

THE PERFORMANCE OF TSOTSI GANGS AND THE CAUSES LEADING TO THEIR FORMATION IN MANGAUNG, BLOEMFONTEIN 1945-1976

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1. INTRODUCTION

Globally there is an intensified concern with those forms of illegal violence and predation, commonly known as 'street crime', committed by youths acting in concert. It is widely held that the numbers of delinquent youths involved in crimes of violence and theft have increased, that the kinds of crimes they commit have become more serious, and that the age of offenders has become lower. Although such contentions are supported by evidence, knowledge of the actual character of youthful involvement in serious crime remains fragmentary and imprecise.¹

References to juvenile delinquency in England, Europe and the United States of America are ample. Many of the major cities of South Africa, Africa and Asia are dominated by impoverished migrant areas where crime and delinquency abound, attracting the attention of social scientists. A Milner and W Clifford reflect in their writings on the several studies of juvenile delinquency in Africa. However, the black juvenile population of South Africa remained largely outside the scope of researchers, probably because of the presence of a mainly white sociological research tradition, coinciding with the country's previous policy of racial separation favouring the socio-economic and political issues of the white population at the cost of the voteless black people.²

In South Africa knowledge is particularly scanty on crimes committed by black youths acting in concert - the area of collective youth crime. HJ Venter called the

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¹ D Shichor and DH Kelly, **Critical issues in juvenile delinquency** (Lexington Books, Massachusetts, 1980), p. 115.
² **Ibid.**; A Milner (ed.), **African penal systems** (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1969); W Clifford, **An introduction to African criminology** (Oxford University Press, London, 1974). Compare the source list in G Cronje et al, **Die jeugoortreder in die gemeenskap** (Unisa, Pretoria, 1976), pp. 353-76. For a look at the historical development of juvenile delinquency in the USA, consult JF Carey and PD McAnany, **Introduction to juvenile delinquency: youth and the law** (Prentice Hall, London, 1964), chapter 4.

actors in this area tsotsis acting concertedly in gangs. It is the aim of this article to look into the activities of the tsotsi gangs which operated in the township of Mangaung, but more specifically into the causes leading to the formation of these gangs and the situation of the black juvenile delinquent in this respect, for the years 1945 to 1976. The problem of juvenile delinquency among urban blacks in South Africa appears to be closely related with tsotsi gangs. Research in the 1960's indicate that at least 51% of the delinquents were members of tsotsi gangs, and the percentage could well be higher. Gangs are based on the dominant terms of delinquency such as conflict, criminal, drug-using and social gangs. This article also aims to determine which form was dominant for Mangaung. The example set by HJ Venter and GM Retief who freely refer to black tsotsi gangs in a South African urban context as numerous, violent and predatory, is followed. The possibility of imitation of the action portrayed in literature and the cinema renders tsotsi gangs in many respects similar to gangs in the U.S.A.³

The tsotsi gang is a self-formed association of peers, consisting of approximately 12 to 30 members, bound together by mutual interests and operating under a leader who exercises strong control. The members act in concert to achieve a specific purpose which generally includes the conduct of illegal activity and control over a particular territory, facility or type of enterprise. Such gangs may even have a secret language, favour a certain dress and boast their own name. Gangs are usually at war with other gangs, family life, the school, the police or other governing institutions like the local authority. The misdeeds committed by gangs are usually acts of defiance.⁴ To what extent gang activities in Mangaung adhered to this definition will be examined in this article.

The ages of 11 to 17 generally appear to be important in the formation of gangs. Most tsotsis are between the ages of 14 and 19 when they first appear in court for crimes. A considerable proportion of offenders convicted in South African courts each year are juveniles below the age of 20 years. The South African Bureau for Statistics classifies juveniles as being 7 to 16 years of age and juvenile adults as 17 to 20 years of age.⁵ LF Freed in his study on crime in South Africa concluded that juveniles of all races aged 16 and under are more prone to non-serious crimes against property. Such crimes include theft of bicycles, poultry, common theft of items and money valued at less than R50,00, trespassing on private property and

³ HJ Venter en GM Retief, **Bantoe-jeugmisdaad, 'n krimineel-sosiologiese ondersoek van 'n groep naturellejeugoortreders in die Boksburgse landdrostdistrik** (HAUM, Pretoria, 1960), pp. 262-3; WS Saunders, **Juvenile delinquency, causes, patterns and reactions** (Holt, Reinhardt and Winston, New York, 1981), p. 210; Schichor and Kelly, chapter 7.

⁴ Venter and Retief, pp. 261-2.

⁵ JM Lotter et al., **Crime and its impact: A study in a black metropolitan area** (HSRC, Pretoria, 1990), p. 246.

intrusion. Non-serious crimes also relate to breach of the peace and riotous behaviour, drunkenness, illegal possession of liquor or dagga-smoking, cruelty to animals, gambling and breaking of curfew regulations, common assault and possession of dangerous weapons. Juveniles aged 17 to 20 years, among whom there also is a higher incidence of drunkenness, are prone to the following incidents of serious crime against the person: aggravated assault or indecent assault, assault on the police, resisting or obstructing the police, public violence, rape or attempted rape, murder or attempted murder, house and shop-breaking, theft of animals or motor vehicles and theft by violence (robbery).⁶

Gang violence is the most visible aspect of gangs in the public mind and the most troublesome type of gang delinquency. Generally speaking gangs in South Africa relate to conflict and crime as modes of delinquent behaviour. The major reason for the existence of conflict gangs is to fight and maintain a reputation for toughness. All their activities are centered around violence and is primarily organized for emotional gratification and to carry out various illegal acts. Prominent among the delinquent gang's activities are burglary, petty thievery and assault for profit. It is generally a tight clique, a small mobile gang that can steal and escape with minimum risk.⁷

The period 1945 to 1976 has been chosen as research period because of its socio-economic and political significance for the urban black in South Africa. The First and Second World Wars (1914-1918 and 1939-1945 respectively), which intensified the industrialization process, caused the City Council of Bloemfontein, like most other local authorities large and small in the country, to struggle with an almost overwhelming influx of blacks and whites from the rural districts. These urbanization tendencies involved various socio-economic complications like the rising cost of life, low wage incomes, limited employment opportunities for blacks, the lack of sufficient educational and housing facilities (involving overcrowding), crime and poverty. These socio-economic considerations are generally recognized to play decisive roles in the formation of gangs.

Important legislation affecting the lives of the urban black was also promulgated since 1945, such as the Natives (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act, No. 25 of 1945, the Bantu Education Act, No. 47 of 1953 and the Children's Protection Act, No. 33 of 1960. The National Party, propagating its policy of racial separation, came to power in 1948 to put black political and socio-economic expectations in tight grip.

⁶ LF Freed, **Crime in South Africa** (Juta, Cape Town, 1963), pp.9-10, 37-40; JD Venter, **The incidence of juvenile crime in South Africa**, Research Series No. 2 (National Bureau of Educational and Social Research, Pretoria, 1964), pp. 14, 59.

⁷ Saunders, pp.196-200.

The year 1976 was a watershed for black youth expectations. The Government had to deal with a whole new generation of blacks thinking in terms of new educational and economic (trade union) perspectives. In Government circles there were talks of the transitional nature of policies and a favourable climate for political change.⁸

The socio-historical research method as applied in this article has been successfully used in criminological research by GL Ndabandaba, JJ Tobias and C Louis. Instead of studying crimes committed by youths in concert in a number of today's societies, the socio-historical research method examines their activities at different times in the past of one society and looks at the impact of the political and socio-economic developments of such a society on the juvenile criminal situation.⁹ To this end the article relies mostly on non-statistical material, using accounts by observers of the time such as local black leaders, concerned parents reporting to the local authorities, newspaper and governmental reports, and Municipal Council and Committee minutes. Included in this research is the reaction of society at large to gangsterism, but more specific the relevant authorities like the local municipal authority of Bloemfontein and its Native Advisory Board, the South African Police, the Department of Justice and the Union Department of Native Affairs as represented by its local Commissioner of Native Affairs.

2. THE PERFORMANCE OF THE TSOTSI GANGS IN MANGAUNG

The Natives (Urban Areas) Act, No. 21 of 1923 and subsequent legislation were consolidated in the Natives (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act, No. 25 of 1945. It was a many-faceted act, serving as a framework for city councils to govern their black townships. The act laid down rules for the pursuit of the idle, dissolute and disorderly black resident. It was part of the legislator's intention to promote regularity and order, to establish Black Advisory Boards to assist township management and to promote housing schemes to accommodate the increasing black population after industrialization in the wake of the two World Wars.¹⁰

By virtue of the 1923 legislation the City Council of Bloemfontein framed the Administrator's Notice, No. 48 of 1932 to regulate, among others, loitering in the streets of Mangaung at night. Except for urgent reasons like illness, nobody was to be outside his or her home between 24:00 and 05:00. The carrying of knobkerries

⁸ Free State Archives, Bloemfontein (FAB), MBL 1/2/4/1/40, Minutes, Natives Affairs Committee, 9 November 1945, p. 2; DS Krige, *Die transformasie van die Suid-Afrikaanse stad* (UOVS, Bloemfontein, 1988); *The Friend*, 18 October 1976. Leading the way (Leader).

⁹ GL Ndabandaba, *Crimes of violence in black townships* (Butterworths, Durban, 1987); JJ Tobias, *Crimes and industrial society in the 19th century* (Schocken Books, New York, 1967); C Louis, *Labouring classes and dangerous classes in Paris during the first half of the nineteenth century* (Howard Fertig, New York, 1973).

¹⁰ TRH Davenport, *South Africa, A modern history* (Macmillan, London, 1991), pp. 235-6.

(clubs) or any other dangerous weapons, like knives, within the municipal area was prohibited. If found guilty, such weapons would be confiscated. The purchase or use of strong liquor was also prohibited, except for Bantu beer which was limited to four gallons (18 liters) per apartment, premises or room. The Township Manager was authorized to prohibit a dance, party or amusement consisting of more than five persons or which to his mind could cause disturbance or abuse.¹¹ The intention of these regulations was clearly to curb the loitering of idle persons in the streets at night, instigated by liquor, parties or other amusements, endangering the lives of peaceful residents by the use of dangerous weapons.

In his annual report for 1945 the Mayor of Bloemfontein acknowledged that tsotsi gangs or, as he called it, 'street gangsterism', remained a problem which the authorities would have to attend to, implicating that this was a problem which could be traced back to the years before the Second World War, but not receiving the attention it deserved. The seriousness of the situation was accentuated by members of the Native Advisory Board, representing the interests of the residents of Mangaung in the municipal Department of Native Administration. In 1945, and again in 1946 and 1948, the Board pointed out the 'shocking conduct' of a certain section of youths in Mangaung. Juveniles between the ages of 14 and 17 years hung around bus stops and were going around in gangs at night, making noises, and resorting to knife-stabbing and robbery. These gangs were assaulting residents with clubs and were responsible for five serious cases of knife stabbing in October 1945 only.¹²

These instances of criminal behaviour continued unabated into the 1950's, indicating an alarming defiance of law and authority by gang members. As the cases of knife stabbing continued, incidents of rape and the misuse of liquor were also reported by the Native Advisory Board. The residents of Mangaung would not leave their houses for fear of being attacked in the dark unlit streets at night. The Commissioner of Native Affairs warned that the tsotsi problem was getting out of hand when he attended a meeting of the Board in 1954. He himself had to carry a revolver for protection when visiting Mangaung.¹³

Members of the Native Advisory Board and other black leaders were becoming increasingly disturbed by the growth of the tsotsi gangs, juvenile delinquency and

¹¹ FAB, BOV 1/175, File N9/11/2, Administrateurskennisgewing, No. 48/1932, artikels 34-6, pp. 12-3.

¹² FAB, MBL 3/1/37, Mayor's Minute, 31 March 1946, p. 22; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/43, Minutes Native Advisory Board, 12 December 1946, p. 2; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/40, Minutes Native Advisory Board, 18 October 1945, p. 3; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/41, Minutes Native Advisory Board, 17 January 1946, p. 5.

¹³ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/53, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 9 February 1954, p.11; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/50, Minutes Native Advisory Board, 18 October 1951, p. 2.

the high incidence of immorality among the residents of Mangaung, resulting in a large proportion of illegitimate births. Violence by these gangs achieved such a dangerous high level in 1955 that the English press felt compelled to commend on it. A local magistrate drew the attention of the press to the gangs who were spreading terror in the streets of Mangaung. The Native Advisory Board and the only black male social welfare worker requested the South African Police, stationed in the suburb of Batho, and the municipal Department of Native Administration to step up their preventive action against the tsotsis. The safety situation in Mangaung was so critical that these authorities could not relax their vigilance for one day.¹⁴

Looking at the juvenile criminal situation in the country generally at the beginning of the 1960's, the rapid increase of serious crime among black juvenile adults aged 17 to 20 years is remarkable. These juveniles committed six times as many serious and 14 times as many non-serious crimes as black juveniles aged 7 to 16 years. In comparison to the white, Asiatic and brown juvenile groups, the black juvenile male adults top the list with aggressive, violent crimes, followed by economic crimes and the illegal possession of liquor. Common assault was the most common offence among black juveniles aged 7 to 16 years. Economic crimes played a dominant role among black, Asiatic and brown juveniles due to their low level of economic existence. The most common of economic crimes were minor thefts of items valued less than R50,00 committed by black male and female juveniles aged 7 to 16 years and adult male and female juveniles.¹⁵

The rapid increase of serious theft and violent crimes among black juvenile adults country-wide in the early 1960's was reflected in Mangaung when the Location Superintendent had to admit that despite strong measures like additional police patrols, the tsotsi gangs still caused disturbances on the evening bus service, stealing the baggage of passengers and indulging in serious knife-stabbing. Blockman J Phetlhu, a member of the Native Advisory Board, and the press concluded that juvenile delinquency and the tsotsi gangs were out of hand. The police was ostensibly not able to exercise effective control over them. Similar situations were experienced in Johannesburg and Cape Town.¹⁶

It is evident from the memorandum on tsotsi gang activities in Mangaung, drawn up by the Central Committee of the Native Advisory Board, including succeeding

¹⁴ FAB, BOV 1/167, file N1/15/6, Native Affairs Committee, Annual Report 1952, p.6; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/63, Minutes Native Advisory Board, 31 August 1959, p. 7; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/45, Minutes Native Advisory Board, 21 July 1949, p. 11.

¹⁵ Freed, pp. 14, 39-69; JD Venter, pp. 14-28, 36-67.

¹⁶ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/63, Minutes Native Advisory Board, 31 August 1959; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/61, Report Non-European Social Welfare Worker, January 1959; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/70, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 5 October 1962, p. 19; **The Friend**, 3 February 1958. Restoring order (Leader).

remarks by the chairman of the Native Affairs Committee of the City Council, that the tsotsi gangs were indeed out of control and a 'terror in the location' in the early 1960's. The memorandum commented on the indiscriminate attacks, thefts in shops and even murders of residents. Groups of tsotsis from as young as 12 years of age, girls included, were assaulting learners returning from school in the afternoon, members of the Native Advisory Board and police constables. Residents were constantly exposed to robbery and vicious knife attacks in the streets, night and day, reaching a peak over weekends and during holidays. Gang members even attacked residents in their homes, demanding in lieu for their 'protection' so-called protection money. If the demand was not complied with, bodily harm was inflicted upon the resident.¹⁷

Country-wide crime numbers for all juvenile race groups steadily increased in the 1960's. With respect to black juveniles aged 7 to 20 years, convictions were in particular for bodily harm, housebreaking and theft, liquor and drugs. Most crimes committed by black juvenile adults were in the categories of murder and assault, whereas housebreaking and theft were the most popular for black juveniles aged 17 years and younger. It is significant that Mangaung in 1965 experienced the highest percentage of black juvenile crime convictions (83), Pretoria came second (78) and Johannesburg third (77). These disheartening figures were due to the bad socio-economic circumstances of the black families, a matter that will be discussed under causes leading to the formation of gangs.¹⁸

On the eve of the 1970's the Native Advisory Board was convinced that the crime prevention efforts of the South African Police had failed, because an alarming increase in cases of gangster murders, hold-ups, attacks in broad daylight and juvenile delinquency was reported. Loitering in the streets was an everyday occurrence. As before knives were used in the majority of the murder and assault cases. The following are only three of the headlines in **The Friend**, reflecting the critical state of crime in Mangaung: "Thugs stab man, attack wife"; "Batho man stabbed"; "Youth stabbed in Bochabela". Despite requests by the Native Advisory Board to strictly apply the regulations of the Administrator's Notice of 1932, prohibiting loitering and the carrying of dangerous weapons, the police had to

¹⁷ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/65, Minutes Native Advisory Board, 9 November 1960, p. 2; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/65, Report Non-European Social Welfare Worker, October 1960; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/70, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 23 November 1962, p. 4.

¹⁸ JA Saueremann, **Jeugmisdaad in die Republiek van Suid-Afrika, 'n ontleding van beskikbare statistiek**, Uitgawe No. 1 (Departement van Volkswelnsyn en Pensioene, Pretoria, 1972), pp. 4-8, 40-41, 22.

admit defeat, which they ascribed to a shortage of manpower, vehicles and communication devices like radios.¹⁹

The 1970's started off with crime statistics for black juvenile adults which were country-wide approximately seven times higher than statistics for black juveniles aged 7 to 16 years. The Mayor of Bloemfontein referred to the distressing increase in acts of violence committed by tsotsis at the end of 1974.²⁰ It is consequently imperative at this stage to investigate the circumstances which favoured the formation of tsotsi gangs since 1945.

3. THE CAUSES FOR THE FORMATION OF TSOTSI GANGS IN MANGAUNG

An enquiry into the causes leading to the formation of tsotsi gangs in Mangaung involves a complex variety of political, social and economic circumstances. The living conditions of the urban blacks were characterized by social disorganization and disintegration that resulted from the process of urbanization, detribalization and westernization. This disorganization and collapse were particularly noticeable in the family life of the urban black.

3.1 Broken homes

Various authors on juvenile criminology in South Africa, Africa and the U.S.A. concur that broken homes are the commonest condition in the histories of delinquents and gangs. In South Africa probably more than 70% of the male youths and 92% of the female youths derived from such homes. The American author, W Clifford, estimated that about 80% of delinquents in case studies of large townships in Africa were members of tsotsi gangs and derived from broken homes. These findings coincide with the conclusion of SI Brown in her study of juvenile delinquency among the Zulus in Natal that over 75% of her sample of 140 Black youths in reformatories came from broken homes.²¹

Domestic disputes played a decisive role in the breaking up of home life as was evident in Mangaung. Such disputes derived from societal questions like divorce,

¹⁹ **The Friend**, 17 June 1968. Disarming the gangsters (Leader); FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/76, Report Manager Department Non-European Administration, August 1965; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/72, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 6 September 1963, p. 2.

²⁰ **The Friend**, 17 July 1976. Tension is still there (Leader); **The Friend**, 17 September 1976. Senseless silence (Leader); Sauermann, p. 6.

²¹ WA Willemsse, **The road to the reformatory** (University of Pretoria, 1937), p. 109; Clifford, p. 154; JM Midgley et al., **Crime and punishment in South Africa**, (Johannesburg, 1975), p. 60; SI Brown, **A study of juvenile delinquency among Zulus in Natal with particular reference to accounts and views of the delinquency** (D. Phil, University of Natal, Durban, 1984), p. 162.

ill-treatment of family members, both parents working away from home the greater part of the day, illegitimacy, insufficient educational facilities and alcoholism. Research in Britain in the 1980's revealed a swing from societal explanations to economic considerations like low wages, high unemployment, the lack of job opportunities and bad housing conditions.²²

There were four grounds for a divorce: adultery, wilful desertion, when a person was declared a habitual criminal and insanity. Adultery, which goes hand in hand with seduction, and wilful desertion were according to the monthly reports of the black social worker, the two most common grounds for divorce in Mangaung.²³ The Commission of Investigation into the hostel riots of October 1957 conducted by the municipal Department of Native Administration revealed that 'hundreds of marriages' in Mangaung were broken up every year by married black migrant workers from the neighbouring provinces of Natal and the Transvaal and from the High Commission Territories of Basutoland, Swaziland and Bechuanaland. These migrant workers conducted unlawful sexual relationships (involving money and alcohol) with the wives of local husbands and school girls. The contribution of illegitimacy (children born out of wedlock) to gang formation in Mangaung is quite significant. Illegitimacy is indicative of lax morals and the absence of a normal parental home and discipline. It is potentially a cause for delinquency and tsotsism, and was surfacing regularly since 1945. Indeed, the rate of illegitimacy in Mangaung was at least 70% between 1945 and 1976.²⁴

In Mangaung at least 50% of the dispute cases numbering more than 3 000 every year between 1950 and 1970 were founded upon grounds for divorce. The social welfare worker, S Ramabodu, found that economic issues like poverty or a low wage income were usually involved in such domestic dispute cases. A substantial number reflected ill-treatment of children aged 10 to 20 years by parents of broken homes or by their guardians. Ill-treatment constituted one of the main reasons for running away from home in a desperate effort to find comfort and protection within the ranks of the tsotsi gangs.²⁵

Another instance of immoral intention were those men who only got married to qualify for municipal housing. Once he got his house, he deserted his wife and children, leaving them at the mercy of the social welfare organizations or the wife's

²² Lotter et al., p.244.

²³ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/74, Minutes Bantu Advisory Board, 4 November 1964, p. 8.

²⁴ FAB, BOV 1/167, File N1/15/6. Annual Reports Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Bloemfontein, 1947-1962; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/55-1/2/4/1/80, 1955-1968; FAB, MBL 3/1/37, Mayor's Minute, 31 March 1946; FAB, MBL 1/2/1/1/12, Monthly Report Medical Officer of Health, 31 March 1966, p. 107; Brown, p. 162.

²⁵ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/54, Report Non-European Social Welfare Worker, 30 June 1954 and 31 October 1954.

family. The offspring of these relationships usually became tsotsis because they did not enjoy a stable, disciplined home and felt no bonds with tribal customs. The Native Advisory Board regarded desertion by the husband as one of the main causes for juvenile delinquency and the formation of gangs. The Commissioner neglected to prosecute the irresponsible husbands for contempt of court and for failing to support their families.²⁶

The absence from home of both parents, being at work from daybreak until sunset was in the experience of the municipal social welfare worker, J Nkomo, another major cause of delinquency and the formation of tsotsi gangs. The Group Areas Act, No. 41 of 1950, segregated the black residential areas from the white areas, causing black mothers to travel long distances to the white residential areas, usually on the opposite side of the city center for work. Tsotsism went hand in hand with juveniles whose care and upbringing were neglected because the parents, being absent from home, failed to transmit their morals, values and roles to their roaming children. The situation of the unattended child was aggravated by the Children's Protection Act, No. 31 of 1937, which made no provision to call parents to meet their parental responsibilities before their children degenerated into crime and gang life. The new Children's Protection Act of 1960, which aimed to show parents of delinquents their parental responsibilities without the delinquent being brought to trial, stranded in the case of Mangaung on the staff economizing policy of the City Council.²⁷

3.2 The South African Police and church organizations

The neglect of social welfare work and recreational management since 1945 coincided with the inability of the South African Police, stationed in the suburb of Batho, to cope with the critical tsotsi gang menace in Mangaung which was out of control in the 1960's. The police ascribed its defeat in the struggle against the tsotsi gangs of Mangaung to a shortage of manpower, vehicles and communication devices like radios. An important contributing factor continually complained of by the Native Advisory Board, was the absence of electric lighting in every second street of Mangaung. The unlit streets served as hide-outs for the gang members, handicapping the efforts of the police to apprehend the offenders.²⁸ The City

²⁶ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/65, Minutes Native Advisory Board, 14 September 1960, pp. 1-2.

²⁷ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/42, Report Non-European Social Worker, 25 November 1946, p. 13; SG and E Glueck, **Delinquents and non delinquents in perspective** (Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1968); Lotter et al., p. 7; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/75, Minutes Bantu Advisory Board, 14 April 1965, p. 1.

²⁸ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/76, Report Manager Department Non-European Administration, August 1965; **The Friend**, 17 June 1968. Disarming the gangsters; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/76, Minutes Bantu Affairs Committee, 4 October 1965.

Council saved money on the provision of rudimentary street lighting for Mangaung at the cost of the lives and property of its black residents.

In the absence of a general program of action against the tsotsi gangs by the police and the City Council, clerical work done by the different church organizations in Mangaung was only of limited value. It was almost impossible for the church organizations to convert gang members from their criminal behaviour in the face of the critical proportions gang activities assumed in the 1950's and 1960's, a lack of money and difference of opinion on how to approach the tsotsi problem.²⁹

3.3 RECREATION AND EDUCATION

It was proclaimed Government policy to provide recreational facilities to the residents of white and black townships. Recreational facilities would help to combat delinquency and other bad social habits like gambling, dancing, the misuse of liquor and loitering leading to gang activities. The objective was to make the facilities for participation in organized sport as attractive as possible. The proposal of O Grinter, vice-mayor and member of the Native Affairs Committee of the City Council, supported by the social welfare worker, that private welfare organizations should play a supportive role in establishing more recreational facilities, was a clear indication that the municipal recreational facilities did not meet the expectations of Mangaung's juvenile population, not to speak of the lack of staff to manage such facilities. The press referred to the lack of a pavilion, proper swimming baths, a course for cyclists and cinema theatres, facilities with which white Bloemfontein with 40% less residents were well provided. The press blamed the lack of these facilities to the absence of the black political vote in the City Council, who put the interests of its white voters first.³⁰

The lack of compulsory education for blacks, as well as insufficient school buildings, equipment and duly qualified teachers were major reasons for black juvenile delinquency and the formation of tsotsi gangs. The members of the Native Advisory Board of Mangaung and the Location Advisory Boards' Congress of South Africa made these complaints standard issues in their agendas since at least 1945. As late as 1975 25 additional classrooms were still needed to provide in the educational needs of Mangaung's growing population. Whereas only 35% of all

²⁹ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/53, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 9 February 1954, p. 3.

³⁰ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/50, Minutes Native Advisory Board, 18 October 1951, p. 2; Publication of the Republic of South Africa, RP 44/1972, **Report of Department Bantu Administration and Development, 1970** (Pretoria, 1972), p. 8; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/39, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 14 July 1945, p. 3; **The Friend**, 9 January 1968. Give them a pool (Leader); **The Friend**, 11 November 1968. An urgent need (Leader); **The Friend**, 2 October 1969. Helping out the Whites (Leader); **The Friend**, 27 October 1970. No pool yet (Leader).

school aged children attended school country-wide in 1945, it improved to 75% in 1975. Less than 6% of these black school learners reached Grade 12.³¹

The significance of these figures is that the majority of black school learners left school before they were functionally literate. Their prospects to earn more than the wage of an unskilled worker was minimal. The consequence was not only that the whole South African economy suffered from the fact that such a small percentage of black juveniles entered secondary school, but also that those juveniles who left school prematurely, found their way to the streets where they became embroiled in crime, ending up in tsotsi gangs.³²

The question of family planning and institutions like crèches, clubs for boys and girls and Bantu Youth Camps (reformatories) had the potential to exercise a stabilizing influence in the lives of the juveniles of Mangaung. Their potential was, however, handicapped by their insufficiency. The City Council started with family planning clinics to curb the increasing number of illegitimate children, child and liquor abuse only on the eve of 1970. These clinics were handicapped by the fact that the City Council provided only two crèches for Black pre-school children (accommodating 500 children) to cater for the maternal needs of at least 10 000 families in 1960, increasing to about 15 000 families in 1976. Mangaung also had to abide by only one club for boys and girls each, aged 5 to 13 years, to cater for their social needs. The City Council planned no more clubs, despite their popularity, after appointing too few social welfare workers to manage the clubs and the limited space available in the community hall. The consequence was that these juveniles who could not be accommodated during the most impressionable years of their lives, drifted off to the streets where they fell prey to delinquents and tsotsi gangs.³³

Money for more crèches, clubs for boys and girls, and institutions for juvenile offenders were not forthcoming because the Government Department of Bantu Administration and Development reserved the 80% liquor profits it received from the local authorities for its so-called homeland development projects. This arrangement left the City Council of Bloemfontein with 20% of the liquor profits to pay the rents on the loans for township development and to fill up the depleted

³¹ FAB, MBL 3/1/65, Mayor's Minute, 31 March 1973, p. 65; Publication of the Union Government, UG 15/1951, **Annual Report of the Union Advisory Board on Native Education, 1948** (Pretoria, 1951), p. 13; **The Friend**, 4 December 1975. Classroom resolution (Leader).

³² **The Friend**, 12 September 1972. Nobody will fall for it (Leader); **The Friend**, 15 February 1975.

³³ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/72, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 6 March 1963; FAB, MBL 3/1/62, Mayor's Minute, 31 March 1970, p. 83; FAB, MBL 3/1/64, Mayor's Minute, 31 March 1972, p. 107; UG 69/1951, **Report Department of Social Welfare**, 1 April 1949-31 March 1951, p. 47; RP 14/1966, **Report Department Bantu Administration and Development, 1964** (Pretoria, 1966), p. 9.

Native Revenue Account which the financially poor Mangaung residents struggled to keep solvent with their municipal tax monies.³⁴

3.4 Poverty

Poverty is indirectly related to juvenile delinquency and the formation of tsotsi gangs. Case histories of juvenile offenders who joined tsotsi gangs in Mangaung showed that disruption of family life was frequently related to economic circumstances, being a major contributing factor. The Native Laws Commission of the Union Department of Native Affairs in 1948, the Conference of Native Advisory Boards in 1952, the South African Worsted Manufacturers' Trade Association in 1960 and finally the African Workers Union in 1961 pointed out to Government the serious socio-economic consequences poverty, low wages and unemployment had for the black families.³⁵

Failure by the husband to support his family was not simply a matter of negligence or irresponsibility as the Native Advisory Board believed, but might have been related to a low wage income rendering him unable to cope with the high cost of living or to side effects of poverty like mental depression of the husband, alcoholism and desertion. HJ Venter found in his study of black delinquency in the black community of Boksburg that more mothers of delinquents work than mothers of non-delinquents, implying that the lack of parental authority and discipline at home contributed to delinquency. Poverty causes malnutrition, hampers the process of education, injures marital and family relationships and eventually leads to school truancy and gang activities.³⁶

The out of date wage determinations for unskilled workers, dating back to the 1930's, were besides unemployment the main contributor towards poverty. Generally speaking 60% of the industrial workers in South Africa were classed as unskilled. It stood on 80% for Mangaung. The average wage for black workers increased from £7 (R14) a month in 1945 to R20 in 1961 and to R50 in 1971, which still lagged far behind the poverty datum line (the level below which there was real starvation) of R70 a month for a family. Authors on juvenile delinquency

³⁴ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/77, Letter Commissioner of Bantu Affairs to Clerk of the City, Bloemfontein, 1 July 1966.

³⁵ **The Friend**, 15 November 1955. Root causes of violence (Leader); UG 28/1948, **Report Laws Commission, 1946-1948** (Department of Native Affairs, Pretoria, 1948), p. 62; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/51, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 31 October 1952, p. 7; FAB, BOV 1/167, File N1/15/6, Commissioner Native Affairs, Annual Report 1962, p. 2; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/66, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 5 July 1961, p. 3; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/66, Report Manager Department Non-European Administration, June 1961.

³⁶ Venter en Retief, p. 256; **The Friend**, 26 June 1964. The need for skills (Leader).

like C Burt (London), T Midgley (Pretoria) and CR Shaw (U.S.A.) confirmed that those urban areas with the highest crime rate were generally also the poorest.³⁷

The National Party Government started to wake up to the economic plight of urban blacks in May 1973 when the Wage Board of the Department of Labour recommended that the minimum wage of unskilled blacks in the industrial sector should be raised. The Durban riots a week later induced the Government to open up training facilities and more lucrative employment to unskilled workers, allowing them also the right to strike under certain conditions. These developments moved the City Council of Bloemfontein to add an extra 5% to the wages of its black municipal workers. However, these concessions probably came too late because in 1975 about 5 000 black primary school learners still attended school in Mangaung on empty stomachs. No wonder the police was left with two million petty offences and an alarming increase in gangster violence in the country on the eve of the Soweto school riots in 1976.³⁸

An explanation for the dire financial position of the black unskilled worker has to be sought in the policy of racial segregation of the Government who advocated that about two thirds of the country's black population were only temporary sojourners in the urban centers. Supported by its white electorate and local authorities, the Government propagated cheap black labour, ignoring the black people as permanent residents and their demands for socio-economic and political rights.

W Clifford emphasizes that next to wages, the unemployment question has shown up in nearly all the studies of delinquent gangs in the large urban centers of Africa up to 1974. In South Africa about 120 000 black juveniles of school-going age were idling their time away on the streets, being absent from school and unemployed in the 1950's. Article 29 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1945, empowered local authorities to prosecute black juveniles older than 15 years who were not at school, unemployed or undesired (migrants from outside the municipal frontiers without legal documents). However, the practical effect of this article was paralysed by the additional stipulation that such juvenile was not to be apprehended if he could prove that he was in the custody of his parents. The parents aggravated the precarious situation of their delinquent children by neglecting to report their loitering, truant children to the local municipal Labour Bureau for possible

³⁷ FAB, BOV 1/167, File N1/15/6. Commissioner Bantu Affairs, Annual Report 1962, p.2; **The Friend**, 26 August 1960. Non White wages (Leader); C Burt, **The young delinquent** (London, 1925), p. 78, 15-16; J Midgley, **Patterns of Crime** (Cape Town, 1979), pp. 225-226; **The Friend**, 5 April 1971. Well below the breadline (Leader).

³⁸ **The Friend**, 8 September 1970. A land of violence (Leader); **The Friend**, 24 May 1973. Get cracking (Leader); **The Friend**, 10 July 1973. Dare we ignore this? (Leader); **The Friend**, 18 May 1959. Feeding the children (Leader).

employment, probably because the parents had already relinquished any hope of control over their children. The loophole offered by the law and the negligence of the parents of delinquent children were of course exploited by the tsotsi gangs.³⁹

The annual reports of the Labour Bureau in Mangaung reflected no statistics of juveniles registered as unemployed, though an average of 80 vacancies were registered every month for the years under discussion. As far as could be determined from the monthly reports of the municipal social welfare worker, only 18 juveniles were employed in Bloemfontein between 1956 and 1968. The absence of large industries in Bloemfontein, including the inexperience of the juvenile delinquents, discouraged employers from employing them. The maintenance grants for divorced wives with children, including applications for poor relief by indigent families, handed out by the City Council of Bloemfontein, failed to break the 'vicious circle' of poverty. The population of Mangaung suffered from an indigence rate of at least 80%. Too few families received too little money from the Council, thus closing the door to education and proper housing and opening the door to juvenile delinquency and gang activities.⁴⁰

3.5 Housing

Industrial demand for a lax influx control policy to meet labour requirements led to a critical housing shortage in the country. The population of Mangaung increased by about 33 000 between 1950 and 1964. The number of houses required for the same period increased from 2 799 to 4 188, boiling down to an alarming 8.6 persons per house as opposed to the recommended average of five persons per house. Black unrest because of the overcrowded housing situation was increasingly voiced by the National Council of Women and black political organizations. They complained about the low wages of black workers generally, which prevented them from buying or leasing houses or acquiring loans for house-building. More than 80% of Mangaung's poor inhabitants were barred from obtaining houses by the City Council's refusal of loans to persons earning less than £20 per month. The complaints of the black political organizations dated back to the 1920's, but were continually postponed by the City Council due to the white majority vote not to subsidize the low wages of the black urban worker or to raise any money for black

³⁹ Clifford, p. 62; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/72, Report Manager Department Non-European Administration, July 1963; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/67, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 7 August 1961, pp. 2-3; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/55, Report Non-European Social Welfare Worker, December 1954.

⁴⁰ UG 37/1955, **Report Department of Native Affairs, 1951-1952**; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/55-1/2/4/1/80, Report Labour Bureau, May 1955-February 1968; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/75, Report Labour Bureau, May 1965, p. 12; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/42-1/2/4/1/80, Annual Reports Non-European Social Welfare Worker, 1946-1968; FAB, BOV 1/167, File N1/15/6, Commissioner Bantu Affairs, Bloemfontein Annual Reports 1948, 1954, 1961.

housing out of fear that the housing schemes for the white residents could be delayed.⁴¹

The Government Commission of Inquiry warned in its report of 1976 that such improper and insufficient housing which had to accommodate big families, would certainly result in social complications such as very little privacy for parents and children. The children were forced onto the streets where they roamed without proper supervision. They were literally driven into the hands of the tsotsi gangs. The Department of Justice, reflecting on juvenile crime and drunkenness that had increased generally in the Free State after 1945, related these social problems directly to bad housing conditions and the lack of proper parental supervision of children.⁴²

4. CONCLUSION

Social related causes remained prominent for the formation of tsotsi gangs in Mangaung, as was also evident in similar studies in Africa, South Africa and the U.S.A. These causes, however, have to be seen in the context of the dire economic circumstances that were prevalent in the township. Broken homes as caused by adultery and wilful desertion, followed by the ill-treatment of children by their parents or guardians, were the main causes for juvenile delinquency and tsotsi gang formation in Mangaung. Low wages and unemployment were substantive causes of these domestic disputes. The alarming rate of at least 70% for children born illegitimately was not merely an indication of lax morals, but also indicated the absence of a normal parental home and discipline, decisively playing in the hands of the tsotsi gangs.

The delinquent turning tsotsi in more than 70% of the cases, was accentuated by other societal considerations like the absence of parents from home because they worked all day long, the Children's Protection Act of 1937 failing to call parents to heed their parental responsibilities, the shortage of municipal social welfare workers to give effect to the stricter child protection clauses of the succeeding Children's Protection Act of 1960 and finally the absence of efficient and sufficient educational and recreational facilities. The absence of a general program of action against the tsotsi gangs by the City Council of Bloemfontein and the South African

⁴¹ RM Packard, **White plague, black labour, Tuberculosis and the political economy of health and disease in South Africa** (University of California, Pietermaritzburg, 1989), pp. 135-6, 195-6, 216; CJP le Roux, "The question of housing for Africans in Mangaung at Bloemfontein 1945-1964", **Historia** 45(2), November 2000, pp.465-82; **The Friend**, 22 April 1948. Conditions in the location (Leader).

⁴² UG 5/1946, **Department of Justice, Annual Report, 1944**, p.13; RP 78/1976, **Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the penal system of the Republic of South Africa** (Pretoria, 1976), p. 9.

Police handicapped the proper enforcement of the child protection legislation and the spiritual work of the church organizations among the delinquents and their troubled families.

The tsotsi gangs, consisting of juvenile delinquents aged approximately 14 to 17 years, played the most important role in non-serious crimes in Mangaung. These gangs were beyond the control of the police in the 1950's and the 1960's. They acted violently, resorting to knife-stabbing, robbery, gambling and the misuse of liquor. Such a conclusion corresponded with the general tendency in the country that more black juveniles were convicted for violent and economic crimes than was the case for white juveniles who were socially and economically better off. The 1960's saw in Mangaung a significant shift towards serious violent crimes such as murder, rape and assault, committed by gang members aged 17 to 20 years. Crime statistics for black juvenile adults, which were country-wide about seven times higher than statistics for black juveniles aged 7 to 16 years, prove this tendency.

Generally speaking it would be wrong to describe these delinquent members of tsotsi gangs as inherently lawless. Their actions have to be judged within the context of the social disorganization of their families after their urbanization and consequent detribalization during the first half of the 20th century, and the political system of racial segregation, making victims of the black juveniles, deprived of those socio-economic rights which are normally part and parcel of a juvenile's upbringing, namely free access to employment opportunities, suitable housing and compulsory education. Their white counterparts who did enjoy such rights, constantly reflected significant lower criminal rates. The social disorganization of the black urban family found expression in broken homes and children despising the laws of the privileged ruler. The outcome was juvenile delinquency and tsotsi gangs.