

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

## HISTORY WORKSHOP

---



STRUCTURE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE MAKING OF APARTHEID

6 - 10 February 1990

AUTHOR: Clive Glaser

TITLE: WHEN ARE WE GOING TO FIGHT ?  
Tsotsis, Youth Politics and the PAC on the Witwatersrand  
during the 1950s and early 1960s

# AFRICANA LIBRARY

During the 1940s and most of the 1950s youths played very much a peripheral role in township politics on the Witwatersrand. The vast majority of urbanised African youths were absorbed to a lesser or greater extent into the politically unorganised and largely anti-social tsotsi subculture. Organisations such as the Congress Youth League drew its support from a numerically marginal stratum of youth based in secondary school. Youths associated with the tsotsi gang subculture tended to express their political and economic frustration through specific forms of subcultural style and ritual and through spontaneous violence directed against symbols of authority and subordination. It was only in the very late 1950s that the broader youth constituency started to become interested in formal political organisation. They were particularly drawn to the newly formed PAC which seemed to strike an appropriate chord of machismo and anti-establishment aggression. The PAC never recoiled from mobilising the volatile, violent and politically undisciplined tsotsi element. The period 1959-1960 represents an important transitional phase in South African youth politics, indeed, in anti-apartheid politics more generally. In the short period that the PAC operated legally, it succeeded in drawing substantial numbers of the broader urban youth constituency into formal political organisation for the first time. Although the 1960s witnessed massive state repression and apparent political acquiescence, a new style of highly militant, youth-dominated opposition politics was incubating in the rapidly sprouting Bantu Education schools. Despite the banning and forced exile of the PAC, black consciousness ideology retained tremendous prestige in African youth politics.

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

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

# I

By the late 1930s urban youths were noticeably absent from the mainstream of African resistance politics. In 1938 H. W. Nxumalo, writing for the Bantu World, lamented: "Why can't youth organise themselves to form their own movements? Why can't youth be represented in the All African Convention, in the African National Congress and also in other movements?" Youths, he complained, were idle and lazy. (1) Township teenagers, generally unemployed and out of school, were increasingly attracted to an expanding gang subculture. By the early- to mid 1940s youths who

associated with these gangs, or youths who identified with the style and behaviour of these gangs, were generically called "tsotsis". Some distinction, however, has to be drawn between the hardcore gang element and the broader youth subculture. Every township had several hardcore criminalised tsotsi gangs, many of them heavily armed. The number of youths involved in these violent gangs was substantial in itself (though virtually impossible to quantify accurately) but it is safe to say that the overwhelming majority of city-bred male African youths were part of the broader subculture. The subculture incorporated the bigger, organised criminal gangs shading through to small streetcorner defense and friendship networks who would gamble and smoke dagga together. The whole subculture, however, shared a common style code, language and status structure.(2)

In 1944 the Congress Youth League was established to mobilise the urban African youth constituency and radicalise the ANC from within. But, although the CYL established a substantial support base within a number of secondary schools, the organisation never really identified tsotsis as a potential support base. Tsotsis, in turn, were not attracted to the CYL's rather elitist style of politics.(3) Throughout the 1940s, then, apart from an element of educated and somewhat older youths drawn to the CYL, township youths kept their distance from political organisation. Reflecting this pattern, an indignant Bantu World reader wrote in 1946:

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

interests, youths are conspicuous by their absence.

Another reader expressed similar views in 1950:

One wonders how much influence Congress has over African youths. I have in mind the vast numbers of young Africans between eighteen and thirty years. As far as I can see, only the older people take an interest in African political organisation.

... It is true that we have the Congress Youth League today, but does it enjoy the support of the entire youth?

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

For most of the 1950s tsotsis remained distant from political organisations. It was extremely unusual to find people less than twenty years old attending ANC rallies.(5) It was always "older people" who attended meetings at Freedom Square in Sophiatown. One ex-tsotsi informant, Henry Miles, comments: "Only the fathers and the grandfathers used to go to meetings but none of the youngsters. They weren't interested."(6) According to another ex-tsotsi, Godfrey Moloi, politicians seemed very remote, highly educated and respectable.(7) The gangs got on with their own subcultural rituals and inter-gang rivalries. "We weren't interested in politics; we were interested in making love," says ex-American, "Peggy Belair".(8) "Politics in those days," observes Peter Magubane, "was not a child's game. It was for the adults. It was not like today; teenagers never ventured into politics."(9)

Although ANC members tended to understand the socio-economic context of the tsotsi phenomenon and blame "the system" rather than tsotsi individuals, they generally found tsotsi culture alien and threatening during the 1940s and 1950s. They recoiled

from the violence, irresponsibility and ill-discipline of the tsotsis. Nevertheless, there were a number of ANC activists, particularly in Sophiatown, who made a great effort to "rehabilitate" individual tsotsis and draw them into constructive political activity. Noteworthy here are Robert Resha, P. Q. Vundla, Siwisa and Nelson Mandela. According to Don Mattera, "these people really cared". They would try to get the street thugs to read about politics and channel their energies into organisational activity. Although their success was limited, a number of tsotsis did become involved in the local ANC branch. Mattera himself was such an example. Resha and Mandela were easily accepted by gangsters because they were physically imposing personalities. Resha had many underworld connections and Mandela was a skilful boxer. They were not entirely culturally alien to the tsotsis.(10) It is important to draw a distinction between mobilising and rehabilitating. With hardly any exceptions, only individual youngsters who effectively shed their tsotsi identity were drawn into ANC structures. The tsotsis, as a constituency, were regarded more as a menace to the community than as a potential support base. It is not surprising, therefore, that the ANC often supported and participated in local civil guard movements aimed primarily at wiping out the tsotsi scourge.(11)

## II

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

During the 1950s, urban youths became eligible to register and take out passes at the age of sixteen (during the 1940s the registration age was still eighteen). Registration, apart from being an infuriatingly complicated and often humiliating bureaucratic procedure, often exposed rather dodgy urban status. The result was that numerous youths chose not to register even though you were considered a criminal without a "dompas". (12) Even with a pass, a city-bred youth could be endorsed out of town if he failed to find employment. In 1957, a Mr Matshiqi of the

Bantu Lads' Hostel remarked at a meeting of the Johannesburg Planning Council for Non-European Social Welfare that there were "hundreds of youngsters who were forced by registration laws to become fugitives." He went on to say that "it is boys such as these that start gangs." (13) Also during 1957, the Golden City Post ran an expose on the Elandsdoorn and Pilansberg youth labour camps. The writer explained the precariousness of a township youth's urban status.

... A boy leaves school with or without his parents' consent (there is no compulsory schooling) and obtains a work-seeking permit which gives him seven days to find a job.

If he is unsuccessful his permit is renewed for a further seven days, with a warning that if he does not find work this time his permit may or will be withdrawn.

Often it is withdrawn, but some are given a further chance of one or two weeks.

Once the permit is withdrawn, the boy cannot look for work. Then the boy, discouraged, stays away from the Pass Office and roams the streets until he is picked up by the police as a "vagrant".

Or he may go back to the Pass Office to try again and gets "arrested" when his reference book is examined.

In an earlier extract the writer comments:

Thus the mere failure by a minor to produce a pass or to show that he is employed or a scholar, becomes proof of delinquent tendencies.

Such a boy is convicted for vagrancy and sent to a youth camp, in many cases without the knowledge of the parents. (14)

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

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

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



always been like that." (15)

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

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

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

It was the violence inherent in the tsotsi subculture which most decisively made it irreconcilable with ANC politics. Tsotsis found ANC passivity baffling, even undignified; the ANC, in turn, recoiled from tsotsi violence and volatility. Tsotsis regarded police as the universal enemy; they were prepared to fight with police physically. Throughout the 1950s in particular there were numerous incidents of tsotsi-police violence, usually not related to a directly political issue. In 1950, for instance, a riot broke out in Newclare when police were brought in to deal with illegal possession of liquor. "Young hooligans" were reported to have waged a long battle through the afternoon and night mainly against police.(18) During the Sophiatown removals there were a number of violent engagements between street gangs and police.(19) In 1958 Moroka tsotsis even invaded the local police station to release a fellow gang member who had been arrested for sexual assault. The police manning the station only just managed to lock themselves in a room and escape out the back way before the tsotsis smashed down the locked door. The arrested youth was freed.(20) Don Mattera, in a rather over-romanticised but nevertheless revealing way, recalls his impatience as a gangster during the 1950s with ANC non-violence.

Young people... When you saw a cop, you saw an enemy... The politicians had a nice way of approaching things. They looked for memoranda, they had petitions, they talked to you... Our memorandum was a knife and a gun. We petitioned ourselves in blood.

.... As a thug, I couldn't see why they were allowing the police to run ramshod over them, why there was no physical resistance other than the thumb raised in the air, the khaki uniforms marching in the streets and singing their ditties.

.. I remember going to my first meeting in Becker Street

[ANC members were trying to 'rehabilitate' Mattera by the late 1950s], hearing all these people chatting away and arguing. And I remember thinking: 'When are these people going to fight? When are they going to fight?' (21)

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

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

Even if they were not actively and openly recruited, tsotsis proved to be extremely useful allies, particularly in boycotts. They would provide an element of physical coercion which the ANC, with its principled rejection of violence in the 1950s, would shy

away from itself. Thus during tram and bus boycotts they would often prevent passengers from boarding.(27) During the potato boycott, Mattera recalls that his gang would smash the windows of fish and chips shops that failed to adhere to the boycott.(28) Possibly the most effective tsotsi intervention came in the Bantu Education boycott. In 1955 the manager of the Johannesburg NEAD reported on an incident in Western Native Township in which a thirteen year old was stabbed by a gang of youths ranging in age from nine to fifteen years old. "...The stabbed lad refused to take part in the school boycott; he was a good boy and was thus set upon by the criminal element."(29) According to Bonner, a rehabilitated ex-tsotsi who became a key activist in the Benoni branch of the Congress Youth League used his old gang contacts to draw tsotsis into the Bantu Education boycott. The Benoni tsotsis were extremely effective in preventing schoolchildren from attending school.(30) This appears to be the only clear example of sustained and orchestrated gang involvement in ANC activity. Interestingly, the Bantu Education boycott was more sustained and successful in Benoni than in all the other urban centres.(31)

In Sophiatown the fiercely territorial youth gangs and the ANC found itself united in opposition to the removals. This was despite the fact that the ANC had a history of support for the local Civil Guard movement whose main concern it was to eradicate tsotsi gangsterism.(32) The gangs sensed that if their turf were taken away from them they would be powerless and, ultimately, disintegrate. Throughout the 1930s, particularly in the late 1950s, gangsters were involved in ongoing street battles with

police and removal teams.(33) Although the ANC understood the importance of the youth gang constituency in its struggle against the removals, the organisation had its work cut out to restrain youths from armed resistance. In 1953, when the Sophiatown removals had become a very real prospect, a revealing lead story appeared in the Bantu World. The large headline read "MACHINE GUNS, RIFLES, REVOLVERS HIDDEN IN SOPHIATOWN" with the sub-head "The People Follow the Congress Lead in Non-Violence".

Minister Swart was right. There is an arsenal of machine-guns, rifles and revolvers in the Western Areas. There are people who are prepared to use them but the African National Congress will have nothing to do with them.

For the past couple of weeks, Sophiatown has been a battleground for the souls of the youth.

The violent section have demanded action.

But Congress has fought for non-violence and the people have followed its lead.

The battle was fought again over the weekend.

Young men poured into Sophiatown from all over the Reef.

They gathered in secret in many rooms. The wordy battle raged for hours.

They demanded violent action to check the Removal.

Congress people pleaded with them to stick to the non-violent line.

Meanwhile big forces of police patrolled the streets, the railway stations of the Western Areas, the bus stops and the street corners.

The weekend passed without violence.(34)

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

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

### III

Powerfully influenced by the "Africanist" ideas of Anton Lembede and A. P. Mda, the ANC Youth League was established in 1944 with the specific aim of radicalising the ANC from within. The CYL effectively seized control of the ANC at the annual conference of the organisation in Bloemfontein in 1947. The CYL's Programme of Action was officially adopted. By the early 1950s the CYL leadership had moved into the leadership positions of the ANC. Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, amongst others, rose to prominence at this time. Although a certain organisational dynamism was injected into the ANC, many of the principles of the original CYL were overturned, particularly the rejection of alliances with sympathetic whites, coloureds, Indians and Communists. Once the CYL had achieved its objective of radicalising the ANC to an extent and the leadership structures had shifted, the original CYL lost direction. Its policies became indistinguishable from those of the parent body and it simply became the wing of the ANC which concentrated on recruiting younger people. But a simmering tension gradually emerged within the CYL between those who were loyal to the parent body and those

who saw themselves as loyal to the original principles of the CYL. A faction within the CYL, based largely in the Orlando East branch under the leadership of Potlako Leballo, felt that the ANC was out of touch with the youth constituency. The CYL, this faction felt, had to continue its task of radicalising the ANC from within. On the one hand, it argued that the ANC should not cooperate with non-Africans and all government-linked "puppet institutions" such as Advisory Boards. On the other hand, it advocated a more assertive mobilisation of the volatile youth constituency. Leballo was expelled from the ANC and the Orlando East branch was suspended. Leballo and his followers were considered to be irresponsible and racially exclusivist. Many Youth Leaguers rallied around the charismatic Leballo and a major breakaway, which led to the emergence of the PAC, was precipitated. In April 1959 the PAC was officially inaugurated under the leadership of Robert Sobukwe, a highly intellectual and charismatic follower of the old Lembede school. Sobukwe had made a tremendous impact in the couple of years he had spent on the Witwatersrand since his move from Standerton.(35)

By August 1959, only three months after its inauguration, the PAC claimed a signed up membership of almost 25 000 of which roughly half came from the Transvaal.(36) The PAC was essentially an organisation for young men. Gail Gerhart emphasises this point.

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

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

If any single group could be described as distinctively PAC in orientation, it would be the broad category of Africans known in some contexts as "location boys" and in others as tsotsis. ... Usually more educated than lower class workers, yet unable to break into the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie, they are scornful of the low status and low paid employment available to them, and engage in rackets, con games and thefts of every description. Those who are unemployed may group into gangs of juvenile delinquents... and participate in crimes of violence. ... They are "embittered, frustrated, aggressive, non-conformist, suggestible, and prone to violence," [Kuper] notes, and "they reject the polished behaviour of the educated elite," the so-called "excuse me" type of older educated urban African. With little to lose materially and much to gain from the removal of job and wage discrimination, they are a politically volatile element and one which was drawn strongly to the PAC.(41)

The PAC immediately struck the right chord with the tsotsi youth. Tsotsis were particularly attracted to the PAC's emphasis on "action" and confrontation. Although the organisation officially distanced itself from violence there was an unstated admiration for violent resistance. According to Gerhart "there seemed to be an assumption that violence was inevitable, or even desirable. Unlike the ANC, for which non-violence was a recognised policy, the PAC pointedly left its options open regarding methods of struggle."(42) The PAC rhetoric made more sense to the aggressively anti-establishment tsotsi subculture. Although tsotsis did not necessarily identify with the intellectual concept of Africanisation, they identified with the PAC scorn for

Africans who imitated the white middle class. The PAC "shared the same sense of urgency and frustration, the same explosive anger as the younger generation." (43)

Whereas the ANC acted within a scrupulously legal and respectable framework, the PAC were not averse to breaking the law and offending the white liberal establishment. Short of finances, the PAC would quietly encourage tsotsis to steal equipment for producing leaflets or steal a car to further organisational objectives. (44) This made sense to tsotsis.

The PAC also tapped into a powerful machismo strain within the tsotsi subculture. Young women were horrifically objectified and abused and systematically pushed to the periphery of the subculture. (45) The PAC did not see a role for women in political resistance. Its membership was almost exclusively male; it considered a woman's league unnecessary. (46) This duplicated the pattern of urban youth gang membership and, once again, it made sense to tsotsis.

During 1959 and 1960 the PAC recruited actively not only amongst school children but also amongst street gangs. This pattern of recruitment had already started to emerge around 1957 and 1958 in Orlando. Marginalised Africanists in the Orlando branch of the CYL, who would later become PAC members, were having an impact amongst tsotsis in Orlando prior to the formation of the PAC. Two of my informants recall the work of an activist by the name of Ben Mapisa, a boxing trainer who worked out at a gymnasium in Orlando. (47) He was a strong man who carried a gun around with



him. He was respected by the tsotsis of Orlando. He was a "capable and intelligent" man who attempted to politicise the gangs. Initially a member of the Orlando CYL, he became "a scout" for the PAC. Mapisa apparently recruited young men at his gymnasium. "While people were practising boxing, they would be holding a caucus".(48) Mapisa would also call gangs together and speak to them; he would try to redirect their energy towards politics. He would tell them to identify the white establishment as the enemy rather than other gangs. He was apparently particularly successful in recruiting members of the Otto Town and Boom Town gangs.(49)

Robert Sobukwe was himself an extraordinarily powerful personality. He was charismatic, "dynamic" and influential, particularly in Orlando.(50) Like Mapisa, his personal influence was established amongst the township youth prior to the establishment of the PAC, while still a member of the ANC.(51) Norris Nkosi, an Orlando tsotsi during the 1950s, recalls the huge impact of Sobukwe amongst the youth during 1959 and 1960. Sobukwe used to address numerous meetings and young men would flock to listen to him speak. Although scholars were probably the biggest constituency of the PAC, the organisation clearly drew in tsotsi youth on a large scale. PAC activists went "scouting on the weekends". They would tell gangsters: "Stop molesting people and come and listen to this gospel."(52) "In the little time [the PAC] had," observed Stan Matjuwadi, "it was phenomenal how the youth responded to Sobukwe's call."(53)

As early as 1950, it seems clear that the South African state feared the potential politicisation of the tsotsi constituency. The state recognised tsotsi gangs as a major social control issue and started to postulate about the devastating consequences should this violent and volatile constituency become politicised.(54) In a recent paper, Jon Hyslop suggests that the Bantu Education system was set up largely as a solution to the problems of social control of the urban youth. Not only did the state want to curb the massive crime levels in the townships but it also feared the potential political mobilisation of the lumpen youth.(55) The urban youth, particularly the tsotsi element, appeared to be the primary target of the post-Sharpesville State of Emergency. In April 1960 the Golden City Post reported the following:

Systematically and with massive forces of heavily-armed men, the police have raided their way through most of the densely-populated African areas in South Africa during the past week. They are not raiding for 'passes', the deputy commissioner of Police for the Witwatersrand, Colonel J.C. Lemmer, told POST - they are trying to clean up "out-of-works, criminals and loafers." (56)

"Out-of-works, criminals and loafers" were almost invariably synonymous with tsotsis in administrative jargon. In July 1960 the Golden City Post ran a series of articles about thousands of youths being arrested on the Witwatersrand. On July 17 it was reported that about 15 000 youths were being held in the giant Modder B jail, a converted disused mine compound which the government purchased from ERPM in December 1959. Youths were arriving from throughout the Reef, from as far afield as Pretoria, Krugersdorp, Springs and Nigel. Every day, it was reported, about 100 youths were released after having been

thoroughly screened while about the same number were being taken in every day. Many of the "released" were sent to farm jails or returned to the reserves where they, or their parents, were born. Youths were generally detained under Section 4 of the Emergency Regulations. Some of them had spent up to two months in Modder B without being charged.(57) A Post writer described the goings-on at Modder B vividly.

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

It was reported that a very large proportion of the approximately 14 000 Modder B detainees were under the age of 21. Common criminals and pass offenders were apparently separated from the political detainees.(58) It seems clear that this massive clampdown on township youth, although not always directed at people who were overtly political, was closely linked to the political control objectives of the State of Emergency. The timing of this clampdown could also suggest that the state perceived the extent to which the PAC had penetrated the wider youth constituency.

In late March and April of 1960 a new wave of tsotsi gang violence swept through the townships. Waves of tsotsi violence were common to the townships but, for the first time, a political dimension crept into tsotsi activity.(59) During the chaotic early days of the State of Emergency the tsotsi's criminal and political activities were intertwined and ambiguous. On 3 April the Golden City Post, under the frontpage headline "BOY THUGS

TAKE OVER from political leaders in the Townships", ran the following story:

Vicious young thugs cashing in on the crisis have virtually taken over the townships in the past few days.

In savage outbursts of violence they have in the past week been responsible for hundreds of assaults, at least one murder of an African cop, and scores of rapes.

... Taking advantage of the confusion arising out of the crisis, and the fact that many houses have been left unprotected, they have used Pan Africanist and A.N.C. slogans as 'fronts' for their activities as they continue to rob and pillage on the majority of the Reef's larger towns.

... Although usually well-behaved, the high school boys from an Orlando school were involved in various stonings and attacks.

They later told POST that that they had been joined by the now notorious Berlins and Apaches of Orlando East.

Apparently on the stay-away day these gangs forgot that they were enemies in a common purpose of assaulting innocent people.

POST learned that most of the thugs responsible for this terror are loafers who do not possess reference books... (60)

According to the article, the offices of the Peri-Urban Health Board in Alexandra were attacked by a gang of tsotsis called the Red Knife Boys. They attempted to burn the building down. The Peri-Urban Health Board was not only a symbol of state authority but an institution which dedicated itself to wiping out the tsotsi menace in Alexandra. A crack police unit operated under its authority which the tsotsis called the "Peri-Urbans".

What emerged in the wake of PAC mobilisation, Sharpeville and the declaration of the State of Emergency was the first foreshadowing of today's so-called "Pom-tsotsis". Thousands of tsotsis had been politically mobilised and gave their allegiance to a political organisation. But they were extremely difficult to control. Non-violence, accountability and coordinated political action were alien concepts to the tsotsi subculture. The situation got

completely out of hand during the State of Emergency when numerous leaders who were respected and admired by the tsotsi cadres were detained. All hope of placing these angry and brutalised street gangs under some kind of political discipline and accountability fell away. The gangs saw no contradiction between their usual criminal activities and their new political motivations. Even the PAC, who had recruited these youths so enthusiastically, were forced to condemn the post-Sharpeville activities of the tsotsis. A PAC spokesman, William Jalohe, stated: "We strongly condemn the fact that these irresponsible youths are using violence on innocent people." (61)

The PAC and, to a lesser extent, the ANC once it had adopted the armed struggle, retained their large support base amongst the urban youth after the organisations were banned. Once the organisations went underground and dozens of members were given long jail sentences, organisational coherence disintegrated altogether but interest in Pogo and Mkonto we Sizwe remained high amongst the urban youth. (62) Throughout the 1960s, a steady trickle of youths made the decision to leave the country and join the exile movements. (63) According to Mattera, ex-gangsters joined the exiled ANC in large numbers during the 1960s. Twenty to thirty members of his old Vultures gang, he claims, became active members of the ANC including George Hutton, Hosi Tsile and Bernard Komane. The influx of ex-gangsters into the ANC, he adds, influenced the ANC from within and moved the organisation in a more violent and militant direction. They reinforced the policy of armed struggle. "The violent arena was not new to the

gangster. He could kill now for a more worthwhile cause." (64)

Of course, those that joined the exile movements represented a tiny fraction of the urban youth. For the bulk of urban youth in the 1960s the key political and social terrain shifted from the streets to the Bantu Education schools. Bantu Education involved a dramatic lowering of educational standards but it also dramatically increased the availability of schooling for Africans. Hyslop shows that Bantu Education played a major role in bringing about the political quiescence of the 1960s, despite simmering grievances against the system. (65) Nevertheless, the new education system started to forge a new unity, a common set of experiences and grievances amongst the township youth. Mass schooling helped to weld together the fractured and internally antagonistic youth constituency. Although the 1960s was essentially a quiescent decade, then, the groundwork was being established for the eruption of 1976. The youth constituency was starting to cohere and loose political allegiances and ideologies, particularly black consciousness, had taken root.

## NOTES

- (1) Bantu World (BW), 7 May 1938, "The Problems of Youth" by H.W. Nxumalo.
- (2) For more detail on the socio-economic background of the tsotsi subculture, see Glaser, C, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League 1944-1955", Perspectives in Education, 10, 2, Summer 1988/1989; Bonner, P, "Family, Crime and Political Consciousness on the East Rand 1939-1955", ISAS, Volume 13, No 1, 1988; Hyslop, J, "'A destruction is coming'. Bantu Education as response to social crisis", Social Transformation Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 21 April 1989. The introductory chapter of my forthcoming MA thesis will deal with these issues more thoroughly. For more detail on style and a discussion on "tsotsiism" as a subculture, see Glaser, C, "Anti-Social Bandits. Culture, Hegemony and the Tsotsi Subculture on the Witwatersrand during the 1940s and 1950s", unpublished Masters Seminar paper, Department of History, University of the Witwatersrand, August 1988.
- (3) For a more detailed look at CYL recruitment and organisational strategies, see Glaser, C, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League 1944-1955".
- (4) BW 17 August 1945, Readers' Forum, letter entitled "Bantu Youth Rebuked" by W.B. Mkhasebe of Cleveland; BW, Readers' Forum, "Congress and African Youth" by Simon A. Moloabi of Thaba 'Nchu.
- (5) Interviews: Godfrey Moloi 26/3/88; Peter Magubane 7/9/88; Gertrude Thwala 21/9/88; Morris Nkosi 25/9/88; Peggy Belair (real name Ephraim Sinnie) 2/6/89; Henry Miles 10/4/89; Arthur "McCoy" Mdialose 20/4/89; "Babes" Mbauli and Ben Ngwenya 27/4/89. See also interview, Don Mattera, interviewed by Tom Lodge, Johannesburg 1979.
- (6) Miles 11/4/89
- (7) Moloi 26/3/88
- (8) Magubane 7/9/88
- (9) Peggy Belair 2/6/89
- (10) Interview, Don Mattera 5/6/88
- (11) Glaser, C, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League"; Interviews, Ntatho Motlana 2/9/86 and Jacob Mhlapho ...
- (12) Intermediary Archives Depot, West Rand Administration Board (IAD WRAB), file 219/3, Minutes of the first AGM of the Johannesburg Planning Council for Non-European Social Welfare, 26 March 1957.
- (14) Golden City Post (GCP) 1 September 1957 and 3 September 1957.
- (15) Interview, Stanley Motjuwadi 29/9/88
- (16) See Glaser, C, "Anti-Social Bandits".
- (17) Motjuwadi 29/9/88
- (18) BW 4 February 1950; see also BW 11 March 1956
- (19) Mattera 1979; Interview, Don Mattera 10/7/88; see also BW 19 February 1953.
- (20) IAD WRAB 351/2, Letter from the Senior Superintendent of Moroka/Tlhabu to the Manager, Johannesburg NEAD, 22 January 1958.
- (21) Mattera 10/7/88

(22) UG 47/1950, Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into Acts of Violence Committed by Natives at Krugersdorp, Newlands, Randfontein and Newclare, Chaired by J. deVilliers Louw, 1950; BW 4 February 1950; William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Church of the Province of South Africa Library (CPSA), AD 1502, South African Institute of Race Relations Archive (SAIRR), Quintin Whyte Papers, Bb2, Paper delivered by Quintin Whyte entitled "Delinquent Urban Youth: Recent Developments", undated (c1953); see also Glaser, C, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League".

(23) See Glaser, C, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League" for a more detailed examination of the relationship between the CYL and Youth gangs.

(24) Magubane 7/9/88; Mattera 10/7/88

(25) Mattera 1979

(26) Interviews: Godfrey Pitje 23/9/86; Es'kia Mphahlele 29/9/86; Ntato Motlana 2/10/86

(27) Pitje 23/9/86; Motjuwadi 29/9/88; Mattera 10/7/88

(28) Mattera 1979

(29) IAD WRAB 351/1, Minutes of Conference attended by Deputy Commissioner of the SAP Witwatersrand, Area Officers, members of the NEAD Committee and members of the Advisory Board, Johannesburg 14 December 1955.

(30) See Bonner, P, "Family, Crime and Political Consciousness".

(31) See GCE 17 April 1955. Of the 25 schools participating in the Bantu Education boycott on the Reef at the time of this report, 11 were in Benoni.

(32) Motlana 2/10/86

(33) Mattera 10/7/88

(34) BW 19 February 1953, p1 lead story

(35) For a more detailed account of the CYL in the 1950s and the emergence of the Pan Africanist movement, see Gerhart, G M, Black Power in South Africa, University of California Press, 1978, pp 138-172 and Glaser, C, "Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League 1944-1955", Honours Dissertation, Department of History, University of the Witwatersrand, October 1986, pp 9-58.

(36) The Africanist, November 1959

(37) Gerhart, G M, Black Power in South Africa, p 221

(38) Mbawu and Ngwenya 27/4/89

(39) Motjuwadi 29/9/88

(40) Nkosi 25/9/88

(41) Gerhart, Black Power, pp 223-224. She quotes Kuper, L. An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class and Politics in South Africa, Yale University Press, 1969, p420.

(42) Gerhart, Black Power, p220

(43) Gerhart, Black Power, p 222

(44) See Gerhart, Black Power, p 225

(45) For a description and analysis of tsotsi machismo, see Glaser, C, "The Mark of Zorro: Masculinity and Gender Relations in the Tsotsi Subculture on the Witwatersrand during the 1940s and 1950s", History Workshop Conference, University of the Witwatersrand, February 1990.

(46) See Gerhart, Black Power, p 221

(47) Interview, Queeneth Ndaba 15/7/88; Nkosi 25/9/88

(48) Nkosi 25/9/88



- (49) Ndaba 15/9/88. According to Nkosi, Manisa faded from politics when he became "disillusioned" and joined the ZCC.
- (50) Peggy Belair 2/6/89; Nkosi 25/9/88; Motjuwadi 29/9/88; Mbawu and Ngwenya 27/4/89. See also Gerhart, Black Power, pp 182-193.
- (51) Mbawu and Ngwenya 27/4/89
- (52) Nkosi 25/9/88
- (53) Motjuwadi 29/9/88.
- (54) See the deVilliers Louw Report, UG 47/1980.
- (55) Hyslop, J. "A Destruction is Coming", p 2
- (56) GCP 17 April 1960
- (57) GCP 17 July 1960. See also GCP 3 July 1960; 10 July 1960 and 7 August 1960.
- (58) GCP 31 July 1960
- (59) See GCP 3 April 1960, p 1; GCP 15 May 1960, p 10; GCP 7 August 1960.
- (60) GCP 3 April 1960, p 1
- (61) GCP # April 1960, p 1
- (62) Nkosi 25/9/88; Mattera 10/7/88; Interview, Lynette Leeuw 23/9/88; Motjuwadi 29/9/88
- (63) Nkosi 25/9/88; Mattera 10/7/88; Leeuw 23/9/88
- (64) Mattera 10/7/88
- (65) Hyslop, J. "A Destruction is Coming"