promoted a process of consolidation in the local mining industry. Many of the small-scale mining ventures were bought up and combined into larger mines that were able to take advantage of economies of scale. In April 1890 plans were made to combine the King Solomon, Morkel and Midas Battery Reef mines into one large mining property.[25]

Before these plans could be carried out, however, the Champ d'Or mine, which was established in 1890 by French capital, bought the King Solomon mine.[26] The Champ d'Or mine expanded its operations onto the adjoining mining ground, and this good news helped to lift the spirits of the local white community. The French-owned venture

[21] *The Star*, 22 November 1890, untitled, 9 December 1890, untitled, and 6 February 1890, untitled.
[22] *The Star*, 8 November 1890, 'Morkel G.M. Co.'.
[23] *The Star*, 12 November 1890, 'Krugersdorp Notes'.
[24] *The Star*, 28 January 1890, untitled.
[25] *The Star*, 4 April 1890, 'Mining Intelligence: The Midas Battery Reef'.
[26] *The Star*, 6 December 1890, untitled.

was one of the few functioning mines in the region and accounted for a substantial part of the West Rand's output in late 1891. [27]

In 1892, just as the residents of Krugersdorp began to hope that the local mining industry's fortunes had turned a corner, bad news rocked the West Rand yet again. The major Paris bank that backed the Champ D'Or failed in April 1892, leaving the local mine high and dry.[28] Two months later, in June 1892, a description of Krugersdorp's mining industry conveyed a melancholy view:

> A rapid run round Luipaard's Vlei and its vicinity gives a great deal of food for reflection. On leaving the Champ d'Or and crossing the brow of the hill, the whole basin of Luipaard's Vlei stretches out as a panorama dotted here and there with batteries. The basin, with its cottages and mining gear in every direction, appears devoid of life. The following list of companies may prove interesting as showing the number of stamps lying idle within a small compass and their future prospects: The Midas: 10 stamps, re-constructing, Battery Reef: 20 stamps, West Battery Reef: 20 stamps, Emma, Monarch: 10 stamps, crushing, New Violet (owned by Oceanic Co.): 20 stamps, developing, Standard: 10 stamps, doing nothing (law suit), Riet Vlei: 20 stamps, developing, Vera: 20 stamps, doing nothing, First Netherlands: 20 stamps, doing nothing.[29]

One ray of light did, however, manage to pierce the gloom by late 1892 when the MacArthur-Forrest process was developed. Gold could now be extracted from the pyretic ore and this revived optimism in the deep-level mining industry. This technique extracted gold more efficiently than older methods applied to alluvial ore. Local investors were sufficiently excited that a number of new mining companies were established near Krugersdorp and some of the older, defunct mines were resuscitated.[30]

Speculators, however, were in their element again and all kinds of quixotic mining

---

[27] *The Star*, 14 September 1891, 'How Things are Shaping'.
[28] *The Star*, 16 April 1892, untitled.
[29] *The Star*, 4 June 1892, 'News from the Main Reef'.
[30] See, for example, *The Star*, 10 September 1892 'Mining Intelligence', 22 November 1892, 'Rietvlei' and 'Brittania'; 25 November 1892,'Mining Intelligence: Eastern Witpoortje'; 6 December 1892, 'Mining Intelligence: Rietvlei'.

ventures were launched. For example the Alexandra Estate mining company began drilling about a mile-and-a-half north of the 'village of Krugersdorp' despite well-established reports of geologists that the reef only lay to the south of the town.[31] New mines continued to be promoted on the stock market despite the absence of any actual mining activity on many of these mines.[32]

Such was the scale of speculation that an entire new mining region, called the 'New Basin', was established on the West Rand in 1894. This mining area was developed between two and five miles west of Krugersdorp, and included the George and May, the Queen, as well as the Knight's Syndicate mines. These operations appear to be highly speculative as they were based on 'fairly coarse gold' found in the local streams and 'among the red clay which bordered the formation of the basin'. [33] The basin was situated on the farm Waterval which was owned by Robinson's Randfontein Estates and the mining magnate might have encouraged speculation in the region. A newspaper report talked of a 'rush' and believed that the news would be of 'interest' to 'speculators'. The reporter, however, seemed to remember Krugersdorp's bad reputation in the pre-1890 period and warned that the 'present strikes are very promising – nothing more'.[34] Nonetheless, excitement mounted and press reports began to push up the value of the Randfontein Estates mine again simply by marvelling at its immense size:

> …the pride of the West Rand, the Randfontein Estates, issued capital: 1 966 500 [pounds], size of property – unlimited. The size of the mynpacht now being working is 10, 000 feet in length, from north to south…the Randfontein is unequalled by any mine in the country…the enormous area of this mine and the systematic manner in which it is being developed… and in time to come…it will probably be working on a more gigantic scale than any mine in the land, and thus inaugurate the low-grade era.[35]

[31] *The Star*, 16 January 1893, 'The Alexandra Estate'.
[32] See, for example, *The Star*, 18 January 1893, 'Paardekraal G.M. Co.': 'The Company had been in existence for [four-and-a-half] to [five] years [yet] all of the work had been done on the property in the first year or so of its existence, and practically nothing had been done except to keep the property going'.
[33] *The Star*, 16 April 1894, 'A Visit to the West Rand'.
[34] *ibid.*
[35] *The Star*, 17 April 1894, 'A Visit to the West Rand'.

One report in 1894, however, warned that 'mining along the West Rand' was 'anything but satisfactory', that a 'lot of grown-up men' had 'deceived themselves' concerning the George and May mine.[36] The report observed that the mine still required a lot more stamps and expensive development and, until this was done, its future 'looks anything but bright'.

More ominously, the reporter pointed out that the both the Queen's and the Knight's mines had found that the 'extraordinarily rich outcrop' disguised a reef that was 'practically barren' and had 'wisely shut down'. It warned that 'all other lines of reef on the West Rand must be looked upon with suspicion'.[37] Starry-eyed shareholders were in no mood to listen to such nay-sayers, and there were no less than 107 mines on 25 proclaimed farms on the Krugersdorp Goldfields by late 1894 and early 1895.[38] Wheatcroft noted that during this period, 'shares were quite mad'.[39]

The bubble of speculation could not last, and when it burst Krugersdorp was particularly badly affected. There is some fragmentary evidence that Krugersdorp did indeed suffer more than other regions of the Rand. The Champ d'Or mine, for example, was apparently the first producing deep-level mine to close down on the Rand, ceasing operations as early as February 1895.[40] Kubicek contends that speculation was rife in this region and suggests that shares' values thus plummeted most here. He points out that it was French speculation that had largely fuelled the boom in 1894–5 and, seeing that the Champ d'Or was one of the few mines on the Rand that was directly developed with French capital,[41] it seems likely that Krugersdorp must have been near the heart of the speculative boom. J. B. Robinson seems to have played the French speculators during this boom in much the same way that he duped and dazzled South African and British investors during the 1888–89 boom. He convinced them to buy up nearly all of

[36] *The Star*, 30 November 1894, 'Mining along the West Rand'.
[37] *ibid.*
[38] Schutte, 'Die Geskiedenis van Krugersdorp', p. 15.
[39] Wheatcroft, *The Randlords*, p. 163.
[40] *ibid.*
[41] Kubicek, *Economic Imperialism*, p. 178. '…Paris was largely responsible for the boom'.
[42] *ibid.*, p. 184.

the 10 000 shares offered by his Randfontein Estates mining property.[42]

In the midst of all this speculative frenzy, the farcical Jameson Raid burst unexpectedly onto the Rand and the mining industry plunged, yet again, into a recession. Dr Leander Starr Jameson, a close friend of Cecil Rhodes, had plotted to lead a force of Mashonaland police from the British South Africa company's Chartered Territory to the Witwatersrand. Jameson decided that the most strategic path was southwards from Bulawayo to Mafeking as this would allow him to skirt the western boundaries of the Transvaal Republic and thus escape detection by the Boer forces. Jameson's policemen would then proceed eastwards towards the heart of the Rand, Johannesburg, where the English-speaking *Uitlanders* of the South African Union were waiting to rise up in rebellion. This route would have taken the invasion force, in its most direct and logical route, directly through Krugersdorp.

Logically, it would have been here, in the farmland to the west of Krugersdorp, that the battle would have taken place. The ZAR's burgher forces, once they detected Jameson's forces, would have wanted to avoid a conflict in Johannesburg itself. The most effective defensive position was just west and south of Krugersdorp as the town provided cover and resources for the burgher forces that prepared to confront Jameson's raiders. The battle took place at Luipaard's Vlei, just a short distance from the town, utterly shattering the social harmony that had been developing between local Dutch-speaking farmers and the English-speaking town dwellers (see Chapter Three).

The depression that immediately enveloped the Rand was particularly pronounced in this area. Krugersdorp also had the misfortune to have attracted mining magnates like J.B. Robinson, who took the opportunity presented by the Raid to break with the Chamber of Mines and form his own 'Associated Chamber of Mines'. He was joined by George Albu and Adolf Goerz,[43] a pair of German mining magnates who may have been influenced by Robinson to acquire interests in Krugersdorp's mining industry.

---

[43] D. A. Etheridge, 'The Early History of the Chamber of Mines, Johannesburg, 1887–1897', MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1949, p. 123.

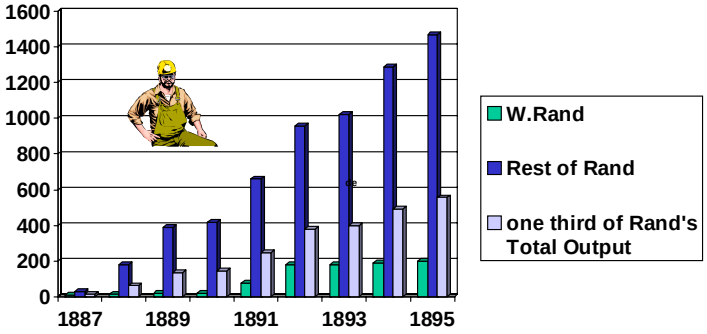
Goerz purchased the Lancaster mine[44] while the Albu brothers bought the Violet mine and, in 1899, were reported to be 'greatly interested themselves in this part of the country'.[45] These mining magnates owned large mining groups and had access to sufficient quantities of capital to enable the West Rand mines to develop deep-level mining on a wide scale.[46]

Thus the West Rand, particularly in Krugersdorp's immediate environs, came increasingly under the control of 'foreign', that is, non-British capital. This was atypical of capital investments on the Rand which were heavily British or 'Imperial' in origin.[47] Furthermore, Robinson, the Albu brothers and Goerz, represented a maverick group among mining companies, which meant that Krugersdorp's mines began to acquire a particularly unsavoury reputation in the eyes of British shareholders, producing a negative sentiment that the local mining industry could ill afford. Furthermore, many of the mines owned by these mining magnates were badly managed and poor in quality, producing considerably less gold than their counterparts on the Central and East Rand **(see Graph One)**.

<u>Graph One</u>: Comparative Annual Output of Witwatersrand Mines (in Thousands of Tons of Gold) – West Rand vs. Rest of the Rand

[44] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 7 January 1899, untitled.
[45] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 25 February 1899, 'Notes and Comments'.
[46] Schutte, 'Die Geskiedenis van Krugersdorp', p. 16.
[47] A. Jeeves, 'The Control of Migratory Labour on the South African Gold Mines in the Era of Kruger and Milner', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1, 1974, p. 20.

Mining Output: West Rand vs Rest of Rand 1887–1895 (in thousand tons of gold)



Source: J. Hatch and F. Chalmers, *Gold Mines of the Rand: being a description of the mining industry of the Witwatersrand, South African Republic*, MacMillan, London, 1895, pp. 286–7

Robinson's mines were particularly poorly managed. For example, the development of his Randfontein Estates property was described as 'sloppy and haphazard'.[48] His financial operations bordered on the fraudulent as he repeatedly resorted to exploiting the loopholes in financial laws to make his fortune. For example, he floated the Robinson South African Banking company and then ordered the bank to buy up 750 000 of the Randfontein Estates' shares at four pounds each. This resulted in a remarkable increase in the value of the shares 'which was run up to 11 [pounds]'.[49]

Much of the bank's capital came from French backers who were likely to have been badly hurt when the bank was subsequently liquidated in 1905.[50] As pointed out earlier, the tycoon may well have resorted to French investors because rapidly 'Robinson's business tactics were known to his fellow Randlords and associated promoters and brokers in Johannesburg [and] Insiders in the City [of London]'.[51]

Robinson ran his companies in 'great secrecy', and he went to trouble to avoid scrutiny even by his Transvaal shareholders by calling general meetings outside the city at very

[48] Kubicek, *Economic Imperialism*, p. 128.
[49] *ibid.*
[50] *ibid*, p. 129.
[51] *ibid.*

short or no notice. At least one shareholders' meeting consisted merely of a chairman whose relationship to Robinson was 'one of servile docility' and a secretary with no-one else present.[52] Such secrecy ensured that while Robinson, in Mendelsohn's memorable phrase, 'commanded financial sandcastles',[53] he was still able mount another successful speculative foray in 1899 during the West Rand's third and final boom before the outbreak of the Anglo–Boer or South African War.

As news of his operations became better known, it adversely affected investment confidence throughout the West Rand. By 1902, even the most starry-eyed investor could not help noticing that Robinson's enormous Randfontein Estates had produced barely one million pounds of gold and had paid out dividends of only 187 000 on issued capital of close to six million pounds. To give just one example of how badly this compared to other mines on the Rand, the 'Langlaagte B', a Johannesburg mine that Robinson had sold to the Corner House, produced nearly five million pounds worth of gold and paid out dividends of nearly one-and-a-half million pounds on issued capital of one million pounds during the same period.[54] The West Rand's mining industry as a whole seemed to follow Robinson's example and very few of the mining companies paid out dividends to their shareholders **(see Graph Two)**.

Of the forty 'principal' Witwatersrand mines studied by J. Broomhead on behalf of *The Financial Times* in London in 1909, only eight were situated on the West Rand and only three were directly associated with Krugersdorp.[55] Of the forty-two mining companies analysed in terms of estimated life span, only one West Rand mine was classified as having a 'lengthy life span'. Of the same number of mines, four of the ten mines paying the lowest dividends were located in the West Rand and three of these were directly associated with Krugersdorp.[56] There were twenty-one mines that had ore reserves over one million tons and not one came from the West Rand. In 1905, none of the five

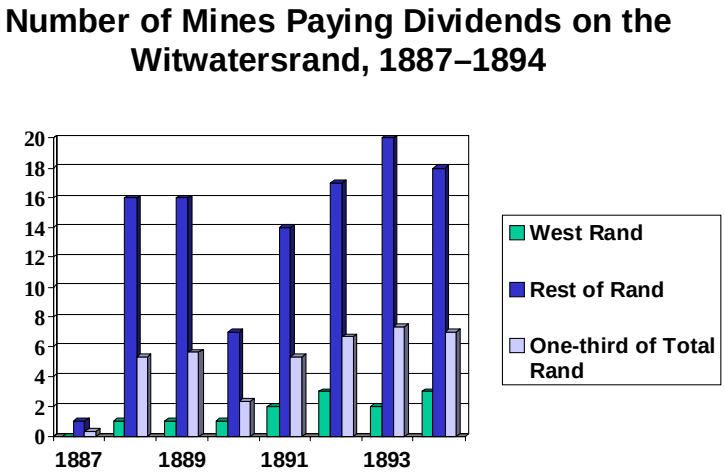
[52] *ibid*.
[53] R. Mendelsohn, 'Blainey and the Jameson Raid: The Debate Renewed', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 6, 1, 1979, p. 163.

[54] *ibid.*, p.130.
[55] J. W. Broomhead, *Round the Rand: Present Position and Prospects of the Principal Rand Mining and Finance Companies* (*Round the Rand)*, The Financial Times, London, 1909, p. 1.

top-performing mines (in terms of revenue per ton) came from the West Rand.

Two of the five worst performing mines came from the West Rand (Luipaard's Vlei Estate and G.M. Co. Ltd., as it later came to be known, and the French Rand G.M. Co. Ltd., both closely associated with Krugersdorp).[57] A Municipal Year Book report recorded that four West Rand mines made the list of the six mines with the lowest profits per ton in 1905.[58] In the same year, not one of the fifteen mines with the lowest expenses per ton came from the West Rand yet three of the five most 'expensive' mines were from the West Rand.[59]

<u>Graph Two</u>: Comparison of The Number of Mines Paying Dividends, West Rand and Rest of the Rand, 1887-1894.



Source: J. Hatch and F. Chalmers, *Gold Mines of the Rand: being a description of the mining industry of the Witwatersrand, South African Republic*, MacMillan, London, 1895, pp. 286–7

In many respects Krugersdorp's mining industry was weaker than the mining industries of the other major towns of the Witwatersrand when measured on virtually any of the relevant indices. This meant that local mines were more likely to close down and leave miners without work than elsewhere on the Rand. It also meant that these mines were

[56] *ibid.,* pp. 6–7.
[57] *ibid.*, p. 10.
[58] Government Publications, University of the Witwatersrand, *Municipal Year Book*, 1911, pp. 425–6.
[59] *ibid.*

more likely to experience high labour turnover as mine owners cut costs on safety measures and the quality of miners' accommodation. In short, life for miners, both black and white, was more likely to be 'nasty, brutish and short' on Krugersdorp's mines than anywhere else on the Rand.

A special investigation of the Rand's compounds in 1908 supports this contention. The North Randfontein was described as 'probably the worst out of a number of bad mines', as it housed 2 600 black miners in two compounds of fifty and ten rooms respectively.[60] There were insufficient beds, the floorboards were uneven, rotten and 'overrun with insects'. About thirty rooms had no light, and none had stoves. The Ferguson compound had 'no floors, no bedsteads, no stoves, no proper ventilation and no light at night'.[61]

Workers from a wide variety of skills, cultures and experiences were sufficiently upset by Robinson's working conditions to go on strike: white miners went on strike in 1897, Chinese miners famously went on strike at North Randfontein in 1905,[62] and 'Pondo' miners went on strike at South Randfontein mine in 1907.[63]

Krugersdorp may have been cursed with the malevolent presence of the maverick J.B. Robinson partly as a result of the accident of its geography. Its position placed it near reefs of unusually poor quality and this, in turn, may have rendered the region unattractive to solid, conservative and cautious British and South African investors and shareholders. Once the 'lions' of the mining industry (people like Rhodes, Lionel Curtis, Wehrner, Barnato and Beit) had chosen better feeding grounds on the east and central Rand, Krugersdorp's mining industry was left to the fate of the figurative equivalent of the mining industry's 'hyenas' who were prepared to pick at the less favourable sections of the Rand. Such men did not inspire confidence in the West Rand's mining industry and further exacerbated the lowly reputation of Krugersdorp's mines.

---

[60] *ibid.,* p. 65. To be fair to Robinson, Moroney admitted that his mines had lower death rates than many other mines that used 'scientific' systems of ventilation. See also A. Jeeves, *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy – the Struggle for the Gold Mine's Labour Supply, 1890–1920*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1985, p. 52.

[61] *ibid.*

[62] See P. Richardson, *Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal*, MacMillan, London, 1982.

[63] See *Transvaal Leader*, 16 March 1907, untitled.

This was, ultimately, the product of geography, of Krugersdorp's position on a fractured, low quality reef which, in turn, meant that the local mining industry was likely to be left in the hands of the kinds of mine owners who turned speculation into a high art. These men played havoc not only with investors' money, but also with the lives of individual miners who were forced to move from mine to mine during the particularly violent fluctuations in the boom-bust cycle that characterised the Krugersdorp mining industry. If Krugersdorp's mining industry was more volatile and unstable than the rest of the Rand, it stands to reason that its miners would experience greater stress and insecurity. The following section suggests that this may well have been the case.

Early Krugersdorp's Development as an Unstable and Insecure Environment

Walking around the town in the late 1880s, a visitor would have had no doubt that Krugersdorp was emerging as a classically ephemeral gold rush camp populated by hard-living, hard-drinking, highly mobile, roughneck English-speaking miners that lived there temporarily.[64] An early description of the first miners on the Krugersdorp Gold Fields in August 1887 vividly conveyed how rough and wild Krugersdorp was during its first few months:

> A gold diggers' rush is a sight once seen and never forgotten. At the very first news of a great find, men drop whatever they are doing no matter how good it is and they race and tear about, liquor up and saddle up more like mad men than reasonable beings.[65]

These 'liquored up' pioneers, 'racing and tearing about' were hardly the type of people

---

[64] The town was a fair walking distance from the goldfields itself and plans were made by the Luipaard's Vlei Estate and G.M. Co. Ltd. to develop a township consisting of working-class housing to the south-east of the town. This was closer to the mines and was proposed as early as October 1889. See CAD, Archives of the State Secretary (SS), 2101, vol. R10561/89, letter from J. M. B. Madison to the Mining Commissioner, 3 October 1889.

[65] Roodepoort Municipal Library (RML), C. M. Payne, 'An Outline of the History of Roodepoort-Maraisburg', manuscript, p. 20. Payne's source is the newspaper, *The Independent*, August 1887.

[66] C. Cole, *Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, Krugersdorp Centenary*, Our lady of the Holy Rosary, Krugersdorp, 1991, Krugersdorp, p. 28. The source cited is the *Missionary record of the Order of Mary Immaculate*, 2, 5, 1892, no page number provided.

required to stabilise a town into a settled and organised urban environment. Rather than presenting an ordered pattern of substantial buildings, early Krugersdorp was characterised, upon closer inspection, by the haphazard arrangement of miners' dwellings and the poor quality of its structures (mostly tents and wood-and-iron jerry-built houses). In 1892, a full five years after the town was established, Krugersdorp was described in terms that conveyed impermanence:

> Government buildings and about twenty-five houses, each built on a ground floor, of corrugated iron. There are two or three stores and the same number of hotels.[66]

Early descriptions of the town evoke an impression of a temporary camp catering to thirsty miners. One missionary noted in 1892 that the Boers who came to the nearby Paardekraal monument every year to commemorate Boer independence saw the town as place of illicit pleasure and Krugersdorp's hotels and taverns did a '…brisk trade [with the Boers], as no intoxicants were sold in the [Boers'] Camp'.[67]

Barth explains this transience that characterised both physical structures and the attitudes of the inhabitants of mining towns by pointing out that 'instant cities' could not produce 'instant citizens', that is, people who cared about and were committed to the urban space in which they lived.[68] The early prospectors were motivated by an irrational faith in 'chance' and if their luck did not pan out, they moved on and tried their fortunes elsewhere. They stayed in one place only so long as they could both make a living there and had a prospect, however, slim, of becoming rich in that location.[69] Beyond that, place had no meaning for them.[70] Their fellow miners did not constitute a 'society' on

---

67 *ibid.*

68 G. Barth, *Instant Cities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1975.

69 C. I. Hofmeyr, 'Mining, Social Change and Literature with Particular Reference to the Mining Novel', ('Mining, Social Change and Literature'), MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1980, p. 48.

70 G. Malamud, *Boomtown Communities* (*Boomtown Communities*), Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1984, p. 35.

71 See S. Dagut, 'Racial Attitudes Among British settlers in South Africa, *c.*1850– *c.*1895', ('Racial Attitudes'), PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1997, p. 272.

which citizenship could be based as they were fierce rivals in a Hobbesian contest of 'all against all'.

The early miners' failure to commit to these urban spaces was understandable as boomtowns were nearly always short-lived. This is evident in the experiences of two of South Africa's most famous mining towns – Kimberley and Pilgrim's Rest. Kimberley was one of a number of instant tent cities that sprang up on the diamondiferous ground in the South African interior and along the Vaal River. By 1871, tents stretched over a hundred miles of river bank in which a combined population grew from 5 000 to 50 000 in just one year.[71]

The town of Kimberley had developed by 1877 into the second largest town in South Africa. Yet the gold rush to the Rand a few years later rapidly emptied Kimberley of its residents, and its population halved between 1888 and 1891.[72] Thereafter the town experienced fluctuating fortunes and, at one point declined into a 'very quiet place' with mostly elderly residents, described by one observer as a 'small, stagnant town' largely owned and run by De Beers diamond mining company.[73]

Pilgrim's Rest also experienced rapid growth followed by rapid decline and like Kimberley it also became a small company town. Many of the derelict houses and shops
of the original town can now be visited by tourists.[74] It appears that mining towns either collapsed completely into hollow shells of the 'ghost town' or were kept going on a much smaller scale as a tightly controlled 'Company Town', an urban form that was unappealing for most miners.[75] Miners were often forced to remain in such towns

---

72 Worger, *City of Diamonds*, p. 296.
73 Dagut, 'Racial attitudes', p. 272.
74 P. Bonner and K. Shapiro, 'Company Town, Company Estate: Pilgrim's Rest, 1910–1932', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 2, 1993, pp. 171–200.
75 See J. S. Garner (ed.), *The Company Town*, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 3–17. Garner noted that Mark Twain described the company towns of Pennsylvania as 'hell with the lid off' while Dickens's evocation of Coketown' in his novel *Hard Times*, is widely considered to be the definitive description of a company town in fiction. See. C. Dickens, *Hard Times*, Harper, New York, 1876.
76 G. Nattrass, 'The Tin Mines of the Waterberg (Transvaal) 1905–1914', *Contree,* 26, 1989, pp. 5–12. See also A. Mabin, 'Capital, Coal and Conflict: the Genesis and Planning of a Company Town

through debt to the company that owned the houses and stores in the town ('I sold my soul to the Company store' went the miner's lament).[76] Boomtowns had a future only as a ghost town or a company town in the experience of most miners and such prospects meant that miners would not commit themselves to the mining towns of the Witwatersrand in the 1890s.

These were urban spaces where they would merely work, sleep and eat, and where they could hopefully one day strike it rich. Then, when the mines closed down, they planned ultimately to return 'home' usually to a large, established town in the metropole or, if they were South African, a port city on the coast. Boomtowns were highly unusual urban spaces that could attract large populations virtually overnight and have all the appearances of settled, complex urban communities with shops, entertainment centres and even churches. Yet they were hollow at their centres. Few newly arrived residents would commit themselves to such towns and set down roots.

Kinsley argued that the urban morphology of the mining town was 'characterised by a myth of impermanence'.[77] She noted that the Boer Republican government was conscious of the 'precedent' of other Transvaal mining towns when it laid out Johannesburg and treated the settlement as 'temporary'. This can be detected in the 'rudimentary layout of the town' where the open squares were randomly placed within a grid, without any apparent 'civic purpose' that 'would have implied permanence'.[78]

The towns of the Witwatersrand all corresponded to the patterns of boomtowns elsewhere, attracting large numbers of residents over a very short period of time. , the Rand's towns, from Springs to Krugersdorp, collectively attracted far more miners than the mining towns of Australia, Canada or the United States. Johannesburg, in particular, grew more rapidly than any other known mining town:

---

at Indwe', *Contree*, 34, 1993, pp. 21–30.

[77] J. Kinsley, 'Meaning, Mnemonic and Myth: An Approach to Urban Design Based on Contextual Readings of the City', ('Meaning, Mnemonic and Myth'), Masters of Urban Design dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1993, p. 65.

> No gold rush in history attracted such numbers. During its prime in the 1870s Virginia had 25 000, Ballarat during the 1850s numbered 40 000, Bendigo had perhaps 30 000, while Leadville in Colorado once housed a similar number. Neither had Helena, Montana ever more than 10 000, nor any of the camps in British Columbia with a total of 25 000, nor the Yukon. The Klondike Rush...did not draw more than about 25 000.[79]

Johannesburg's population, alone, approached 100 000 by 1900. Its enormous size and its growth into a city, despite its isolation (railways only reached it in 1892), is explained by its central position and the immense size of the gold fields of the Rand. Its population grew at an average of 7.5% per annum between 1890 and 1936, a growth rate that far exceeded the 3.9% per annum growth rate for the populations of Buenos Aires, 2.4% for
Melbourne and 3.5% for Sydney over their peak growth periods.[80]

Nonetheless, a slump in 1889–90 and a serious depression in the mid-1890s when mining technology was unable to extract gold from the deeper level quartzite ore, threatened even this behemoth with the fate of becoming a ghost town. This particular economic downturn coincided with a rumour of a 'Second Rand' in Mashonaland to the north, which had the potential of drawing off large numbers of miners.

Not surprisingly, mining towns were seen as temporary destinations for the vast majority of the miners. Most of the white miners were either single men or married men who had left their wives behind. Only 12% of white employees on the Rand were married and had their families with them in 1897. By 1902 this figure had increased to 20% and while this represented a rapid increase in this category, it still meant that only one in five of the miners on the Rand was married and settled with their wives.[81] Like their

---

[78] *ibid.*
[79] E. Rosenthal, *Gold! Gold! Gold!*, MacMillan, London, 1970, p. 193.
[80] *ibid.*

[81] C. Van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand*, vol. 1, *New Babylon*,

counterparts in other mining towns around the world, the early residents of Krugersdorp were transients because they expected the gold to run out. Most predictions gave the Rand a life expectancy of a few decades, like most mineral-rich environments where boomtowns arose. As Malamud points out,

> Nearly all of the early American, Australian and South African mining boomtowns were doomed to decay. Once the nearby mines were played out beyond the ability of existing technology to exploit them, miners had no choice but to move on....[82]

The boomtown mentality and the harsh environment of the instant city created a peculiar form of society. The Rand towns, like mining towns from Canada to Australia, constituted a masculine, homo-social environment almost entirely devoid of women. The average age of boomtown populations would also be much younger than those found in
ordinary settled towns. Boomtowns lacked women, the aged and the very young.

This must have been very disconcerting for the young men who found themselves in these urban spaces. Few working-class miners would have experienced a similar society unless they had served in the armed forces. Some may have accessed such masculine spaces vicariously through late Victorian literature reading ‘penny awful’ novels or Kipling's popular ‘Barrack-room Ballads’ of male soldiery, while most working-class men regularly attended their soccer clubs and societies that were nearly exclusively male environments. Nonetheless, whether they came from Australia or Cornwall, most of the miners had grown up and lived in family environments in settled towns with a full spectrum of old and young people as well as a balance between men and women. These places represented ‘home’ unlike the bleak and harsh mining town of the Witwatersrand at the edge of the world.

For many of these miners, then, the life of transience, economic hardship, sexual

---

Ravan, Johannesburg, 1982, p. 34.

[82] Malamud, *Boomtown Communities*, p. 42.

frustration and loneliness was an awful, alienating and brutalising experience. Violence was but one manifestation of this unnatural lifestyle similar to other male institutions like the army or a private school but without the rules, regulations and collective purpose that characterised such institutions. Masculine pastimes such as visiting the pub, playing cards and friendly 'rough-housing', were typical of the working-class neighbourhood in the metropole.[83] These activities were, however, balanced and diluted by what many sociologists would consider to be more wholesome or 'rounded' experiences such as family outings, relaxing at home, visiting neighbouring families and courting women. In the mining towns of the Rand, these family-orientated activities were almost completely absent or perversely distorted through liaisons with prostitutes.

Drinking, gambling and sex, which were relatively 'harmless' working class activities found throughout Europe and in most industrialised countries, became accentuated, distorted and exaggerated into destructive anti-social behaviour. Thus, social drinking was magnified into serious and frequent over-indulgence that bordered on alcoholism, social card games transformed into obsessive gambling for high stakes and friendly 'rough-housing' deteriorated into vicious fights and serious assault.

The isolation of the Rand's towns from the ports and 'normal' towns like Grahamstown or Boer *dorps* like Potchefstroom, meant that they became dangerous and violent places without the example of these socially balanced urban spaces. Towns like Krugersdorp were far from the Boer Republic's capital of Pretoria, a potential source of Boer authority and socially leavening influence. Few miners feared the Republican policemen (who they derogatively referred to as 'ZARPS') and these towns, thus, had few or none of the sanctions governing behaviour that one finds in socially stable and well-regulated urban spaces. Thus, the 'friction' of distance' promoted social friction, leading to a sense of lawlessness where disputes were settled with physical violence rather than through the courts.[84]

---

[83] P. Cohen, 'Policing the Working Class City', in B. Fine et al *(eds.)*, *Capitalism and the Rule of Law: From Deviancy Theory to Marxism*, Hutchinson, London, 1979, p. 123.

[84] See D. Gregory, 'The Friction of distance? Information Circulation and the Mails in Early Nineteenth-century England', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 13, 2, 1978, pp. 130–154. A useful definition of the 'friction of distance' is 'the cost of moving anything, measured in

Aggression became valued in itself as intrinsic to masculine identity and Viney argues that aggression was the 'only universal and generally accepted attribute of manliness'[85] Furthermore, Viney describes the existence on the Rand as an 'extreme masculinist culture' where 'open aggression towards competitors', 'loud boasting' and 'swearing' was 'normal'.[86]

While liquor seems to have been in abundance, the supply of food for miners was an early concern for the Chamber of Mines.[87] A severe drought in late 1889 and lack of sufficient transport to meet the needs of such a rapidly growing population were cited as

key reasons for a food shortage on the Rand.[88] The Chamber estimated the population the Rand at 23 000 whites and 15 000 blacks and, allowing for 2 lbs of flour or meal to each white miner and 3 lbs of mealies to each 'native', it estimated that there was scarcely enough food on the Rand to feed its residents for a month.

Some areas were worse off than others, and some of the East Rand mines had 'scarcely any stocks, certainly not sufficient to last more than a week'.[89] The renowned merchant, Mr Hoskins, complained that the farming area near Krugersdorp at Heidelberg was seen as a 'producing country' yet it was 'not possible to get anything from the boer farmers'.[90] It seems likely that the local Dutch-speaking farmers had not yet adjusted their productive capacities to such a rapidly-growing market and many people believed that the mining towns would collapse as quickly as they rose up, making heavy investment in food production for the mines a risky

---

time and space'. See also E. F. Bergman and T. L. Knight*, Introduction to Geography*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs New Jersey, 1993, glossary, p. 453.

85 R. Viney, 'Officers and Gentlemen: Masculinity, English Speaking South African Colonial Troops and the British Army during the South African War, 1899-1902', paper presented at the 'Anglo-Boer War: a reappraisal' Conference, 12-15 October 1999, p. 3.

86 *ibid.,* p.11.

87 *The Star*, 25 October 1889, 'State of the Country'.

88 *ibid.*

89 *ibid.*

90 *ibid.*

venture for these farmers.

Any living space where access to the basic necessities was so unpredictable can only be described as exceedingly harsh and these conditions were more than likely to promote a sense of precariousness and vulnerability. The Rand was, furthermore, frequently very hot and miners were plagued by fierce electrical storms.[91]

Of course, all mining towns, throughout the world, were characterised by harsh living conditions. After all, Lewis Mumford wrote in his description of a typical 'Coketown' in Britain that '…never before in recorded history had such vast masses of people lived in such a savagely deteriorated environment…'[92] while George Orwell also described the exceedingly harsh conditions in which British miners worked and lived.[93]

Yet these writers described miners in well-established mining towns who had families and identifiable communities. Mumford's and Orwell's miners had their respites in a variety of communal leisure activities, support networks and emotional sustenance of stable relationships. In the remote mining towns of Australia, Canada, California and the Rand, mining was fiercely competitive with no compensations of the metropolitan home life of the Welsh or Cornish mining town.

Writing about 'mining communities' of such Cornish and Welsh mining towns, Gilbert notes that these were characterised by a 'combination of social and socio-geographic characteristics, primarily occupational and social homogeneity, social closure, a high density of social networks, and relative physical delimitation and isolation'.[94] Mining towns in Australia and South Africa could hardly be described as

[91] *The Star*, 14 September 1888, untitled. The rain and wind of a spring storm was so fierce that it destroyed a canvas church and school in Krugersdorp, reducing it to a 'heap of torn canvas and splintered woodwork'.

[92] L. Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1940, pp. 190–1.

[93] G. Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1962.

[94] D. Gilbert, 'Community and Municipalism: Collective Identity in Late-Victorian and Edwardian

'communities' during their initial phases but rather as agglomerations of atomised and intensely competitive individuals. Thus, as undeniably harsh as most Cornish, Welsh and British mining towns were, conditions were much better than the remote, isolated and bleak environment of the Rand.

Battling against both scarcity and the elements, white miners grew increasingly desperate and competed fiercely with one another. This, in turn, further deepened their sense of vulnerability and insecurity. A court case in 1890, involving a dispute on Krugersdorp's easternmost border, Klein Paardekraal, highlights the tensions that were constantly present on the goldfields. The plaintiffs had hired a 'mynpacht' and pegged it off themselves. The defendants then, according to testimony, 'jumped the ground' and placed 'professional boxers on the ground to keep the men from working'. Later some of the 'pegs were withdrawn'.[95]

Such incidents were by no means rare and a similar confrontation broke out over attempts by James McDerman of Krugersdorp who tried to jump a claim by pegging out land owned by the Randfontein Estates and G. M. Co. Ltd.. An employee of the company, Mr Johnson, 'subsequently pulled out their pegs' and warned the man that he would 'get into a row' if he did not leave.[96] Claim jumping, as these examples illustrate, was a manifestation of the marginal position of these miners and their sense of desperation produced an uncertain and unstable environment.

The Friction of Distance and a Modified Central Place Theory

A key factor behind the insecurity and instability experienced by miners in early Krugersdorp was that it was an exceedingly expensive place in which to live. This was due not only to its isolation but also due to its small size. Johannesburg was remote but it was able to use its much larger size, economies of scale and its 'centrality' to its advantage. As the largest market, it attracted suppliers who first travelled to this city and

---

Mining towns', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 17, 3, 1991, p. 260.

95 *The Star*, 28 February 1890, 'Transvaal High Court'.

96 *The Star*, 10 April 1890, untitled.

then moved eastwards and westwards to the smaller towns on the Rand. The following table **(see Table One)** demonstrates that while some goods were more expensive in Johannesburg than in Krugersdorp, overall the larger town had cheaper supplies than its smaller, more 'remote' counterpart for key items:

Table One: A Comparison of Market Prices for a Select range of Products Offered at the Krugersdorp and Johannesburg Markets 1895

Product (English translation)	**Price of Product at the Krugersdorp and Johannesburg Markets**	
	Krugersdorp Markt Bericht	***Johannesburg Markt Bericht***
Boter per lb (Butter per pound)	2s	1–1s5d
Eieren per dozyn (Eggs per dozen	2s9d–3s6d	2–2s5d
Kalkoenen per stuk (Chickens per piece)	14–23s	12-21s

Source: Ons Volk, 7 December 1895, untitled.

Johannesburg's size and its position at the centre of a sprawling Rand meant that it benefited enormously by being able to attract the bulk of labour, capital and markets. In Central Place Theory, Johannesburg would constitute a higher order centre that could provide facilities such as banking that was beyond 'lower centres' like Krugersdorp. Henning argues that Randfontein and Krugersdorp constituted the Rand's 'outer zone', like Springs and Brakpan in the east which, 'while not necessarily in daily contact with the core' it was none the less 'dependent on it for many specialized functions and services'.[97] Johannesburg's large size meant that it could develop economies of scale that, in turn, meant that its shops were bigger, cheaper and had a greater variety of goods. As a result, Johannesburg's shops became more attractive for consumers from the smaller centres on the Rand who would travel by rail to the city rather than buy goods in their 'home' towns. Johannesburg's advantages were so considerable that its shops could offset the additional transport costs incurred by residents in distant Rand towns like Krugersdorp, who visited Johannesburg's shops on the weekends. This held back Krugersdorp's growth prospects as a commercial centre, further depressing economic conditions in the smaller town.

[97] J. Henning, *The Evolution, Land Use and Land Use Patterns of Krugersdorp*, BA Honours dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1963, p. 9.

Central Place Theory was formulated by Christaller in the 1930s to explain the distribution of resources and services among urban spaces, specifically the emergence of a hierarchy of settlements in the homogenous rural economy of Southern Germany.[98] Under Christaller's model, an embryonic market town or 'Township centre' ('Amtstort') could attract consumers from a number of surrounding 'Market hamlets' ('Markort') through its position as a 'central place' on an isotropic plane. If the size of the population of one such town reached a certain size (often due to its favourable central position in relation to other market towns) it could attain a 'threshold' that would make it economically viable to offer certain kinds of additional, specialised services. This, in turn, would attract consumers from a 'range' of additional hamlets and even from other market towns and emerge as a 'County seat' ('Kreistadt').

Christaller's model has proven to be a remarkably accurate predictive model of the size and distribution of urban settlements in a number of case studies around the world. Various modifications have improved the model, for example, Losch's more sophisticated model that implied a 'continuum' of urban centres of varying sizes rather than a 'tiered' system suggested by Christaller.[99] There are many problems with these models, however, and they cannot predict the size of urban settlements when factors other than situation, supply and demand, range and threshold apply on a relatively homogenous rural plane. One study alerts us to the '…many examples of ports, mining towns and oddly or badly sited settlements which do not approximate to the service centre pattern'.[100]

On the Witwatersrand the mining settlements are distributed along the reef in a linear pattern from east to west in a way that is similar to 'ribbon development' along major routes in industrialised countries. Yet Johannesburg's position at the centre of the reef modified the size of these settlements in such a way that it became, by far, the largest

[98] W. Christaller, *Central Places in Southern Germany*, trans. C. Baskin. Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs New Jersey, 1966.

[99] Losch's more sophisticated approach was preferred by Prof. K. Beavon in his study of the distribution of intra-urban shopping centres in Cape Town in the 1970s, see K. Beavon, *Central Place Theory: a Re-interpretation*, Longman, London, 1977.

[100] P. Daniel and M. Hopkinson, *The Geography of Settlement: Conceptual Frameworks in Geography,* Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1979, p. 200.

urban settlement in the region as early as 1896 when it had a population of over 100 000 inhabitants. This made it a much larger city than the towns like Krugersdorp and Benoni on the western and eastern edges, respectively. The rich veins of gold in the central Rand certainly played a role in determining Johannesburg's large size and ensured that Johannesburg was destined to be a Gulliver among the relative Lilliputians of Krugersdorp and other towns on the Rand.

Nonetheless, this is not the full explanation of Johannesburg's huge size in comparison to Krugersdorp, nor does it account adequately for the effects of this large size. Given its large size, Johannesburg could attract large numbers of consumers from the edges of the Rand in an almost gravitational pattern. It is here that Christaller's model (together with Losch's modification) has some explanatory power because Johannesburg, as a 'higher order' centre', was able to offer a much larger range of goods and services than a 'lower order centre' like Krugersdorp and could attract consumers over a much larger area including from Krugersdorp itself. Even where towns like Krugersdorp offered these goods and services, they were likely to be cheaper in Johannesburg where its large size enabled it to cut prices through the economies of scale. This may have played a key role in the relatively small size of towns like Krugersdorp compared to towns like Kimberley that had no rivals in close proximity.

Another concept that helps to illuminate why Krugersdorp was relatively small and impoverished is the 'friction of distance' which can be summarised as the following principle: 'the degree of attraction to a town will be proportional to the ease with which it can be reached'.[101] If Johannesburg had been sufficiently far away, consumers may have concluded that it was too costly or too inconvenient to visit. It is clear that Johannesburg's proximity and size in relation to Krugersdorp which enabled it to offer a range of goods, many of these specialised, and often at a cheaper rate than those offered in Krugersdorp, combined with a relatively cheap and efficient railway transport system, meant that Krugersdorp's commercial activities were seriously threatened by its behemoth neighbour. This, in turn, would have intensified a pervasive sense of

precariousness that the residents of the mining town would already feel.

Johannesburg's centrality also ensured that it became, like Germiston, a major hub for communication networks.[102] The railways that were built from Cape Town and Durban, first connected to Germiston and Johannesburg. It was some time later that a tramway was extended to Krugersdorp despite appeals to have this extension made sooner.[103] Krugersdorp's commercial sector is likely to have suffered from its marginalisation from the transport network across the Rand in the early years which left it economically behind its neighbours to the east.

Kinsley describes the devastating effects that such marginalisation could have on the businesses located on specific streets in Johannesburg and these findings can then offer some insight into how, on a larger scale, Krugersdorp's commercial district withered on its distant branch, far from the central trunk of communications. Kinsley, for example, explains that when electrical trams replaced horse-drawn trams in 1906, this necessitated a route change so that Eloff street became the new main route through Johannesburg, replacing Rissik street. This caused a massive and rapid relocation of commercial business out of Rissik street and into Eloff street.

In another example, Kinsley notes that when the highway route from Kimberley to Johannesburg was completed, it terminated at Sauer Street and not Eloff street. This meant that travellers would have to disembark in Sauer street and walk along Pritchard Street to catch the trams in Eloff Street. They would use this opportunity to buy goods in Pritchard Street. In a very short space of time, as a direct result of its function as a major channel or 'path' between two transport hubs or 'nodes', Pritchard street was transformed from a quiet road into one of the main shopping streets in Johannesburg.

---

[101] *ibid.,* pp. 227–8.

[102] For an insightful discussion of this aspect of Johannesburg's spatial development see N. Sidukwana,'Transportation and Spatial Development in Greater Johannesburg', M.Sc. (Development Planning) dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1999.

[103] *The Star*, 28 November 1889, 'The Boksburg Tramway'. The delay was no trivial matter as public transportation systems could have a profound effect on urban land use patterns, see Kinsley, 'Meaning, Mnemonic and Myth', pp. 87–9.

In much the same way, Johannesburg's commercial businesses as a whole benefited from its centrality and its position as a transport hub, while Krugersdorp's commercial sector remained stunted due to its marginality. This, in turn, produced depressed economic conditions in Krugersdorp and a pervasive sense of insecurity and instability in the town. One possible effect of this marginality was that it helped to make Krugersdorp a particularly violent town, one that came to be known as a 'Devil's Dorp'.

Krugersdorp as a Violent Town

There is evidence that Krugersdorp was, indeed, a violent town during the 1890s and early 1900s and this is suggested in the criminal and population statistics that are available for the Republican period. About 1000 white men worked on the Krugersdorp Goldfields in 1889[104] out of a total of 23 000 white miners on the Rand. By 1890, about 431 'persons' lived in the town itself, a term that probably referred exclusively to the white residents.[105] The town's population was said to have more than doubled in size from 1897 to 1898[106] and by the time of the 1901 census, 3 500 people were living in the town itself. This would include the suburbs of Burghershoop, District Township, Luipaardsvlei and the Indian and 'Native' locations.[107]

Krugersdorp's reputation as a dangerous town can be evaluated by taking one set of criminal statistics at random: the number of cases presented before the criminal court in the town in December 1895. These statistics indicate that five white men were charged, in separate cases, with 'assault' ('aanranding') by the Krugersdorp 'magistrate' ('landdrost'). Johannesburg which was many times the size of Krugersdorp, reported just nineteen assault cases committed by white men, in the same month, in all three of its *landdrost* courts. Johannesburg's had at least 40 000 white residents by then, while Krugersdorp probably had less than a tenth of this figure.

[104] *The Star*, 25 October 1889, 'Chamber of Mines'.
[105] *The Star*, 29 April 1890, untitled.
[106] *Ons Volk*, 3 May 1898, untitled.
[107] CAD, Archives of the Colonial Secretary (CS) 124, 0543,unsigned report dated 1 July 1901.

Of course such statistics should be treated with considerable caution as there are many variables that are unknown or which cannot be easily measured. For example, it is not altogether clear whether the courts' jurisdictions extended beyond each town's immediate environs in both cases. Nonetheless, at the very least, Krugersdorp was clearly 'punching above its weight' (both literally and figuratively) as an unusually violent town with the third highest level of assaults in the entire Republic that month, behind the much larger towns of Johannesburg and Pretoria.[108]

During the period July to December, 1895, two murders were committed along with two cases of culpable homicide, and two accidental or 'unforeseen' ('onvoorzichtige') deaths[109] in Krugersdorp, among all races. While six unnatural and violent deaths over six months may appear to be rather insignificant compared to modern experience, Krugersdorp's record was poor compared to most other contemporary towns. Boer *dorps* like Klerksdorp, for example, had no cases of unnatural deaths at all during this period.[110] Forty-two cases of murder were considered by juries in the whole Republic during this period, together with thirty-three cases of culpable homicide and five cases of infanticide or eighty unnatural deaths in all, in the whole Republic. Krugersdorp's six deaths, thus made up a substantial proportion of the Republic's entire record of unnatural deaths over this period.[111]

Not only was Krugersdorp one of the most violent places in the Transvaal, but its crime rate also seems to have increased sharply each year. For example, the 112 criminal cases heard in December 1892 nearly doubled to 215 cases for the corresponding period, in December 1893. Of course criminal statistics are notoriously unreliable and

---

[108] CAD, SP 108, *Crimineele Statistiek*, 1895, *Extract uit de Maandreporten der Landrosthoven, over de maand December, 1895*, p. 2.

[109] Transvaal Archives Bureau (TAB), Archives of the Staatsprocureur (SP), File 108, *Crimineele Statistiek*, 1895, *Staat aanwijzende de Zaken waarin Voorlopig Onderzoek over het Tweede Halfjaar 1895, Krugersdorp'*, p. 7.

[110] *ibid.,* Klerksdorp, p. 8.

[111] *ibid.,* p. 26.

[112] CAD, SP42, SPR610/94, *Crimineele Zaken*, *Krugersdorp, Januari*, 1894, no pagination.

some of this increase could be accounted for by the stricter enforcement of various laws. Also, in the absence of reliable statistics on year-on-year population increases, it is not clear how much this apparent increase in crime could be attributed to a proportionate increase in the population of Krugersdorp. It, nonetheless, is reasonable to state that a doubling of the overall crime rate over a period of one year strongly suggests substantially increased levels of violence.

A closer analysis of the relevant statistics seems to support this conclusion. To give one example, the number of assault cases involving all races in Krugersdorp seems to have increased substantially from five in December 1892 to twelve in December 1893. An analysis of crime figures for the month of January 1894, moreover, reveals that there were seventeen cases of assault during that month, a substantial increase on the month before.[112] The statistics of small numbers and the incompleteness of these records necessitate caution; but what such numbers do suggest, however, is that assaults were taking place on a sizeable scale and were increasing from year to year.

These bare statistics do not reveal who the victims of murder and assault were. It is not clear whether black miners assaulted their white counterparts or their fellow black workers. It is also not specified whether white miners were assaulting black miners or their fellow white workers. At this point anecdotal evidence culled from local newspapers can help to shed some light on trends at the time. After even a cursory study it quickly appears that the bulk of the alleged perpetrators and the victims of violence were not the 'roughneck' white miners. Rather most of the violent incidents reported in the newspaper involved what later commentators would refer to as 'black-on-black' violence.

While white men were violent, they were not responsible for the bulk of the criminal charges for assault or murder. Rather it was black men, driven to the mines of the Rand under twin pressures of land seizures and taxation, who were charged with the lion's share of violent crime. Black men featured prominently as perpetrators and victims of violence in Krugersdorp's court statistics, although white men were nonetheless still

prominent in both categories. Even assuming that black residents equalled the number of white residents, which they probably did not (a ratio of 1:2 is more likely), black men seem to be over-represented in many criminal statistics that were recorded according to race during this period. For example, in December 1892, black men were responsible for 60% of the assault cases perpetrated in Krugersdorp.[113]

The Transvaal Republic was, however, notoriously racist and it would be surprising if its legal system did not heavily prejudice black men at every step of the judicial process. This was noted by a Johannesburg newspaper that cynically reported that hanging was now 'abolished' for 'White Men...though not for black men' after two Boers who had murdered another white man in 1892 escaped the gallows. The article noted that only two 'Europeans' had been hanged in the whole history of the Transvaal up to that year.[114]

Yet the hanging of black men accused of murder was frequently reported in Krugersdorp's newspapers. For example, in 1890 a black man called 'Hans', a 'Basotho' was found guilty of killing 'September' at Krugersdorp by battering his skull in with a pick-axe handle. He was sentenced to death and escorted to Pretoria for his execution after the Executive confirmed the sentence.[115] A week later, 'Tom' was sent from Krugersdorp to Johannesburg to be tried for murdering another black man.[116] Two murders in the space of two weeks was certainly indicative of a violent, urban 'negative space' and Krugersdorp's reputation as 'Devil's Dorp' appears to be justified when considered against anecdotal evidence like this.

The over-representation of black perpetrators in both the anecdotal and statistical

---

[113] CAD, SP35, SPR93, *Verslag wan Crimineele Zaken behandeld door den Landdrost van Krugersdorp (Crimineele Zaken, Krugersdorp**)** gedurend de maand December, 1892*, no pagination. These are the only crimes to which a racial breakdown can be applied as the majority of white men were accused of breaking local regulations which seem to apply to whites exclusively while black men were accused of 'crimes' that had no relevance to whites such as 'desertion' ('deserti') and 'infringement of the pass regulations' ('zonder pas'). Murder was dealt with in the Circuit Court in Johannesburg.

[114] *The Star*, 1 July 1892, untitled.

[115] *The Star*, 1 February 1890, untitled.

[116] *The Star*, 11 February 1890, untitled.

evidence needs to be considered in the overall context of a racially distorted judiciary system where, for example, the jury system was reserved for white men only.[117] State prosecutors and magistrates were also exclusively white and were likely to be much harder on a black men accused of assault or murder in an effort to win praise for high conviction rates.[118] Although court interpreters were provided in most cases, black men suffered the disadvantage of having to be tried in a system that used the Dutch language throughout the legal process.[119]

White *landdrosts* were more likely to impose harsh sentences on convicted black men. Landdrost Bodenstein, for example, was described as being 'extremely severe on kaffirs travelling around without passes' and 'exceedingly severe' on drunken black men, few of whom 'escaped without making acquaintance with the cat [o' nine tails]'.[120] The bias of white juries, prosecutors and judges meant that black men were disproportionately represented among the inmates of Krugersdorp's local prison for acts of violence, becoming victims of structural state-inspired violence themselves as they were often flogged and were required to carry out hard labour.

White men who committed acts of violence against black men were, by contrast, fined rather than imprisoned and while the fines were fairly harsh, these were usually affordable and it is rare to read of cases of imprisonment in such cases. There appears to have been a widespread belief that it was necessary for white men to use violence to assert control over black men. For example, Mr S. P du Toit, a farmer at Luipaard's Vlei No. 10, in the Krugersdorp District, punished his servant for 'insubordination' by tying him to a wagon and flogging him with a 'leather trace'.[121] He was not imprisoned but rather given a relatively steep fine of five pounds.

There were many further examples of white men committing assault on black men in

---

[117] *Ons Volk*, 3 May 1898, untitled.

[118] Krugersdorp's Public Prosecutor van Leggelo was praised for achieving 58 convictions in 77 cases in illicit liquor cases in 1899, see *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 6 May 1899, untitled.

[119] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 22 July 1899, untitled.

[120] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 4 February 1899, untitled. In one case a Krugersdorp *landdrost* sentenced two black horse thieves to six months' hard labour and fifty lashes, see *Ons Volk*, 25 July 1896, 'Goedgestraft'.

Krugersdorp in the late 1890s and early 1900s, who justified this assault by blaming the victim's 'insubordination' or 'laziness'. For example, Mr. Thompson was fined five pounds for 'kicking a kaffir boy' and setting his two dogs on the victim, defended himself by saying that he was only guilty of 'removing a loafing native'.[122] In another case, Mr. A. Martens assaulted his 'kaffir servant' with a 'piece of iron' for apparently failing to clean a stable and was fined three pounds. [123]

It was rare for black victims to defend themselves during such assaults or to perpetrate attacks on white men. When this happened, the black perpetrator could expect much harsher treatment at the hands of the law. For example, a 'native coachmen' who collided with a Jewish cab-driver, a Mr Legum, in Ockerse street in Krugersdorp and who then struck Mr Legum on the shoulders with his whip, was sentenced to two months' hard labour in prison. The article that reported the incident and the court case that followed revealingly combined race, space and social status into the headline, 'The Black in His Place'.[124]

Even if statistics were distorted by the factors outlined above, the evidence suggests that adult black males were more likely to be both the victims and perpetrators of violence than white males in Krugersdorp. Krugersdorp, in turn, seems to have been more violent in absolute and relative terms than virtually any other town in the Transvaal Republic. In a relatively religious age where Christian evangelicalism predominated in late-Victorian England and a *Dopper* (Orthodox) Dutch Reformed Church value system was hegemonic under President Kruger in the Z.A.R., Krugersdorp stood out, indeed, as a 'Devil's Dorp'.

It is not difficult to see why Krugersdorp should be so violent. Like the white miners, black miners also left their families behind when they became contracted migrant workers. Masculine pastimes and physical prowess became distorted in this homosocial

[121] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 19 March 1903, 'Flogging a Native'.
[122] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 9 May 1903, untitled.
[123] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 29 November 1903, untitled.
[124] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 12 March 1904, 'The Black in His Place'.

environment in much the same way that it does for prisoners or any person forced to live in 'total institutions'. Black men had the added pressure of being treated by local authorities and white residents in mining towns as 'ascriptive criminals'.[125]

Breckenridge suggests that racialised violence, where black miners were regularly and frequently assaulted by white miners, was endemic on the Rand's mines. This white-on-black violence played a key role in brutalising black men and drove them to then commit acts of black-on-black violence (and much more rarely, to 'lash out' against their tormentors). Breckenridge explored the role of hegemonic masculinity in promoting violence on the Reef's mines by pointing out that assault had become a way of life in the male environment of the mine.

It was widely believed by white miners and white men more generally that violence was the 'only language' that black men understood and that a white man in a position of authority had to assert himself violently to 'earn the respect' of his black subordinates.[126] White miners frequently justified this violence as a didactic, life-saving action, claiming that they only struck black miners who transgressed basic safety regulations. Violence was rationalised as the 'intersection' of paternalism and masculinity.[127] Often even this justification was dispensed with and white miners, like whites more generally, simply declared that they used violence to show who was 'boss' in the workplace which became, in Breckenridge's words, a 'racialised space'.[128]

---

[125] See Worger, W., *South Africa's City of Diamonds: Mine Workers and Monopoly Capitalism in Kimberley, 1867-1895*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1987.

[126] K. Breckenridge, 'The Allure of Violence: Men, Race and Masculinity on the South African Goldmines, 1900–1950' ('The Allure of Violence') *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24, 4, 1998, p. 682.

[127] Dagut questions whether British settlers' relations with black subordinates could be usefully described in these terms as there was often too great a 'social distance' – in the British settler's racial viewpoint – between settler and black subordinate for 'genuine paternalism' to be a common defining feature of this relationship, see S. Dagut, 'Paternalism and Social Distance: British Settler's Racial Attitudes', *South African Historical Journal*, 37, 1997, pp. 3–21.

[128] Breckenridge, 'The Allure of Violence', p. 683.

[129] *ibid.* Breckenridge refers to Africans reliving a 'memory of a martial past' was still strong among his interviewees in the Mzimvubu district who were second generation miners on the Reef, see also p. 690.

[130] *ibid.,* p. 691.

Black men, however, did not assault one another in the workplace but in areas associated with their leisure, far from the mines and in their 'own' space. These spaces included the mine and municipal locations near Krugersdorp but, more frequently, they were located in the wild, untamed veld. These latter spaces were racially neutral even 'black controlled spaces' outside the control of the white male employer.

Such 'open spaces' contrasted strongly with the heat and confinement of mine stopes and backrooms of shops or houses that were so alien. Perhaps such spaces conveyed to the black male identity an association with traditions of the warrior and their memories as 'herd boys' as youths.[129] It is here that humiliated black men, fortified with liquor, asserted themselves as 'real men' through displays of physical prowess in fights. These were frequently dyadic or one-to-one confrontations in the warrior tradition, contrasting sharply with the 'anonymous racialised violence of beatings underground'.[130] One should not romanticise such violence, however, as the examples cited earlier in this Chapter made it clear that it was often brutal and even murderous.

A further contributory cause to insecurity and instability - and the mentalities that this produced - was the structural violence of the early mining town where life could be cut short by both disease and mining accidents. This, too, contributed to the transience of mining towns and the lack of commitment to the town by its inhabitants. Disease was rife in the town and was not only debilitating but frequently also fatal. The most common diseases were dysentery, enteric fever, cholera and typhoid fever. White men succumbed to tropical diseases and even apparently minor complaints in the absence of adequate medical facilities. A number of young black men died of 'natural causes' where no foul play was suspected.[131] As early as 1888, the health conditions in Krugersdorp were described as follows:

> ...Several persons have arrived in the town suffering from malarial fever and [were] helpless (due to lack of hospital facilities). These cases

[131] CAD, Microfilm Death Certificates, file 4595, the 'labourer' 'Jim' died of 'natural causes' aged 32.

> have all been assisted privately, otherwise they might have ended fatally in the public streets.[132]

Poor health conditions were typical of mining towns and were the main cause of disease in Kimberley where the poor management of human waste meant that cesspits quickly filled up and then overflowed. In 1878, for example, fifty-one of the 262 adult whites who died in Kimberley in that year died as a result of contracting dysentery and related diseases. Kimberley's death rate of 40.5 per thousand was roughly double that of industrialised London, despite Kimberley's relatively younger population.[133] Johannesburg's mortality rate was slightly lower at 31 per 1000 for white inhabitants (35 per 1000 for black residents) in 1893, but it was still higher than even the notoriously unhealthy Australian mining towns.[134]

In Benoni, typhoid and pneumonia carried off so many 'Cousin Jacks'[135] (Cornish miners) that Sundays became synonymous with funeral processions. The deceased's fellow workers would follow the coffin to the grave wearing their Sunday best. These sources indicate a pattern that was common to the Rand, and Krugersdorp was unlikely to have been any different. Indeed, given the relatively poorer state of its mining industry and its more severely depressed economic conditions, Krugersdorp's death rate may well have been higher.

Another serious threat to the early inhabitants of Krugersdorp were mine accidents, a depressingly common occurrence as relatively inexperienced men used dynamite and worked in poorly supported mine stopes. The superstitious white pioneers looked askance at mines where a fatality occurred and this may have contributed to the frequency with which miners moved from mine to mine. A more likely case, though, was the complete lack of job security and it was a common sight to see an entire workforce

---

[132] *The Star*, 14 March 1888, untitled. The dramatic language which conveys an image of people literally dropping dead in the streets is meant to shock authorities into action but also depicts the ephemeral and harsh environment of the mining town.

[133] Worger, *South Africa's City of Diamonds*, p. 153.

[134] B. Kennedy, *A Tale of Two Mining Cities: Johannesburg and Broken Hill, 1885–1925*, A.D Donker, Johannesburg, 1984, pp. 40–1. Johannesburg's mortality was twice that of contemporary Australian mining towns.

[135] D. Humphriss, *Benoni - Son of My Sorrow*, Benoni Town Council, Benoni, 1968, p. 35.

summarily dismissed when they organised to complain about working conditions or wages).[136]

Black mineworkers were no different, as a labour agent at Krugersdorp pointed out in 1889:

> These fellows look upon one another as brothers and whenever one of them meets with a mishap at a mine, they all get frightened and want to go away. Last week a boy engaged at a mine out Krugersdorp way had the bad luck to put his head under a falling lump of rock. His skull was cracked and the whole of the boys of the property gave out that they were going to leave. They are very superstitious.[137]

The violence that flourished in Krugersdorp, especially during its early years, meant that it was an extremely unappealing place for most of its residents who consequently failed to commit to the town. This meant that most residents were transients and this predisposed them to violence. Furthermore, the town was a harsh environment precisely because few people committed themselves to it and hardly anyone was prepared to help to make it more liveable.

These elements of transience, violence and a harsh built environment were, thus, interlinked in a complex way that ensured that Krugersdorp remained what contemporaries called a 'Devil's Dorp'. In the section that follows, a more in-depth analysis of Krugersdorp's built environment will be attempted to illustrate this interconnectivity. This section will focus on the Krugersdorp Gaol, its canteens and its gambling dens, all of which, it will be argued, were quintessentially transient structures that both grew out of the residents' own transience and helped to confirm their apathetic attitude towards the town. Before commencing with this analysis, it is necessary to briefly consider some theoretical work that can illuminate this process.

Cognitive Mapping, Environment Behavioural Systems and Urban Semiotics

---

[136] *ibid.,* p. 3. See also E. Katz, 'The Origins and Early Development of Trade Unionism in the Transvaal, 1902–1913', MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1973.
[137] *The Star*, 25 July 1889, 'Wholesale Exodus of Kaffirs: A Serious State of Affairs'.

Lynch's theory and research methodology that he calls 'cognitive mapping' contends that the city was 'legible' and that as we move through it, our senses construct a composite image that organises its various parts into a coherent pattern of recognisable symbols. The content of the image consists of physical elements that Lynch divides into path, edge, node, district and landmark.[138] The pattern that develops in the mind of the town dweller moving through the town provides a reassuring sense of familiarity and order to those who live in the urban environment. This pattern also helps town dwellers to find their way around the city and provides a sense of the aesthetic. [139]

Gottdiener and Lagopoulos take Lynch's work beyond mere 'mental mapping', to argue that 'intra-subjective pictures of the environment [form] the basis of urban behaviour...through the perception of the inhabitants'.[140] This implies that the perception of the urban environment by the town dweller actually influences their behaviour in that environment. Gottdiener and Lagopoulos suggest that urban dwellers do not merely adapt to an environment but also 'play a role in the production and use of the urban milieu through urban practices.'[141] The urban residents simultaneously make and are made by their urban environment. These writers see the city as a 'pseudo text' which can be 'read' although not as words in a book but rather as signs. Urban spaces are products of social processes and need to be understood in terms of these processes.

Rappaport contributes to this argument by positing a more 'pragmatic' type of semiotic model where environmental meaning is based on non-verbal communication or environmental behaviour systems (EBS). Rappaport suggests that the nonverbal dimensions of a culture – its clothing, village layouts, architecture, furniture, food, cooking, music, physical gestures, posture, etc. – all communicate meaning. He contends that the built environment provides important sets of cues that act as a

---

138 K. Lynch, *The Image of the City*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960, chapter 3, pp. 45-90.

139 *ibid.*, chapter 1, pp. 1-13.

140 M. Gottdiener and A. Lagopoulos, (eds.), *The City and the Sign: an Introduction to Urban Semiotics*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1986, p. 6.

141 *ibid*. p. 7.

mnemonic device and trigger appropriate responses. When ‘space organisation, building form, sign systems and visible activities coincide, meaning is much clearer and urban form much more legible and memorable’.[142]

This meaning is influenced by the observer's socio-cultural situation: the same city can be seen as clean, safe and quiet or dirty, dangerous and noisy depending upon whether one came from a metropolis or a rural area. It is important, furthermore, that the ‘signs’ in the built environment convey ‘messages’ that can be understood by a broad spectrum of the population. These insights drawn from cognitive mapping, environmental behaviour systems and urban semiology will now be applied to Krugersdorp Gaol, its pubs and its gambling dens.

The Krugersdorp Gaol

One of Krugersdorp's most important buildings, located in the very centre of the town, was its prison, known colloquially as the ‘Krugersdorp gaol’. As a symbol of authority in the town, its central position was meant to be ‘read’, in terms of urban semiotics, as a warning to those who would break the law that the ZAR's authority would arrest, try, convict and punish transgressors with prison sentences. The prison could easily be seen from most vantage points around the town. It was still prominent among the small number of buildings erected during the 1890s.

The prison was first planned in 1888,[143] and was built at some point before March 1890 when it was first mentioned in the local newspaper which used the occasion to report that three prisoners had escaped from the gaol.[144] Not a month later, ‘two Zulu murderers’ called Magaleni and Sigendi escaped from the same gaol and an offer of fifty pounds was made for their recapture.[145] Just a few weeks after that, a white

[142] A. Rappaport, *The Meaning of the Built Environment – a Nonverbal Communication Approach*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1990, p. 84.
[143] CAD, PW 166, File no. 35, *Contractenboek 1*, Bld. 16, 1888, reference to ‘het bouwen van Gouvernments kantoor een Gevangenis te Krugersdorp’.
[144] *The Star*, 4 March 1890, ‘Local and General’, ‘Recaptured’.
[145] *The Star*, 5 April 1890, ‘Local and General’, ‘Reward’.

highwayman and horse thief escaped as well.[146] Escapes from the local gaol occurred with metonymic regularity to the point that the prison no longer signified incarceration but rather as a farcical sieve that failed to keep dangerous prisoners locked up and contributed to a general atmosphere of insecurity and lawlessness in the town.

Although the prison was made of stone and mortar[147] it was described as 'crumbling' and as having in some 'places ... to be put on crutches'.[148] The outbuildings were made of zinc and were 'shoddily put together'. Apparently the prison had no foundation and was simply built on the bare earth, a fact that a local newspaper found so amazing that it commented that '…it would seem that the authorities deliberately intend to place temptation to escape in the way of convicts'.[149]

The position of the prison was a matter of considerable controversy. It was situated in the heart of the town itself, located, with some irony in Church Street, perhaps with the intention that the name of the street would invoke the influence of organised religion and God in the minds and hearts of the prisoners. Its position made the frequent escapes a matter of serious concern to the townsfolk who, on a number of occasions, demanded that the gaol be removed to a 'more isolated part'.[150]

Furthermore, the holding cell for prisoners who were awaiting trial apparently looked directly out onto the street and during visiting hours the relatives and friends would talk to the prisoners. A local newspaper said that it was unacceptable for the town's residents to be exposed to the sight of prisoners 'confined in a barbed-wire cage, [with] their friends outside on the sidewalk', on the 'public street at the corner of the lock-up'. This demonstrated 'no regard for the feelings of both prisoner and sympathiser'.[151] This intrusion of the public gaze into the private space of incarcerated prisoners did not

[146] CAD, SS 2320, R 5668/90, April 1890, statement by L. B Newman. The prisoner escaped on a horse in the possession of the police.
[147] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 19 March 1904, untitled. Two white prisoners escaped by 'scraping away the mortar between two stones with a nail'.
[148] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 4 February 1899, untitled.
[149] *ibid.*
[150] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 19 March 1904, untitled.
[151] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 4 February, 1905, untitled. It was recommended that a private visiting room be erected inside the gaol where prisoners could speak to visitors through an iron grating.

invoke fear of prison and a commitment to a lawful form of behaviour. Instead, people passing by would be angered at having to be exposed to this unwanted sight on their daily business. The public humiliation of the prisoners would evoke sympathy to the point that the legitimacy of their incarceration would be undermined.

In the Benthamite Panopticon the prisoners only see walls and bars, believing that they are constantly scrutinised by the gaze of the warder. This 'technology of power' causes the prisoners to 'internalise' this 'discipline' so that they effectively 'guard' themselves, as Foucault has famously argued.[152] In contrast, the prisoners in Krugersdorp gaol could both see out of the prison onto the street and be seen by people in the space outside the prison. In this way, the everyday goings on in the street would 'leak' into the prison as easily as prisoners apparently 'leaked' physically out of the prison, disrupting this process of internalisation. The prison's location in public space and its structure can be envisaged, in architectural terms, as the construction of an *oculus* onto public space, where the prisoners gaze outwards and do not believe themselves to be incarcerated.

Krugersorp's crumbling jail situated at the centre of the town would have made the inhabitants in this small town feel particularly vulnerable through their exposure to the prison and its inhabitants. Croll, in his study of the coal mining town of Merthyr Tydfil in South Wales, argues that the 'compact nature of the urban landscape in smaller towns meant that the boundary separating 'dangerous' spaces from those that were 'safe' was more difficult to define and maintain'.[153] Croll adds that in the construction of 'moral geographies' in Merthyr, it was generally agreed by 'civilised' urbanites that the 'main streets' should be the safest of all. Yet Krugersdorp's main street – Church Street – was one of the most dangerous streets in the town, and this must have 'seeped' into the urban consciousness of its inhabitants, further promoting a sense of violence and vulnerability.

The prison projected a 'message' of a permeable barrier that itself constituted a source

[152] See M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Allen Lane, 1977.

[153] A. Croll, 'Street Disorder, Surveillance and Shame: Regulating Behaviour in the Public Spaces of the Late Victorian British town', *Social History*, 24, 3, 1999, p. 255.

of threat, a signifier of potential and unpredictable violence. This offers one possible explanation why residents viewed their town as a violent 'negative space' or 'Devil's Dorp'. Krugersdorp's violence was not ameliorated by the presence of the prison and, indeed, its existence in such a compromised form may have contributed to this violence itself.

The local gaol was a failure; both in keeping prisoners incarcerated and as a sign of legitimate government authority that projected law and order. Instead it conveyed lawlessness and chaos to the residents of the town. As a structure housing male criminals and guarded by male warders, it had considerable potency as symbol of masculine identity, and so its 'message' of chaos and insecurity rather than law and order was an important failure that may have contributed to a masculine culture of violence rather than constraining it.

The Canteen

Another important structure or set of structures that contributed substantially to the relatively high levels of violence in the town was the canteen. Situated close to the mines in a 'ribbon-like' distribution on an east-west axis, were a large number of wood-and-iron drinking establishments including many 'taverns', 'inns', 'pubs', 'hotels' or 'restaurants'. These were all variations on the theme of the canteen as a place where people gathered to buy and consume liquor. Many of these did offer a bed and meals but their main purpose was to sell copious amounts of liquor to both black and white miners. So-called 'native stores', which catered specifically to Africans (dealing in so-called 'kaffir truck'), also sold liquor illicitly as did many of the 'kaffir eating houses'. A report to the Commissioner of Police remarked that the 'majority of the kaffer [sic] stores and canteens sell liquor to the natives'.[154]

In 1890 the manager of the Randfontein Estates gold mining company wrote to the government objecting in the strongest terms the number of liquor licences granted in the

[154] CAD, SP 881, File B, Report of Mr. Erwin, Krugersdorp to Commissioner of Police, Schutte, Pretoria, 5 April 1897.

area.[155] Twelve canteens had already been established in the Luipaard's Vlei mining region south of the town in the past year alone.[156] In the early 1890s black miners could procure a limited amount of alcohol upon presentation of a 'drink permit' ('drankbriefie') to the proprietor of a so-called 'coloured canteen' ('kleurling kantien').

As many writers have pointed out, this apparently generous concession to black miners was promoted by the mining industry as a means to attract black workers to the Rand as well as to retain them. These workers were known as 'target' workers. They worked to reach a 'target' of a certain amount of money earned – usually to pay off 'hut' and poll taxes. If they could be seduced into wasting their money on drink, they would then be forced to remain on the Rand's mines for longer contracts in order to reach their goal.[157] Some mine managers even provided liquor illegally in order to recruit and retain black mineworkers, a practice observed and condemned by a local, Dutch-language newspaper in Krugersdorp in 1896.[158]

An English-language Johannesburg-based newspaper carried an article as early as 1890 by a white 'observer' on the West Rand who condemned the issuing of liquor licences to 'so-called hotels between Johannesburg and Krugersdorp' because it promoted widespread drunkenness.[159] Such concerns were justified since many of the canteens that sold liquor legally to white miners through the front door also had a purpose-built back door to facilitate illicit liquor sales to black miners.[160] The same observer complained about

> ...the shocking scenes that occur in the vicinity is a disgrace to any civilised community. There is not the slightest doubt that the crowds of half-mad and drunken kaffirs you meet along the road obtain the drinks from these so-called 'hotels'.[161]

[155] CAD, SS 2356 R7158/90, J. W. Brooks, Randfontein Estates G.M. Co. to Hoofd van Mijnwezen, 19 April 1890.
[156] *The Star*, 29 April 1890, untitled.
[157] See, for example, van Onselen, *New Babylon*, especially Chapter 1, 'Randlords and Rotgut'.
[158] *Ons Volk*, 18 April 1896, 'De Drank Kwestie'.
[159] *The Star*, 31 March 1890, untitled
[160] *Ons Volk*, 7 November 1895, untitled.
[161] *The Star*, 31 March 1890, untitled.

Local mine owners began to have second thoughts by the late 1890s as they increasingly realised how the disadvantages of liquor consumption by their black miners outweighed the benefits. A labour contractor wrote to the mine captain of the Violet Mine in 1897 complaining that there were so many cases of drunkenness among their workers that he would not be able to meet his contract deadlines. With forty-five black workers on his books he struggled to produce thirty able-bodied workers on any given day. At the start of the two o'clock shift on a Tuesday he could produce just two of the expected fifteen workers. The reason was drink at the 'surrounding Bars in the neighbourhood', the labour contractor argued, noting also that '…scarcely a week goes by but one or more are seriously injured while fighting and quarrelling under the influence of drink'. He could account for no less than four deaths in the last three months as a direct result of 'liquor consumed by the Boys'.[162]

What is striking about the above complaint is that it was written a year after a 'total prohibition' clause had been introduced for all black urban residents in the ZAR in 1896 'Drank Wet' or Liquor Law.[163] Illicit liquor brewing, selling, and consumption became illegal but, instead of declining, it became a serious social problem for Krugersdorp in the late-1890s. Attempts to impose greater control over the movements of black mineworkers, through the introduction of supervised living spaces in the form of compounds, were vigorously resisted by white shopkeepers who condemned the introduction of the 'Kimberley System' of 'closed compounds' which closed off access to black clientele. Kimberley's commercial class had suffered economic ruin as a result, and this persuaded Krugersdorp's commercial class to fiercely resist any attempts to create a 'second Kimberley' in Krugersdorp. This undermined the solution that was most likely to succeed in curbing black miners' access to liquor.[164]

---

[162] CAD, SMI 10, 2780/97, Aitken and Gregory, Contractors to Mr. S. Searle, Mine Captain, Violet G. M. Co. Ltd., Krugersdorp, 11 August 1897.

[163] W. Scharf, 'Liquor, the State and Urban Blacks', in D. Davis and M. Slabbert (eds.), *Crime & Power in South Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1985, p. 49.

[164] This case was elegantly made by B. J. Viljoen, an influential Dutch-speaking *veldcornet* and later MP.

[165] *De Voortrekker*, 2nd July 1898, untitled.

[166] *The Star*, 16 October 1894, untitled.

[167] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 25 January 1899, untitled. See also *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 25 February 1899, untitled and *De Voortrekker*, 7 June 1899, untitled.

Krugersdorp's isolation and its small size meant that, unlike Johannesburg, it more closely matched the key features of a company town. Krugersdorp's middle class realised how vulnerable it was to any action that smacked of a company town and so was vehement in its resistance to the idea of a closed compound system. This vehemence may possibly have undermined the town's commitment to seeking ways to achieve the curtailment of black miners' access to liquor, further exacerbating the problems of violence associated with drinking.

Krugersdorp's isolation and the large, relatively empty spaces between the mines and on the many surrounding farms, gave the advantage to the nefarious illicit liquor sellers. The small numbers of local police meant that they were unable adequately to police the region. According to the Member of Volksraad for Krugersdorp, Mr Meyer, local policemen were also paid a lower wage than those in Barberton, Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp, despite much heavier duties. The 'ZARPS' were paid just thirteen pounds and one shilling per month, and needed to support their families on this meagre sum.[165] It was not unknown for 'impecunious policemen [to] borrow money from canteen keepers' which needless to say lay them open to bribery.[166] There were a number of cases of policemen in Krugersdorp who had accepted bribes to destroy evidence of illicit
liquor sales or who engaged in such nefarious activities themselves.[167]
The combination of rampant alcohol consumption with poor policing seems to have played a major role in cases of serious assault and murder in Krugersdorp throughout its first thirteen years. As early as 1888, a 'Hottentot' and a 'Zulu' at Roodepoort (which then fell under Krugersdorp's jurisdiction) were seriously injured. One of the victims had his 'skull considerably battered by knobkerries' and the four 'natives' who were arrested for this assault were reported to be the 'worse for liquor'.[168] In another case, in 1893, a

[168] *The Star*, 23 May 1888, untitled.
[169] *The Star*, 9 January 1893, untitled.

‘Shangaan’ named ‘England’ killed another black man by means of a blow to the head with a hatchet, at Klein Paardekraal in Krugersdorp. Both men had been drinking and the accused was found to have been so inebriated that a lesser charge of manslaughter was entered and he was given a sentence of just five years in jail.[169]

The Gambling Den

Apart from hard drinking, a common male pastime in mining towns like Krugersdorp was gambling and here, too, it is possible to discern obvious causes for violence. Black and white gamblers, for example, assaulted one other in the context of accusations of cheating or failure to pay gambling debts. It is easy to imagine how the frustration that came with a prolonged losing streak could provoke the hapless miners to violence. Krugersdorp’s poor policing and the sprawl of the mines, farms and liquor establishments, made illegal gambling on a large scale possible as well as helping to ensure that it could become a common practice that was carried out virtually with impunity.

Like drinking, gambling was an important aspect of masculine identity, and was a familiar sight whenever males gathered in exclusively male environments such as the early mining town. Success in gambling, like ‘holding one's liquor’, was considered an admirable masculine trait by white miners and black miners alike, and individuals quickly took up the vice with great enthusiasm (games of chance were, of course, common in indigenous African culture).

Hofmeyr has written about the ‘mining novel’ evoking this culture of the ‘Chance’ and ‘Lady Luck’, as pointed out at the outset of this Chapter. Early pioneer miners hoped to strike it rich by picking up the ‘big one’, a huge gold nugget that would enable them to live like kings for the rest of their lives. By the late 1890s, deep-level mining had made this dream redundant, but a taste for risk and a sense of hope still lingered and fed the gambling fever.

There were gambling dens scattered around Krugersdorp: in the town, in the location, situated near the mines and even in peri-urban allotments. These were, by nature, transient sites and the gambling den usually consisted of a house or a shop which was temporarily converted to a site where gambling could take place. This denotation of a space to meet the specific function of gambling shifted constantly as gamblers sought to keep one step ahead of the law.

Often a street corner would be used as it allowed the gamblers to keep a look out for approaching policemen. The street corner thus became a temporarily illegal gambling space that black and white miners were constantly prepared to abandon at a moment's notice. In a sense, the whole town may have been seen in the same terms by the miners living there – a place they came to hoping to make some money but one that they would leave in an instant if faced with a threat or a better opportunity elsewhere.

Gambling dens existed under disguise, pretending to be what they were not. A gambling den was thus a 'lie'. While there were newspaper reports of 'Native Monte Carlos' in the District Township, no actual casinos ever existed. Rather spaces would be temporarily converted for the purpose like the stable that was used by black gamblers as a temporary venue for illicit games of risk.[170] In another case, a house in the 'Native Location' became a temporary gambling den where four 'well-dressed natives' were found by police to be playing the 'three card trick' to the 'detriment financially of sundry coloured subjects'.[171]

The other key feature of the gambling den is that it was a violent place. Gamblers could become very angry if cheating was discovered and this could lead to severe, even fatal, violence. It is unlikely that one would pick this up in the court records as such cheats would not lay charges of assault out of fear of prosecution for gambling. That the victims of cheating could respond with violence is, however, suggested in the case of the Portuguese man and the 'Cape Boy' Jacob who used the 'Pea and Thimble trick' to

[170] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 25 February 1905, 'Native Monte Carlos'.
[171] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 3 November 1906, untitled.

defraud black miners at the Robinson Randfontein mine of thirty pounds.[172] These men were reported to have been 'held by outraged native boys' until police arrived to arrest them but it is not hard to imagine other incidents where those cheated would take the law into their own hands.

The gambling den was a denotation of a space serving a specific temporary function, and when one gambling den was raided another popped up elsewhere to attract a discreet knot of gamblers who heard by word of mouth the location of this space. Often there would be no trace of gambling in this space when it no longer served this function and police would not be able to find any evidence of gambling. It was a phantom space, existing in time only and then for only a moment. The transience of this space powerfully conveyed and mirrored the impermanence of the mining town to which few miners were committed and for whom it was merely a site for brief relaxation after a hard shift on the nearby mines. It was probably the most representative structure of the mining town, even more than the canteen or the prison, because, after all, what is a mining town but a gambling den writ large?

Conclusion

Krugersdorp was in many ways a typical mining boomtown, similar to such urban environments in Canada, Australia and the United States. While not much work has been done on a comparative analysis of such towns, it is clear that they shared much in common. These places were remote, isolated, violent and dominated by men who engaged in gambling, drinking and fighting as recreational activities. This transience meant that Krugersdorp's black and white miners were more inclined to violence as people were more likely to be anonymous faces in the crowd.

Miners who failed to make their 'big break' would take out their frustrations on their fellow miners. Violent attacks were fuelled by excessive alcohol consumption in bland, indistinguishable canteens scattered around the town and was brought to boil when gamblers felt cheated in the anonymous and transient gambling dens that popped up

[172] *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 19 September 1905, untitled.

from nowhere and disappeared just as quickly. Gambling dens and canteens were closely related masculine spaces which brought together strangers for fleeting periods of time where relationships could switch from tentative *camaraderie* towards brutal violence in a blink of an eye.

Once arrested for assault, these miners became prisoners in the Krugersdorp Gaol, a structure that was, in many ways, as ephemeral as the canteen and the gambling den. These, in turn, were situated in a transient mining boomtown, an ‘instant city’ that emerged from nowhere on the veld and which most miners expected to abandon, leaving only a shell as a ghost town. Krugersdorp, with its exceptionally fragmented reef and fluctuating ore deposits combined with its great distance from the coast and its substantial distance from the centre, was both more economically vulnerable and geographically isolated than either Johannesburg or the East Rand. Mines closed down there with alarming frequency throwing black and white miners out of work. The effects of poverty caused by layoffs and the isolation due to the distances involved; would have predisposed young men in and around Krugersdorp to violence to a greater extent than elsewhere on the Reef.

Moving from canteen to gambling den and often to jail, a series of transient masculine institutions, much as they moved from mine to mine and town to town, these miners were anonymous faces in the crowd. This anonymity, too, promoted violence as it made conviction less likely and meant that these miners could stand as symbols for all that the miners hated about their lives under a faceless mining capitalism that so abused and exploited them as faceless workers. Such was Krugersdorp. Such was the ‘Devil’s Dorp’.