

Political Mobilisation, Violence and Control in the Townships of the Vaal Triangle, South Africa, c.1976-1986

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Short abstract

This thesis is an exploration of political mobilisation and its relation to violence and control in the townships of the Vaal Triangle, South Africa, c.1976 to 1986, with a particular focus on the Vaal Uprising of 1984. It examines the emerging conflict between councillors and local communities and the redrawing of imagined boundaries of community. Councillors were demarcated as a collective group that was perceived to be violating the social contract and were regarded as being obstacles to meaningful political change. The period saw the emergence of a localised discourse around accountability, political legitimacy, transparency, freedom and community.

Political subjectivities were influenced by the straddling of everyday experiences of oppression, violence, inequality and poverty on one hand and the impact of ideologies of freedom and liberation on the other. The latter were promoted by the African National Congress in exile, as well as the United Democratic Front, but these organisations did not provide direct leadership. On 3 September 1984 the conflict escalated, sparked by an announcement to increase rent, service tariffs and municipal levies. It led to a large-scale uprising that altered the political and social landscape. It heralded the beginning of the insurrectionary period of the mid-1980s that brought the most sustained challenge to the apartheid regime.

The relative success of the uprising in enforcing concessions from local authorities and the departure of councillors from the townships informed subsequent political strategies. The state attempted to win Hearts and Minds with limited reforms but also used heavy-handed repression. Terror began to escalate and state violence further conscientised and radicalised local communities. Youth activists in particular came to believe that the regime could only be overcome if confronted with strategies of political violence. Alleged informers and black policemen came under increasing attack, reflecting a redrawing of boundaries of community and hindering effective policing.

Long abstract

This thesis examines political mobilisation and its relation to violence and state control in the townships of the Vaal Triangle, South Africa, c.1976-1986, with a focus on the Vaal Uprising of 1984. It is particularly concerned with exploring the roots and impact of the emerging conflict that led to the Vaal Uprising. This event was a watershed in South Africa's history, altered the social and political landscape of the region and influenced broader political dynamics in South Africa at large. It heralded the beginning of the insurrectionary period of the mid-1980s that challenged the apartheid state in unprecedented ways. The Vaal Triangle was central in shaping a new political order. This thesis provides detailed insights into the unfolding of this popular insurrection and its impact on power relations and political dynamics.

Chapter one focuses on the socio-economic background of the region and examines the reformation of the local state in the late 1970s. It argues that everyday experiences of poverty, inequality, oppression and violence as well as the influence of literature and other forms of cultural expressions were vital in moulding political subjectivities. While living standards were falling for the majority, social stratification increased due to the opening of business opportunities for the black middle class, including councillors.

The introduction of Community Councils in 1977 and Black Local Authorities in 1983, partly decentralised apartheid power with dire consequences for both local and national government. A weak fiscal basis and lack of revenues led to a series of increases in rent, service tariffs and levies

between 1977 and 1984. As early as 1977, rent increases were among the key grievances of local residents. At the forefront of the emerging conflict were the newly elected councillors, who were perceived as violating the social contract with those they were supposed to serve. They were seen to engage in corruption and nepotism and they further alienated local communities by failing to implement their election promises and by adopting aggressive and anti-social behaviour. Councillors and local communities were therefore pulled apart by ideological differences but also by different interests and personalised grievances.

From the early 1980s rumours began to circulate by word of mouth and through media reports about their abuses of power. The political and social identities of the councillors had been fluid until the mid-1970s. However, they increasingly bounded during the period between 1977 and 1984. Hence by 1984 when the uprising started, political activists and a great number of ordinary residents had demarcated councillors as a collective social group. Epithets including 'stooges', 'sell-outs' or 'puppets of the regime' placed them outside the imagined boundaries of township communities and made violence against them thinkable. Blamed for the socio-economic misfortune of local residents, councillors came to be widely regarded as obstacles to meaningful change. Since 1980, public meetings with councillors led to frequent hostilities and violent confrontations. The thesis argues that by 1984 violence had become ingrained in expressions of conflict. Until 1984, violent confrontations between local communities and representatives of the regime were contingent and reflected localised processes of conflict.

With the formation of a number of civic and student organisations and political structures, popular protests became organised, as chapter two analyses. This chapter examines the straddling of subjective everyday experiences with ideologies of freedom and liberation promoted by the African National Congress and other liberation movements. Public meetings however strictly focussed on bread-and-butter issues to avoid police harassment. Fledgling political networks and the newly established organisations struggled to attract committed members and their ability to provide

sustained leadership was limited. Nevertheless, between 1980 and 1984 local organisations were engaged in mobilising township communities against rent increases, the malfunctioning councils and poor service delivery. The variety of popular grievances hence proved a fertile breeding ground for mass mobilisation and by 1984, large sections of the township communities identified with the demands of civic structures. The period saw the emergence of a localised discourse around accountability, political legitimacy, transparency, freedom and community. Hence the everyday experiences of local actors were vital in shaping particular understandings and strategies that infused the liberation struggle with its content.

The establishment of underground cells of the African National Congress around 1982 introduced literature, ideas and strategies that came to influence popular struggles. While individual underground cells had an impact on emerging civic politics, the ANC in exile did not have the organisational capacity to guide popular struggles in the townships. The influence of the ANC and the United Democratic Front provided ideological support and allowed local organisations to transcend parochial struggles by linking grievances to the broader struggle against apartheid. Leadership was both public and underground; a few individuals played both roles despite the risk of being exposed to police surveillance.

Due to the police's difficulties in accessing information through technological surveillance, they heavily relied on local intermediaries including informers and black policemen. State control was uneven and depended on the ability to generate knowledge through such intermediaries. As this chapter explores, the South African security branch had partly infiltrated organisations by 1984 and possessed detailed knowledge on above ground structures and planned public protests but struggled to access information on more contingent formations and clandestine units. Despite their detailed knowledge about the planned protests of 3 September 1984, the police did not arrest the organisers of the protests prior to the event. Bound by the legal framework they preferred to monitor activists in order to uncover networks and political structures.

As chapter three examines, after the announcement of the rent increase in early August 1984, political mobilisation intensified. A series of private and public meetings were held to organise strategies to oppose the implementation of the increase. The local authorities' intransigence became further apparent in their handling of popular opposition to the increases. Their unwillingness to engage with local grievances and their display of aggressive behaviour towards political opponents led to the erosion of peaceful means to resolve the conflict.

Eventually, a decision was taken to march to the offices of the Orange Vaal Development Board on 3 September 1984 and to stage a stay-away from school and work. However, even prior to the scheduled protest march, violence began to escalate. A last meeting between councillors and local residents in Bophelong in late August led to violent clashes and the police shot several people within the following days. On 2 September, buildings belonging to the Development Board were burnt down, roadblocks set up and councillors and policemen's houses came under attack by groups of young people. Street battles between police and local activists ensued. By the time the protest march set off in the morning of 3 September, some areas of the townships had become more embattled.

Chapter three also traces the narratives of different actors including participants in the official protest march, youth activists, councillors and police. The different narratives confirm the multiplicity of experiences, perceptions and strategies. The use of political violence in particular was contested and reflected divisions over contending perceptions of appropriate political strategies to confront the regime. The context of the uprising provided various actors the platform to pursue their own agenda and to assert their power by employing violent tactics. The spatial character of the uprising highlights the variety of engagements. While the large crowd who had joined the official protest march required open spaces, smaller groups converged in the side roads to confront councillors. The sudden agglomeration of crowds played a vital role in shaping processes of confrontation and conflict.

Petrol bombings and stonings of buildings reflected increasing impatience by young people, many of whom regarded a protest march as an insufficient strategy to confront the state. It further demonstrated an assertion of power towards the older generation and more moderate groups. Violence, as this chapter argues, neither simply 'erupted' nor was it a mere by-product of mass protest. The uprising was rather marked by a complex intersection between violent and non-violent forms of protest and collective action. However, as this chapter explores, the two repertoires of protest were neither discrete nor complementary. Instead, they were drawn upon by different actors for different purposes and reflected contested perceptions of appropriate political strategies to promote change. When a number of councillors began to shoot at the crowds outside their houses, the situation escalated and four of them were killed. Empirical evidence suggests that the killing of the councillors had not been anticipated and planned.

Part of the violence on 3 September was therefore contingent and arose from hostile interactions between crowds, councillors and police while other incidents including the petrol bombing of houses were premeditated. The shooting by police and councillors in particular triggered acts of retaliation and further inflamed an already tension situation. Attacks on councillors and police exposed and reflected the deep fissures within township communities and drew the boundaries of community very clearly. Collective action therefore reflected existing social tensions and years of localised conflicts while the killing of councillors constituted a transgression of social norms. Hence the extent and form of violence constituted a break from past confrontations. The Vaal Uprising provided a platform for collective action against those who were perceived to violate the social contract and hinder political change. After the uprising, collective violence became ingrained in new forms of political protests. Attacks on buildings and physical attacks were not random. Statistics demonstrate the directedness of burnings and stonings. Widespread looting that ensued was however often opportunistic. Chapter three therefore analyses patterns of violence and their relation to non-violent forms of opposition. It also highlights the dynamics of collective action.

The protest march was eventually stopped by members of the riot police squad that had blocked the road and shot into the advancing crowd of marchers. After the halting of the march, pandemonium broke out as protestors scattered in all directions. The leadership was no longer in control of the situation and neither was the police. Police reacted with harsh repression and the use of violence, shooting dozens of people. However, despite their sophisticated equipment and the reinforcements brought in from Pretoria, the riot squad had difficulties in quelling the uprising. The uprising led to a breakdown of the social and political order and plunged the townships into a state of war.

Chapter four examines the immediate aftermath of the uprising, the reordering of the political, civic and student networks as well as state response. The shattering of the political and social order, this chapter argues, necessitated new narratives of understanding what had transpired and brought a change in social and political relations. The majority of the leadership either went into exile or hiding, or was arrested. The vacuum that ensued provided space for new groups to emerge and occupy the political space. Neither the deployment of troops nor other repressive measures could halt popular protests. The eclectic and multi-layered nature of popular struggles proved almost impossible to quell. However, rapid turnover of leadership as well as heavy-handed repression hamstrung efficient mobilisation and organisation. Violence spawned by the state radicalised and conscientised large sections of township communities who were under the impression that the state had declared war on them. Eventually heavy-handed repression restored a semblance of state control; its success was short-lived. The state's dependence on partial co-operation from the broader population made it susceptible to challenge through mass mobilisation. Hence once the large sections of communities withdrew their co-operation, the state was forced to make limited concessions.

State representatives were quick to declare that the revolt had been orchestrated by outsiders who 'instigated' and 'agitated'. Such claims reflected the perception of state officials that the

leadership of oppositional forces were lacking a political constituency. State discourse further highlights the inability of officials to understand the deep-seated nature of popular grievances. Calls for the resignation of councillors that had begun on 3 September continued; however, most councillors refused to step down and were instead relocated to a guarded complex to ensure their safety.

In October 1984 the Lekoa Town Council announced the scrapping of the rent increase that had sparked the uprising. However, by that time a large majority of the local population had embarked on a total boycott of payment of rent, service tariffs and levies. The boycott was a major blow for local government and exacerbated the fiscal crisis. From September 1984 onwards, local authorities in collaboration with courts, police and business developed new strategies to break the boycott through evictions, court summons and a stop-order system to deduct rent from wages. Neither of them proved particularly successful.

In addition local authorities embarked on a campaign to win the Hearts and Minds of the local population. Propaganda in local newsletters and the radio as well as youth 're-education' camps all aimed to curb political activism. Workshops were organised to improve administrative and leadership skills of councillors. By that time the power of local authorities had been successfully undermined. The Vaal Uprising and its aftermath hence demonstrated the capacity of popular struggles to tilt the balance of power and re-order the social and political landscape. The relative success of the uprising in enforcing the scrapping of the rent increase and the departure of councillors informed subsequent political strategies.

Chapter five finally examines discourses and practices of violence. The records of the trial 'State v Baleka and 21 Others' – known as the Delmas Treason Trial – as well as the trial 'State v Sefatsa and 7 Others' – widely referred to as the Sharpeville Six Trial – reflect discursive struggles over the meaning and content of popular politics, collective action and its relation to violence.

Furthermore in the case of the Delmas Treason trial the role of leadership in shaping political protests was at the heart of legal battles.

The discourse over violence was at the centre of the propaganda war waged by the South African government. While the political nature of collective violence was stressed by state prosecutors in court, it was often depoliticised when reported in the media. Crowds were portrayed as faceless masses, guided by emotions and violence was referred to as 'senseless' and 'unreasonable'. However interviews with former participants of political violence demonstrate the purposeful nature of incidents of arson and public violence. Around 1985 clandestine youth units were formed with the purpose of chasing policemen and informers out of the townships to undermine the power base of the state by making the townships 'ungovernable'. As the Vaal Uprising had demonstrated, struggles over the boundary of communities were a vital part of the insurrectionary period of the mid-1980s. Degrees of militancy varied and while some had been able to access handgrenades other fought their battles mostly with petrol bombs and stones. Political violence until 1984 had mostly been contingent and triggered by hostile confrontations between youth and police, councillors and in some instances school principals, but a new generation believed that freedom could only be won by using violent strategies.

Coinciding with the ANC's call for a People's War in 1985, youth strategies and activism during the early phase was mostly borne of localised incentives. From 1985 onwards, units of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) began to bring more weapons into the country to carry the armed struggle into the townships. One of the key aims of the People's War was the establishment of armed units inside the country and the arming of the population more generally. In the Vaal Triangle – as in many other parts of the country – MK networks were rather weak and in many instances discovered by police.

During the same period state terror escalated. For the security forces, their inability to protect black policemen against petrol bombings hampered effective policing and undermined networks of

knowledge upon which they were reliant. Mass detention, the widespread use of torture and rumours of disappearances of political activists created a climate of fear and distrust and seeped into the social fabric of township communities. Expectations of violence shaped everyday relations and ruptured social networks. Overcoming of fear was vital to engage in political opposition and hence further shaped a militant political culture that included songs and toyi-toying. Hence by 1986, as this chapter demonstrates, conflicts with state representatives had taken on an increasingly violent form.

Preface

The great bulk of source material used for this thesis is in open archives or it results from interviews where the interviewees have given their consent for the content to be used. I have consulted interviewees about whether or not they wish to be quoted under their names. In most cases, they have assented to this and I have used their real names.

In certain instances I raised my concerns about specific quotes and sections and have changed the names of those who preferred to remain anonymous. To protect the informant I cannot disclose the origins of the restricted police files that were made available to me. Those interested in accessing them may contact me.

Occasionally names are spelt in different ways. I have, where necessary, indicated the different versions. In some instances I have included nicknames as these were often used more widely than birth names.

Approximately 40 per cent of the archival records I consulted were in Afrikaans. These include mostly records of government and its various institutions, certain newsletters as well as almost all examinations and cross-examinations by the prosecution during trials. I have translated these sources from Afrikaans into English.

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List of abbreviations

I have made up the abbreviations that are starred (*) for convenience.

ANC	African National Congress
APLA	Azanian People's Liberation Army
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
AZASM	Azanian Students' Movement
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BLA	Black Local Authorities
CI	Christian Institute
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
COSAS	Congress of South African Students
DESCOM	Detainees' Support Committee
DET	Department of Education and Training
DPSC	Detainees' Parents Support Committee
FEDSAW	Federation of South African Women
ISA	Internal Security Act
LPP	Lekoa People's Party
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe
NAP*	National Archives Pretoria
NEC	National Executive Committee
OVAB	Orange Vaal Administration Board
OVDB	Orange Vaal Development Board

PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
RMC	Release Mandela Campaign
PWV	Pretoria – Witwatersrand - Vereeniging
SACBC	Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADF	South African Defence Force
SASO	South African Students Organisation
SASM	South African Students Movement
SRC	Student Representative Council
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF	United Democratic Front
UWC	University of the Western Cape
WHP*	University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers
VAC	Vaal Action Committee
VALIMO	Vaal Liberation Movement
VASCO	Vaal Student Congress
VAYCO	Vaal Youth Congress
VCA	Vaal Civic Association
VIC	Vaal Information Centre
VMSG	Vaal Ministers Solidarity Group
VOW	Vaal Organisation of Women
VTCC	Vaal Triangle Community Council
VTUCOC	Vaal Triangle Trade Union Co-Ordinating Committee

Introduction

‘Everything in South Africa’, Njabulo Ndebele wrote in 1991, ‘has been mind-bogglingly spectacular.’¹ Symbols of this spectacle that have seeped into, and are constitutive of the social, political and indeed cultural fabric of society include

the monstrous war machine developed over the years; the random massive pass raids; mass shootings and killings; mass economic exploitation the ultimate symbol of which is the mining industry; the mass removals of people; the spate of draconian laws passed with the spectacle of parliamentary promulgations; the luxurious life-style of whites: servants, all encompassing privilege, swimming pools, and high commodity consumption; the sprawling monotony of architecture in African locations, which are the very picture of poverty and oppression.

Ndebele’s analysis of the spectacular features of apartheid is deeply intertwined with the multiple layers of violence that were intrinsic to the apartheid system. As Shula Marks and Neil Anderson point out, racial discrimination, the impact of forced removals and the breaking up of families through migrant labour, poverty and disease combined with state brutality, high levels of crime, high rates of accidents and the ubiquitous presence of physical assault of black people created the ‘socio-psychological climate of apartheid’.² However, despite the ubiquity of oppression and violence that shaped the lives of the majority of South Africans, local actors were guided by multifarious interests that were not always a direct reflection of, and reaction to, the apartheid system.

¹ N. Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Johannesburg, 1991), 37.

² S.Marks and N. Anderson, ‘The Epidemiology and Culture of Violence’, in C.Manganyi and A.du Toit, *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa* (Basingstoke, 1990), 29-69.

At the heart of this thesis is the emerging political opposition and conflict that led to the Vaal Uprising in South Africa of 1984. This moment of protest was a key event in the emerging insurrection of the mid-1980s and in titling the balance against white minority rule. My thesis examines the role of localised conflicts in shaping locally generated ideas about appropriate political strategies to achieve change. Such localised conflicts, despite being within the realm of broader political dynamics, exhibited a certain contingency that differentiated them from those of other areas. The period between 1976 and 1986, I argue, saw the production of new ideas around liberation, freedom, accountability, community and conflict.

The roots of the incipient conflict can be traced back to the reformation of the local state in the late 1970s. In 1977 Community Councils were introduced that provided the newly elected councillors with enhanced powers to run local affairs. As chapter one examines, the changing political status of councillors altered social relations between local communities and councillors. Being part of the industrial heartland, the Vaal Triangle was deeply affected by retrenchment and economic recession and thus experienced falling living conditions that led to socio-economic grievances. Meanwhile, councillors were accused of nepotism, malpractice and considered to be acting outside the accepted social norms of local communities. While economic and political structures did not shape political, cultural and social identities in any deterministic way, they certainly set the ground for everyday experiences, which were at the core of the formation of new subjectivities that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s.³

New subjectivities raise the question of agency in everyday life as well as in moment of spectacular political protest. African historiography has long grappled with the question of agency,

³ On the history of the everyday, see Eckert, A. and A. Jones, 'Historical Writing about Everyday Life', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 15/1 (2002) 5-16; A.Lüdtke and W.Templer (eds.), *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton, 1995).

particularly since the establishment of modern African Studies in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴ Scholars such as Terence Ranger have argued that the colonized were indeed no mere oppressed objects but conscious subjects who shaped and constructed their own history.⁵ The richness of this scholarship has contributed towards a diverse and multifaceted understanding of anti-colonial and nationalist struggles in various African countries. Deeply embedded in a nationalist discourse, it often equated agency with resistance and focussed on the importance of local initiatives, political consciousness and organisation.⁶ The prevalent analytical framework worked around the binary themes of oppression and domination versus resistance; internal cleavages and frictions were often neglected. However, this paradigm soon came to be criticized across the disciplines.

In his review on resistance in African social historiography, Eric Allina-Pisano has argued that during the 1970s and 1980s, a new group of scholars emerged that criticised the older school for romanticising the anti-colonial struggle.⁷ Situating African agency within a framework of class, this new generation moved away from the dichotomy of resistance versus domination to include the concept of African collaboration. Africans were thus seen as being guided by their own class interests, and whether or not they resisted was influenced by the routes and the degree through which they were incorporated.⁸ This generation was further concerned about the limits of socio-economic transformation and hence class formation. Themes at the centre of this scholarship thus included the complexities of migrant and peasant consciousness, the role of rural chiefs, ethnicity and gender.

⁴ J. Abbink, M. de Bruijn and K. van Walraven (eds.), *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History* (Leiden, 2003), 1-40.

⁵ T. Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerilla War in Zimbabwe: A Comparative Study* (London, 1985).

⁶ F. Cooper, 'Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History', *American Historical Review*, 99/5 (1994), 1,516-45; F. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2005). The body of literature on resistance in Africa is very large for an overview see Abbink, de Bruijn and van Walraven (eds.), *Rethinking Resistance*.

⁷ E. Allina-Pisano, 'Resistance and the Social History of Africa', *Journal of Social History*, 37/1 (2003), 187-98; also see A. Isaacman and B. Isaacman, 'Resistance and Collaboration in Southern and Central Africa, c.1850-1920', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 10/1 (1977), 31-62.

⁸ Allina-Pisano, 'Resistance and the Social History of Africa'.

Writing in the mid-1990s, Sherry Ortner and Frederick Cooper heavily censured paradigms that sharply differentiated resistance and collaboration and challenged the conceptual limitations of this framework. Ortner pointed out that it was 'an impulse to sanitize internal politics' while Frederick Cooper argued that 'it may narrow our understanding of African history rather than expand it'.⁹ Binary models, they argued, obscured the subtleties, ambivalences and ambiguities of people's choices, their space to act and the creativity they expressed as social agents, cultural brokers and political entrepreneurs. Furthermore, it ignored the internal divisions and competing visions of order, justice and meaning within the various communities and thus bereaved the oppressed of their agency by reducing them to participants in the struggle.¹⁰ In an article on the concept of resistance, Jocelyn Hollander and Rachel Einwohner further pointed out that it needed to be taken into account that there are 'multiple systems of hierarchy, and that individuals can be simultaneously powerful and powerless within different systems'.¹¹

According to Cooper, another major flaw of the scholarship employing binary frameworks that saw African agency as a direct reflection of colonial rule, was that it underestimated the possibilities of the oppressed to 'alter the boundaries of subordination'.¹² The subaltern agent was still trapped in the colonial world of domination without real possibilities to transform this reality by acting as a true social agent. In order to eschew dichotomies between domination and resistance, Cooper thus stressed the need to examine how power was 'constituted, aggregated, contested, and limited' in order to engage with the complexity of colonial engagements.¹³ Power relations were therefore usually neither dichotomous nor symmetrical and colonial regimes were never omnipotent.¹⁴ As

⁹ Cooper, 'Conflict and Connection', 1,532; S.Ortner, 'Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37/1 (1995), 179.

¹⁰ Cooper, 'Conflict and Connection'.

¹¹ J.Hollander and R.Einwohner, 'Conceptualizing Resistance', *Sociological Forum*, 19/4 (2004), 550.

¹² Cooper, 'Conflict and Connection', 1,518.

¹³ Ibid, 1,533.

¹⁴ F.Cooper and A. Stoler, 'Tensions of Empire: Colonial Control and Visions of Rule', *American Ethnologist*, 16/4 (1989), 609-620.

Engels and Marks note in their analysis of British imperial hegemony, agents of direct violence were too few to do more than exert exemplary violence from time to time.¹⁵

In South Africa, the most powerful settler regime on the continent, domination was perhaps more thorough than in many colonial states. Representatives of the white minority including state authorities, farm owners or mine owners dominate the means of violence on a day-to-day level. Yet even here, the state did not act in uniform patterns and this daily exposure to violence was contested and challenged by the black majority in multiple ways. Eschewing the resistance, domination and collaboration paradigm, William Beinart and Colin Bundy for example examined how 'rural people saw their circumstances, made their choices, and constructed their ideas about the larger society'.¹⁶ And hence by the late 1980s, in South African as well as African historiography, the focus of resistance and collaboration had been abandoned for analyses of the complexity of life under colonial rule. The 1990s saw the rise of a new generation of Africanist historians who began to question whether colonial authorities were indeed the only target of resistance. Norma Kriger stressed the need to examine how internal structures within African societies reflected the way people interacted and became politically mobilised.¹⁷ Robert Ross also showed in his study on the Eastern Cape frontier how resistance was ambiguous and multi-faceted and often directed against local African elites.¹⁸ My analysis of the Vaal Uprising takes account both of ordinary and spectacular agency, and explores conflicts within African communities, as well as resistance against the apartheid state.

¹⁵ D.Engels and S.Marks, 'Introduction: Hegemony in a Colonial Context', in D.Engels and S.Marks (eds), *Contesting Colonial Hegemony: State and Society in Africa and India* (London, 1994), 1.

¹⁶ W.Beinart and C.Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape 1890-1930* (London, 1987), 31.

¹⁷ N. Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerilla War. Peasant Voices* (Cambridge, 1992).

¹⁸ R. Ross, 'Ambiguities of Resistance and Collaboration on the Eastern Cape Frontier: The Kat River Settlement 1829-1856', in Abbink, de Bruijn and van Walraven (eds.), *Rethinking Resistance*, 117-140.

(I) Violence and resistance

Patterns of resistance in the Vaal took an increasingly violent form and it is important to link violence to complexities of political agency. More generally this need to pay attention the variety of cleavages shaping a conflict was further advocated by Stathis Kalyvas, examining a wide range of historical and contemporary case studies from across the world. Tracing the diverse allegiances and conflicts during civil wars, he stressed the necessity to examine the complexity of violent confrontations and to eschew a strict distinction between 'private' and 'political' violence.¹⁹ In Kalyvas analysis, violence therefore has multiple roots that cannot be treated as discrete entities. In other words, violence towards individuals and groups can be both inspired by political motivations as well as private reasons including personal grudges or material aspirations and benefits.

Within South African scholarly literature, violence was hardly analysed in its own right until the late 1980s, when the intensification of violent confrontations necessitated new ways of understandings and reflections on the origins of patterns of violence.²⁰ Violence spawned by the state, collective violence against anyone associated with the apartheid regime, violence by right-wing vigilantes as well as the proliferation of gang activities reached unprecedented levels from 1984 onwards as contending forces were engaged in a deadly struggle over control, territory and networks of knowledge. A special issue of the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, published in 1992, questioned old frameworks of examining political violence in South Africa and offered new modes of

¹⁹ S.Kalyvas, 'The Ontology of "Political Violence": Action and Identity in Civil Wars', *Perspectives on Politics*, 1/3 (2003), 476.

²⁰ This includes, for example, W. Beinart, 'Introduction: Political and Collective Violence in Southern African Historiography', *Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS)*, 18/3 (1992, Special Issue: Political Violence in Southern Africa), 455-486; D.Bonnin, 'Claiming Spaces, Changing Places: Political Violence and Women's Protests in KwaZulu-Natal', *JSAS*, 26/2 (2000, Special Issue: Popular Culture and Democracy), 301-31; C.Manganyi and A. Du Toit, *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa* (Basingstoke, 1990); D.Foster, P.Haupt and M.de Beer, *The Theatre of Violence: Narratives of Protagonists in the South African Conflict* (Cape Town and Oxford, 2005); P.Gobodo-Madizikela, 'Legacies of Violence: An in-depth Analysis of Two Case Studies Based on Interviews with Perpetrators of "Necklace" Murder and with Eugene de Kock' (University of Cape Town PhD Thesis, 1999); G.Kynoch, 'Crime, Conflict and Politics in Transition-Era South Africa', *African Affairs*, 104/416 (2005), 493-514; M.Marks, *Young Warriors: Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 2001); H.Pohlandt-McCormick, "'I Saw a Nightmare...': Doing Violence to Memory: The Soweto Uprising, June 16, 1976' (University of Minnesota PhD Thesis, 1999).

explaining the roots, complexity and history of political violence. While scholars of previous periods had often regarded violence as a by-product of the struggle for liberation, contributors to the issue and William Beinart in particular stressed the need to include the role of socialisation, masculinity and culture.²¹ Besides paying attention to the multiple roots of violence, André du Toit argued that political violence ravaging the townships during the 1990s in particular had to be understood beyond the master narrative of struggle and had its roots in localised conflicts between various groups.²²

Violence as a strategy for change can not be disentangled from the broader context of apartheid South Africa but needs to be seen 'as but one of the many forms and varieties of endemic violence'.²³ The many aspects and layers of violence thus constitute a web of violence where certain expressions and forms are imbricated and others discrete. In their anthology *Violence in War and Peace*, Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philip Bourgois speak of a continuum of violence, arguing that violence reproduces violence. However, the meaning of violence is not always clear. Violence, as Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois argue, can be productive, destructive and reproductive. It can be 'necessary' or 'useless', 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate', 'senseless and gratuitous' or 'utterly rational and strategic'.²⁴ Violence can be contingent or premeditated but always emerges within a particular political and social context; it hence neither simply erupts nor is it a mere by-product of broader political dynamics.

Furthermore, the relation between state violence and revolutionary violence is not always

²¹ Beinart, 'Introduction: Political and Collective Violence in Southern African Historiography'. On the relation between violence and masculinity on the gold mines see K.Breckenridge, 'The Allure of Violence: Men, Race and Masculinity On the South African Goldmines, 1900-1950', *JSAS*, 24/4 (1998, Special Issue: Masculinities in Southern Africa), 605-30.

²² A. Du Toit, 'Understanding South African Political Violence. A New Problematic?', Discussion Paper 43 (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)), accessed 16 January 2013 at <http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/%28httpPublications%29/6FC92D92DCDF2CE680256B67005B64B7?OpenDocument>.

²³ C.Manganyi and A. Du Toit, 'Editorial Introduction. The Time of the Comrades: Reflections on Political Commitment and Professional Discourse in a Context of Political Violence', in C.Manganyi and A.du Toit (eds.), *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa*, 6.

²⁴ N.Scheper-Hughes and P.Bourgois, 'Introduction: Making Sense of Violence', in N. Scheper-Hughes and P.Bourgois (eds.), *Violence in War and Peace. An Anthology* (Malden, Mass., 2004), 2.

clear-cut. Indeed, the Sharpeville shootings of 1960 for example, albeit influencing the formation of the armed wing of the African National Congress, were not met with widespread violent tactics by the black majority. Instead, state violence during that time produced a climate of fear and an expectation of retribution that shaped the collective psyche and discouraged local residents in the townships of the Vaal Triangle, of which Sharpeville was part - and perhaps South Africans at large - from confronting the state. Apartheid rule had - at least to some extent - led to a political state in which repression as well as the fear of being subjected to psychological and physical harm had become internalised. In this sense the hegemonic project of the apartheid state was temporarily and partially successful.²⁵

To understand the cultural and social aspects of systemic and direct violence by the state on communities, the concept of terror and its relation to power and domination is useful. Terror, in Michael Taussig's words – with reference largely to Latin America - is 'the mediator *par excellence* of colonial hegemony'.²⁶ Terror intensifies and transforms the nature of violence and thus emerges at particular historical junctures.²⁷ In the South African case (as perhaps in most cases), experiencing terror included the *threat* to be subjected to physical and psychological harm. Terror is hence intimately related to the mind and the power of imagination.²⁸ In his work on 'cultures of terror', Michael Taussig has argued that they are defined by an 'epistemic and ontological murk', where the boundary between 'reality-and-illusion, certainty-and-doubt, becomes infinitely more than a

²⁵ On the internalisation of repression and fear see F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington (Harmondsworth, 1965); A. Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi and Oxford, 1988).

²⁶ M. Taussig, 'Culture of Terror - Space of Death: Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture', in Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (eds.), *Violence in War and Peace*, 40.

²⁷ I'm indebted to Daryl Glaser for his thoughts on the relation between terror and violence. K. Wilson discusses the use of terror by Renamo in Mozambique, see K.B. Wilson, 'Cults of Violence and Counter-Violence in Mozambique', *JSAS*, 18/3 (1992, Special Issue: Political Violence in Southern Africa), 527-82; on state terror see J.A. Sluka, 'Introduction: State Terror and Anthropology', in J.A. Sluka (ed.), *Death Squad. The Anthropology of State Terror* (Philadelphia, 1999), 1-45; on the relation between violence and terror see A. Strathern and P.J. Stewart, 'Introduction: Terror, the Imagination, and Cosmology', in A. Strathern, P.J. Stewart and N.L. Whitehead (eds.), *Terror and Violence. Imagination and the Unimaginable* (London, 2006), 1-39.

²⁸ A. Strathern and P.J. Stewart, 'Introduction: Terror, the Imagination, and Cosmology', 6.

“merely” philosophical problem. It becomes a high-powered tool for domination and a principal medium for political practice.’²⁹

And yet in contrast to Latin American countries the quantitative and qualitative nature of state violence and terror in South Africa was different. In Guatemala for example entire communities were terrorised and the army engaged in mass killings of the local population while in Argentina during the ‘dirty wars’ approximately 30,000 people were ‘disappeared’.³⁰ In apartheid South Africa, at least for the first quarter of the century up to the early 1980s, mass executions and public political assassinations were not the order of the day. Although the period from 1985 onwards saw an increase in massacres and widespread violent campaigns both internally and abroad, the South African security forces went to great lengths to disassociate themselves from murder; torture mostly occurred in secret.³¹

Instead, terror in South Africa included the terror of the pass raids, of forced removals, the terror of military occupation, the harsh brutality by which members of the different police branches treated the local population and last but not least the terror of the possibility of detention and torture. The prospect and experience of state violence led to a sense of fear and distrust that shaped political strategies and perceptions of the self, community and society at large. This sense of distrust was further exacerbated by strategies of the South African security branch to destroy networks of allegiance and trust by circulating false information, recruiting informers and harassing families of those who had become politically involved.

Furthermore, experiencing death threats by members of the security branch during torture or

²⁹ Taussig, ‘Culture of Terror - Space of Death’, 49.

³⁰ L.Green, ‘Living in a State of Fear’, in Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (eds.), *Violence in War and Peace*, 186-95.

³¹ The literature on Latin American countries is vast, but see A.Robben, *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina* (Philadelphia, 2005); for a broader analysis of the relation between state and violence, see M.Mazower, ‘Violence and the State in the Twentieth Century’, *The American Historical Review*, 107/4 (2002), 1,158-78.

witnessing the violence perpetrated by members of the riot squad during upheavals created a sense of powerlessness and a liminal space between life and death; this created the perception that to some extent survival was random. It created what Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman have called an 'ecology of fear'.³² From the early 1980s onwards stories around the disappearance of activists, experiences of torture and assault as well as police brutality in the townships were mediated through newspaper and perhaps more importantly through narration and rumour. With heightened political repression, the role of rumours as a means to generate and spread information became even more important and rumours were used both by the security forces and the comrades.³³

However, no regime can rule through force alone. While state violence and repression may deter people from engaging in political protest at least for a while, the balance of power between the rulers and the ruled is highly fragile and susceptible to challenge. Instead, as Belinda Bozzoli argues, the rulers and the ruled are bound together by a variety of threads.³⁴ Hence, a partial co-operation from the population is necessary in order to maintain power. To counter the student revolts of 1976 and to diffuse the revolutionary moment, the South African state implemented its concept of Total Strategy that included a curious mix between reform and repression. The implementation of reforms however opened up new space for dissent and galvanised communities into mass action.

While the momentum of 1976 could not be sustained, the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 and the beginning of the township insurrections in 1984 heralded the beginning of the most sustained challenge against the regime. Between 1984 and 1986, South Africa was engulfed in uprisings that reflected a new mindset, emerging mass mobilisation as well as the failure of the regime to implement reforms. Starting in Tumahole in the Northern Free State in July 1984, it

³² V.Das and A. Kleinman, 'Introduction', in V.Das, A.Kleinman, M.Ramphela et al. (eds.), *Violence and Subjectivity* (Berkeley, 2000), 14.

³³ The term 'comrade' is used for participants in the struggle against the apartheid regime. Comrades were usually associated with the Charterist movement and in many instances young and male. The term was increasingly used from the late 1970s onwards.

³⁴ B.Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Johannesburg, 2004), 41.

was in the Vaal Triangle, a highly industrialised area South of Johannesburg, where popular protests turned into an insurrection that recast the dice. The event that became known as the Vaal Uprising or '3 September' as it is often locally called, had been planned as a peaceful protest march to express socio-economic grievances and opposition to local authorities. However, from its very beginning violent and non-violent strategies of expressing popular protest co-existed. Uprisings in other townships were equally shaped by an amalgam of multiple strategies.

Despite being faced with increasing repression, many national leaders of the UDF were hesitant to condone political violence but were equally slow in condemning it.³⁵ As Jeremy Seekings has argued, advocates of revolutionary violence including Frantz Fanon or the Black Power thinkers in the United States were not drawn upon by the leadership of the UDF. This attitude towards political violence was rooted in the civic thinking of the UDF leadership, the fear of being banned or imprisoned and the role violence played in winning the propaganda war.³⁶ During the height of the township uprisings in 1985, the leadership of the African National Congress met in Kabwe, Zambia where it adopted a strategic position that saw the promulgation of a People's War. The idea of shifting the focus to a protracted revolutionary war with armed bases inside the country had gained prominence in the aftermath of a visit by a delegation of the National Executive the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC) of the ANC to Vietnam in October 1978. However, contrary to Anthea Jeffery's claim that the ANC-in-exile orchestrated the township uprisings and instigated violence (reminiscent of state discourse of the 1980s), violent strategies were often rooted in localised understandings of conflict and community.³⁷ Furthermore, they were not mere contradictions to non-violent strategies.

³⁵ J. Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991* (Cape Town, 2000), 315.

³⁶ On the propaganda war, see D. Posel, 'A "Battlefield of Perceptions": State Discourse on Political Violence, 1985 – 1988', in J. Cock and L. Nathan (eds.), *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (Cape Town, 1989), 262-74; R. Moosage, 'The Impasse of Violence: Writing Necklacing into a History of the Liberation Struggle' (University of the Western Cape MA thesis, 2010).

³⁷ A. Jeffery, *People's War: New Light on the Struggle for South Africa* (Johannesburg, 2009).

As Janet Cherry argues in her chapter recently published in an edited volume titled *Southern African Liberation Struggles*, violent and non-violent strategies to oppose the regime were not simply complementary.³⁸ She points out that they were 'complementary at tactical level, but not at the strategic level'.³⁹ Cherry hence argues against a nationalist view that regarded the proliferation of political violence as being orchestrated and guided by the ANC in exile. My own research confirms Cherry's analysis. Indeed, as an analysis of popular politics between the late 1970s and the mid-1980s demonstrates, strategies were often home-grown and emerged out of localised conflicts that shaped particular understandings and perceptions. The ANC, as Thula Simpson and Howard Barrell, among others, have pointed out, failed to seize the momentum and did not possess the organisational capacities to stir and guide the insurrections inside South Africa.⁴⁰ Instead it provided ideological support. Strategies of challenging the regime thus reflected a straddling between localised understandings and broader ideologies.

The question however remains as to why popular protests emerged during the 1980s at a time when the apartheid state was certainly not less repressive than during previous decades. In her book on the Alexandra Rebellion of 1986, Bozzoli asks

If apartheid was so powerful and oppressive, how was it that revolts such as these occurred at all? [...] If the African National Congress had been attempting to initiate revolution in South Africa for twenty years, what was it about the 1980s that helped it partly succeed?⁴¹

Tracing the various causes and dynamics that led to the rebellion in Alexandra, she examines the development of a new moral order and a shift towards more violent repertoires of resistance. Other

³⁸ J.Cherry, 'The Intersection of Violent and Non-Violent Strategies in the South African Liberation Struggle', in H.Sapire and C.Saunders (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Struggles. New Local, Regional and Global Perspectives* (Cape Town, 2013), 142-61. Tom Lodge also analyses the intersection between violent and non-violent strategies, though mostly focuses on the relation between the ANC and the UDF, see T.Lodge, 'The Interplay of Non-Violent and Violent Action in the Movement against Apartheid in South Africa, 1983-94', in R.Adams and T.Garton-Ash (eds.), *Civil Resistance and Power Politics. The Experience of Non-Violent Action from Ghandi to the Present* (Oxford, 2009), 213-30.

³⁹ Cherry, 'The Intersection of Violent and Non-Violent Strategies in the South African Liberation Struggle', 159.

⁴⁰ T.Simpson, "'Umkhonto we Sizwe, We are Waiting for You:": The ANC and the Township Uprising, September 1984 - September 1985', *South African Historical Journal*, 61/1 (2009), 158-77; H. Barrell, 'Conscripts to Their Age: African National Congress Operational Strategy, 1976-1986' (University of Oxford DPhil Thesis, 1993).

⁴¹ Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid*, 3.

authors have stressed the importance of socio-economic grievances, the failure of the state to implement meaningful reforms and the role of ideological guidance by the ANC-in-exile and the mushrooming of civic organisations in creating a context conducive for mass mobilisation.⁴² Jeremy Seekings argues that the changing role and status of councillors after the institution of Community Councils in 1977 altered social and political dynamics in the townships.⁴³ However, besides Bozzoli's analysis of the Alexandra rebellion, the majority of analyses focus on the causes and dynamics of mass mobilisation and less so on the roots and moments of violence that was part of the uprisings between 1984 and 1986.⁴⁴

The contribution of this thesis is fourfold. It provides empirical data and an analysis of popular politics and the shaping of a popular discourse around rights, community, conflict and freedom in the Vaal Triangle between 1976 and 1986. Furthermore, it adds to an analysis of the relation between above ground and underground structures in shaping of the content and strategies of political

⁴² T. Lodge and B. Nasson, *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s* (Cape Town, 1991); W. Cobbett and R. Cohen (eds.), *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (London, 1988); P. Frankel, N. Pines and M. Swilling, *State, Resistance and Change in South Africa* (London, 1988); M. Chaskalson, K. Jochelson and J. Seekings, 'Rent Boycotts and the Urban Political Economy', in G. Moss and I. Obery (eds.), *South African Review* 4 (Johannesburg, 1987), 53-74; J. Seekings, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation in PWV Townships, 1980-84', in Cobbett and Cohen (eds.), *Popular Struggles in South Africa*, 59-76.

⁴³ J. Seekings, 'Quiescence and the Transition to Confrontation: South African Townships, 1978-1984', (University of Oxford DPhil Thesis, 1990).

⁴⁴ The literature on protest and political organisation during the 1980s has profoundly shaped this thesis. It is vast but includes, for example; C. Bundy, 'Street Sociology and Pavement Politics: Aspects of Youth and Student Consciousness during the 1985 School Crisis in Greater Cape Town', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13/3 (1987), 303-330; C. Carter, '"We are the Progressives": Alexandra Youth Congress Activists and the Freedom Charter, 1983-85', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 17/2 (1991), 197-220; C. Carter, 'Community and Conflict: The Alexandra Rebellion of 1986', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18/1 (1992, Special Issue: Social History of Resistance in South Africa), 115-142; Cobbett and Cohen, *Popular Struggles in South*; Lodge and Nasson, *All, Here, and Now*; For an analysis of the broader historical context and the shaping of social and political life, see P. Bonner and N. Niefertagdien, *Alexandra. A History* (Johannesburg, 2008). Recent collections on resistance politics and protest include W. Beinart and M. C. Dawson (eds.), *Popular Politics and Resistance Movements in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 2010) and A. Lissoni, J. Soske, N. Erlank et al. (eds.), *One Hundred Years of the ANC. Debating Liberation Histories Today* (Johannesburg, 2012). The recent volume by the South African Democracy Education Trust provides a large selection of chapters on different aspects of protest and the struggle against apartheid in the 1980s, see SADET (ed.), *The Road to Democracy, Volume 4* (Pretoria, 2010).

protest in the 1980s.⁴⁵ By analysing the dynamics of the Vaal Uprising, this thesis contributes towards a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of collective action. It argues that crowds that emerged were not monolithic but guided by multiple interests and tactics. Finally, it examines the multiple facets of violence including the relation between contingency and premeditated strategies and the influence of subjectivity and ideology.

(II) The Vaal Triangle and the structure of the thesis

One area ravaged by multiple forms of violence, as suggested earlier, is the Vaal Triangle. It forms part of the industrial heartland of the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging complex (PWV). The boundaries I used in my thesis are influenced by boundaries of political mobilisation and organisation as well as political (and less so administrative) ones. They remain, however, to some extent porous and artificial.

Ever since the infamous shootings at Sharpeville on 21 March 1960, the area has been etched in popular memory for its violent conflicts. After March 1960, the Vaal Triangle warranted little scholarly or media attention, only to resurface in 1984 when popular protests led to the Vaal Uprising of 3 September. During the 1990s, the townships suffered from a series of massacres, drive-by shootings and violent clashes between supporters of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the African National Congress (ANC). The Nangalembe Night Vigil massacre of 12 January 1991 and the Boipatong massacre of 17 June 1992 in particular came to symbolise the escalating terror that marked the transition period. Piers Pigou, an investigator for the Truth and Reconciliation

⁴⁵ The recently published SADET volume on the 1980s is particularly valuable in shedding new light on the relation between the popular struggles and underground structures. See SADET (ed.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa. Volume 4* (Pretoria, 2010).

Commission (TRC), called the Vaal Triangle ‘an epicentre of violence during the eighties and the nineties’.⁴⁶

As suggested above, a key element in emerging political consciousness were the internal tensions that increasingly dominated the townships following local government reforms. Emerging hostility towards councillors was hence not merely based on political disagreements but rooted in subjective experiences.⁴⁷ Lived experiences of injustice and oppression also influenced modes of communication, socialisation and relations between people. In his book on the Zanzibari revolution, Jonathon Glassman examines the formation of violent subjectivities that were at the core of communal violence.⁴⁸ As he observes, rumours of impending attacks and imaginations of anticipated violence contributed towards a collective mindset that made violence against certain groups thinkable. This demarcation of conflicting identities can be observed in the Vaal Triangle as well. While not all councillors in the Vaal Triangle displayed the same disregard for accepted norms, their social and political identities became bounded through the circulation of rumours and stories in the media. By 1984, they had become demarcated as a collective social group that appeared to be violating the social contract. Violence against councillors was therefore not simply guided by overarching political ideology and orchestrated by external forces. To include the contingencies of violence further allows for an explanation – at least to some extent – of the different patterns of violence across the country. Epithets used to refer to councillors such as ‘puppets’ or ‘sell-outs’ were born of a broader discourse propagated by the ANC and the UDF.

Chapter two analyses emerging forms of popular protest and the straddling of subjective experiences with ideologies of liberation and freedom. Although political and civic networks in the Vaal Triangle were rather weak and fledgling in comparison to other areas such as Soweto or

⁴⁶ O’Malley Collection, Response, Piers Pigou from Boipatong, accessed 17 January 2013 at <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv02039/04lv02133/05lv02139/06lv02148.htm>.

⁴⁷ On subjectivity see J.Biehl, B.Good, et al. (eds.), *Subjectivity. Ethnographic Investigations* (Berkeley, 2007).

⁴⁸ J.Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington, 2011).

Alexandra, they provided space for ordinary residents to express their grievances and dissatisfactions. While opposition to the council system and the expression of socio-economic grievances had been unorganised and parochial, the formation of the Vaal Civic Association in 1983 – and to a lesser extent the local branch of the Congress of South African Students in 1980 channelled popular dissatisfaction into more organised forms of protest. Without the ancillary role of popular grievances, mass mobilisation would have remained impossible. While trade unions were certainly crucial in mobilising shop floor resistance, they are not the focus of this thesis that is mainly concerned with community politics. The variety of grievances provided a fertile ground for political mass mobilisation of the broader population. Mass meetings in particular shaped the emergence of a localised discourse on accountability, transparency, rights, community and freedom.

This discourse was further influenced by the formation of underground cells of the African National Congress around 1982. Although these cells were in no position to control popular protest, membership of such cells and the Vaal Civic Association overlapped. ANC material provided an important ideological framework that transcended parochial bread-and-butter issues by rooting them in the broader struggle for freedom and liberation from oppression. However, as the section on policing demonstrates, above ground structures concerned themselves with localised grievances as infiltration by police informers would otherwise have exposed the leadership.

The conflict eventually exploded on 3 September 1984, when thousands of local residents staged a stay-away from schools and work and marched to the offices of the Orange Vaal Development Board. Organised by the Vaal Civic Association, the march was planned to be peaceful. However, as chapter three highlights, by the time the protest march set off, violence had already begun. It was however neither a by-product of mass mobilisation nor did it simply ‘erupt’. Media discourse in particular often conflated mass mobilisation with political violence; violence in this discourse was a by-product of popular politics and erupted at certain moments in history. Such an analysis is not useful as it dehistoricises political violence as a strategy and concept that was

promoted by particular groups. Instead, the matrix of the uprising provided various groups the opportunity to pursue their own agendas. These were for the most part broadly shared within the black population of the Vaal but included scope for settling of personal grudges.

Part of the violence was contingent and resulted from hostile interactions between crowds, police and councillors. Both violence by police and councillors led to retaliation and cycles of violence, further exacerbated and inflamed by rumours of wanton police conduct. Other forms were however premeditated and rooted in contending perceptions of how to achieve political change. While violence against councillors had been contingent prior to 1984, it became an ingrained expression of conflict from 1984 onwards. As Gyanendra Pandey argues, 'Violence and community constitute one another.'⁴⁹ The theatricality of violence exposed fissures within township communities and demarcated the boundaries of community.

Understanding the roots, causes and impact of violence and its many manifestations is notoriously difficult and poses a series of empirical and ethical challenges. To analyse the event of violence itself as a 'moment of social interaction' is even more difficult.⁵⁰ Violence always constitutes a moment of rupture that necessitates new narratives of explaining and making sense of lived experiences and social relations; it shapes social norms and meanings.⁵¹ Examining the impact of the Alexandra rebellion, Bozzoli states that it shattered normality and thus altered the social and political landscape.⁵² The same can be argued for the Vaal Uprising. As Pandey highlights, moments of collective violence hence need to be examined as events that were not unilinear expressions of discontent reflecting preconceived ideas of particular outcomes but rather included confusion, loss

⁴⁹ G. Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge, 2001), 3; on communal violence also see S.Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922 -1992* (Berkeley, 1995).

⁵⁰ R.Thornton, 'The Shooting at Uitenhage, South Africa, 1985: The Context and Interpretation of Violence', *American Ethnologist*, 17/2 (1990), 218.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid*, 68.

and disorientation.⁵³ In other words, uprisings and other forms of collective action are inherently messy and reflect a multiplicity of forces and interests.

The reverberations of the uprising were manifold. While the security forces responded with heavy-handed repression, the uprising was difficult to quell. This had partly to do with the variety of repertoires of protest including older forms such as strikes, boycotts and public protests and newer more militant forms that promoted political violence. Hence despite attempts to break the rent boycott that had begun on 3 September and to re-establish 'law and order', the local authorities were mired in their unsuccessful attempts to regain control. As chapter four argues, local authorities had to make certain concessions including the scrapping of rent increases. However, oppositional political and civic networks were also in a state of disarray as the majority of the older leadership had been arrested, gone into hiding or left for exile. This vacuum of leadership catapulted a new and more militant youth leadership into the forefront of the struggle. They had been baptised by fire and their experience of state violence had radicalised them. It was a generation that was no longer afraid of openly confronting the regime. Not only the younger generation was conscientised by their experiences of violence and repression. Indeed, wanton police conduct and state repression created a new consciousness amongst the older generation as well.

At the forefront of violent confrontations were, however, young people. Street battles with police shaped the everyday life of many youths, and violence as a conscious strategy to oppose the regime gained momentum from 1985 onwards when clandestine youth units were formed.⁵⁴ Their aim was to promote 'ungovernability' by driving members of the black police force as well as alleged informers out of the townships. The incentive for the formation was rooted in localised understandings of conflict and inspired by the ideology and strategies of the ANC in exile. The Vaal

⁵³ Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 4-5; Robert Thornton argues that the violence is inherently unpredictable and hence cannot be explained by using concepts of causality, see R.Thornton, 'The Peculiar Temporality of Violence: A Source of Perplexity about Social Power', *KronoScope*, 2/1 (2002), 41-69.

⁵⁴ 'Youth' is of course not a monolithic category. Young people were guided by a great variety of interests. The percentage of youth involved in organised structures was comparatively low.

Uprising had demonstrated the capacity of gaining certain concessions from local authorities and led to the departure of councillors from townships. This relative success of the uprising hence inspired clandestine groups to continue enforcing new moral boundaries of community. The petrol bombing of policemen's houses, like the violence on 3 September, not only proved to be a major headache for the police but sent a signal to others not to collaborate with the regime.

Collective violence, according to Roberta Senechal de la Roche, is 'commonly a moralistic response to deviant behavior'.⁵⁵ In other words, while the older literature attributed collective violence to deviant behaviour by erratic crowds or groups, it was a form of social control. Collective political violence is hence not inherently anti-democratic and destructive but rather reflects a moral project that defines acceptable social behaviour and norms. Hence collective violence may also be regarded as a form of punishment against those who step outside the boundaries of the social contract that is perceived to exist between members of a community.

While it may be tempting to argue that political violence included an element of cleansing that allowed, in a Fanonist sense, the oppressed to liberate their mind, such claims are difficult to maintain.⁵⁶ Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre most famously argued that the colonized could only regain their humanity through revolutionary violence, hence overcoming the psychological impact colonization had on the mind of the oppressed. Interviewees, although explaining the impact apartheid had on their psyche, never explicitly argued that violence led to psychological liberation. In her book *On Violence*, written in the late 1960s in response to Fanon's theory of violence and during the height of student protests in the United States and Europe, German philosopher Hannah Arendt challenged the notion that the use of violence reflected the highest form of power and argued that

⁵⁵ R. Senechal de la Roche, 'Collective Violence as Social Control', *Sociological Forum*, 11/1 (1996), 97-128.

⁵⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Also see G. Straker, *Faces in the Revolution: The Psychological Effects of Violence on Township Youth in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1992).

on the contrary, use of violence symbolises absence of power.⁵⁷ Arendt's analysis in many ways also is problematic as she conflates means and ends and analyses violence from an ethical perspective. My interviews highlight an approach to violence that reflected a demonstration of power towards the state and more conservative members of society, but also a reluctance and almost regret about certain forms of violence.

(III) A note on methodology

I have chosen to focus on one area and one case study as it allows me to examine historical processes of continuity and change from a grassroots perspective. Examining everyday discourses and practices through biographies of diverse actors allows for an analysis of the complexity of power relations, political mobilisation and patterns of violence beyond the dichotomy of structure versus agency. This biographic approach is highly dependent on interviews and hence life histories of diverse actors are one of my key sources. But I have been fortunate that oral sources can be contextualised in detailed archival records. The archival sources for this thesis include the lengthy records of the trial 'The State v Baleka and 21 Others', popularly known as the Delmas Treason Trial, court records of other trials, newspaper reports, church records, collections of political materials, some police records, files of the State Security Council, records of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, records of the Archives of the Departments of Bantu Administration and Development, Co-operation and Development, Plural Relations and Development Aid as well as local archives in the Vaal Triangle.

⁵⁷ H. Arendt, *On Violence* (London, 1970); It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore Arendt's theory in great detail but see E. Frazer and K. Hutchings, 'On Politics and Violence: Arendt Contra Fanon', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 7 (2008), 90-108.

An analysis based on court records alone would risk reinforcing some of the problems of these narratives honed in the trial, as chapter five explores. Parts of the story, and other voices, counter-memories and versions of the past would be silenced and neglected. Certain themes, including the relations between civic structures and the ANC, as well as practices and discourses of political violence, which are elusive at best, would be demoted in analysis. The latter in particular, while absent in the evidence presented by the defence are over-exaggerated by the prosecution. Neither were keen to analyse the precise forms and nature of political violence and its complex relationship to mass protest. Moreover, the patterns of violence are empirically and conceptually difficult to grasp as understandings and memories of violence are deeply embedded in later political debates, and in the politics of identity. They are also entangled with subsequent perceptions of selfhood and people's memory of their role in a successful and legitimate struggle against oppression and injustice. My interviews suggest that the role of political violence against individuals has been silenced as it highlights ambiguous aspects of the liberation struggle.

Furthermore, the subjective construction of individual memory is based on experience, feelings and images – some of which are stressed over time while others are silenced or forgotten. To complicate things further, events such as the Vaal Uprising have produced collective or social memories that have been rehearsed over long periods to attribute meaning and to make sense of the past. In some instances I have been able to interview the former Delmas trialists, allowing me to contrast court evidence with their memory and interpretation within a post-apartheid context.

For all their problems, the records of the Delmas Treason Trial provide an unparalleled density of fine-grained information on popular mobilisation, everyday life in the townships, as well as state control and repression. The records include 424 volumes of court evidence as well as thousands of exhibits such as pamphlets, letters, handwritten or typed notes, sketches, copies of phone books and membership lists, photographs, transcripts of speeches, biographical files, copies of poems and songs and many other written documents that would most likely have been lost otherwise. In addition,

court records provide a detailed sense of time – the sheer density of information on the weeks prior the uprising and the dynamics on 3 September itself are astonishing and allow in-depth insights into the unfolding of the insurrection.

While the records of the Delmas Treason Trial are accessible, the records of the smaller trials on public violence, arson, intimidation, possession of weapons, terrorism and other charges are generally difficult to locate. Mostly tried at Magistrate's courts, the records have not been kept at the courts while the National Archives in Pretoria are of little use for such information. However, the records of International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF), housed at the Mayibuye Archive at the University of the Western Cape contain hundreds of files on trials and detentions and include court records, statements collected by the police as well as the defence lawyers, memoranda and charge sheets. Unfortunately, the hundreds of boxes of IDAF records have neither been catalogued nor indexed properly and hence to find information on particular cases is time-consuming.

While information on the period between 1977 and 1984 is very dense, it becomes scant and haphazard for subsequent years. Much of the communication and discussions by political activists, anxious not to leave a written trail that might incriminate them, were not recorded and if there was documentation, it was frequently confiscated by the police. While a series of well publicised trials in other regions of South Africa provided a platform, albeit tainted, for youth activists to outline perceptions and experiences of violence, I could not locate similar trial records for the Vaal Triangle.⁵⁸ This may have to do with selective destruction and poor keeping of records. Moreover while the Delmas Trial, focussed on the violence of 3 September, attracted sustained national attention, the subsequent trials around violence in the Vaal Triangle were less prominent. Furthermore, it was not an area of very regular newspaper coverage and articles are often highly

⁵⁸ Belinda Bozzoli for example uses trial records to analyse the Alexandra rebellion of 1986, see Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid*.

biased and reflect a particular discourse. It is thus difficult to establish precise chronological order of incidents and political organisation for this period.

The most coherent information on political networks, organisations, mass mobilisation and incidents and strategies of violence would most likely be found in police records. However, in contrast to East Germany for example where the records of the former Ministry for State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit or Stasi in short) were made accessible after the fall of the Berlin Wall, access to files of the South African security forces remain restricted. Although it is theoretically possible to apply for access to view these files through the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA), on a practical level access includes a number of challenges and hurdles. To my knowledge, there has been no sustained access to these files to date. Furthermore, many of these records have been destroyed.⁵⁹ While the security files on individuals collected by the Stasi span 180km, the extent of information on South Africans by the security branch remains unclear. Lists of files that survived the frantic destruction of records by the state in the early 1990s include material on several thousand individuals but I do not know the extent of this archive.⁶⁰

Parts of chapter five in particular is hence heavily reliant on interviews. I conducted semi-structured life history interviews which provided interviewees space to narrate their experiences in ways they deemed appropriate. However, as suggested earlier, memories are not a mere window into past experiences and perceptions but always represent subsequent experiences as well as perceptions of selfhood. Memories change over time while identities are continuously negotiated. They are obscured by subsequent layers of experiences and perspectives, most prominently through the discursive construction of events during political trials. Furthermore, my approach was not always successful as my questions nevertheless framed people's stories in a particular way and many

⁵⁹ K.Allan, *Paper Wars: Access to Information in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 2009).

⁶⁰ For SAHA's Freedom of Information Program (FOIP), see Apartheid Era Security Files, accessed 18 January 2013 at http://www.saha.org.za/about_saha/freedom_of_information_programme/apartheid_era_security_files.htm.

interviewees, upon hearing the focus of my research, focussed on topics that directly related to my research interests. The development of a political consciousness and the events leading up to 3 September in particular were stressed in many interviews.

Furthermore, violence in particular is difficult to research. Former activists may wish to distance themselves from past violence; extreme forms of violence, such as necklacing in particular, seem to have been an uneasy area for discussion and I abstained from probing the topic further.⁶¹ Hence besides conceptual challenges, research on violence poses severe ethical dilemmas. Although I have refrained from asking direct questions on violence including experiences of detention, witnessing death or being subjected to psychological and physical torture, talking about the past inevitably triggered painful and traumatic memories. Many interviewees, without being asked, recounted experiences of having been subjected to various forms of violence. This has led to moments of great distress that left interviewees with renewed memories of past trauma. Awareness of possible implications and the ability to provide assistance is hence crucial when conducting research on such topics. Unfortunately, no structures exist to provide psychological assistance to survivors of past violence in the Vaal Triangle; my attempts to organise assistance remained limited in scope. As a researcher, listening to such memories can be deeply unsettling, making it difficult to keep a healthy distance from research.

And finally, being a young white European woman introduced particular challenges relating to gender, language, age and race as well as power over the production of knowledge. I have dealt with these issues as best as I could by attempting to give voice to my informants, and by naming them specifically where they have so agreed, so that their contribution to the analysis can be acknowledged. I have also been keen to capture their language and subjectivities at the time. In this sense I have tried to give them some role in shaping the narrative. At the same time, I have tried to

⁶¹ Necklacing is the practice of putting a tyre doused in petrol around someone's neck to burn the person alive.

gain distance. Wherever possible I have sought to contextualise and test their reminiscences against documentary sources including those produced by the opposition and the police. For example, I am able to write about the events of 2-4 September 1984 in a more complete way by using police records of incidents as well as the subjective experiences of participants.

CHAPTER ONE

Community and Conflict

1965 - 1984

The knock on the door in Evaton was abrupt - if there was a knock on the door. Perhaps it was rather a hammering sound that disturbed the peace that evening. In any case it was unwelcome as it did not announce the friendly visit of a neighbour but the dreaded coming of the infamous municipal police, known as the 'blackjacks'. The year was 1968, eight years after the Sharpeville massacre and the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and three years after first houses were built in the new township of Sebokeng in the Vaal Triangle. A young boy of eight years had just come back from playing in the street when he witnessed his parents' arrest.¹ Neither his mother or his father had Section 10 rights under the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1952 and their presence in Evaton was thus considered to be illegal by the apartheid government.² To protect her husband, the mother claimed that he was a visitor and not the head of the household.

¹ University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers (WHP) AK2117 (State v Baleka and 21 Others), Case No.482/85, I2.7, Vol.205, Testimony Malindi, 10,733-4; interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010. Gcina Malindi is referred to by his full name Gcinumuzi Petrus Malindi in archival records.

² The 1952 Native Laws Amendment Act (which amended the 1945 Natives (Urban Areas) Act) further restricted the movement of South Africa's black population by tightening influx control. It defined three categories of black people who were qualified to live in urban 'white' South Africa. Deborah Posel summarises the sections as follows: 'in terms of section 10(1)(a), Africans who had been born and continuously resident in a particular urban area; in terms of section 10(1)(b), Africans who had served one employer for at least ten years, or several employers within the same area for at least 15 years; in terms of section 10(1)(c), the wives and dependent children of the people who qualified under section 10(1)(a) or (b).' In D.Posel, 'Influx Control and the Urban Labour Markets in the 1950s', in P.Bonner, P.Delius and D.Posel (eds.), *Apartheid's Genesis 1935-1962: Contradiction, Continuity and Popular Struggle* (Johannesburg, 1993), 414. Those who did not qualify were regarded as a temporary sojourners and under continuous threat to be removed to one of the homelands.

Asked by one of the policemen whether he knew the man who had just been arrested, the child denied this. Despite his young age he understood the gravity of the situation and was aware of his father's precarious legal status. Children were often the first ones to warn of impending pass and liquor raids.³ It was neither the first nor the last time his parents would be arrested during a pass raid.

Almost twenty years later, in April 1987, Gcina Malindi – who had by now become a grown man – recalled the incident in court as he was standing trial for his alleged involvement in creating a revolutionary climate to overthrow the South African regime. As one of his lawyers, George Bizos, remembered Malindi was in clear distress when he recounted the story.⁴ It had been a life-changing experience that had influenced his young mind. It was a story symptomatic of life under apartheid, a story that happened countless times all over the country.

(I) The structural context and the everyday

Social engineering: The 'model townships'

The Vaal Triangle had been one of the key areas to benefit from the growth in the manufacturing industry. The birth of heavy industry in the region dates back to 1913 when Sammy Marks founded the Union Steel Corporation (USCO).⁵ The South African Iron and Steel Cooperation

³ Under the Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act, Act No.67 of 1952 (popularly referred to as the Pass Laws), South Africa's black population was forced to carry an identity book at all times (often referred to as *dompas*). It was one of the cornerstones of apartheid legislation and led to widespread grievances and dissent.

⁴ G. Bizos, *Odyssey to Freedom: A Memoir by the World-Renowned Human Rights Advocate, Friend and Lawyer to Nelson Mandela* (Johannesburg, 2007), 461.

⁵ M. Chaskalson, 'The Road to Sharpeville', in S. Clingman (ed.), *Regions and Repertoires. Topics in South African Politics and Culture. Southern African Studies Volume 6* (Johannesburg, 1991), 117; also see R. Mendelsohn, *Sammy Marks: 'The Uncrowned King of the Transvaal'* (Cape Town and Athens, Ohio, 1991).

(ISCOR) was created in 1928 by the government to exploit South Africa's rich resources of coal and iron ore. Its initial base was near Pretoria, however in 1940 additional capacity was needed and a new site was selected in Vereeniging.⁶ In the Second World War the iron-and-steel industry experienced enhanced demand to service the armaments industry. Industrial expansion led to rapid urbanisation. As a consequence, new waves of migrants moved to the Vaal Triangle to seek their fortune. In Evaton the population increased from 10,000 in 1936 to 30,000 in 1946, leading to severe overcrowding.⁷ For the rapidly urbanising black population, employment in the manufacturing industry in the Vaal Triangle was an alternative to the gold mines of Johannesburg.⁸ By 1970, the local black population was estimated to be 240,214 and had increased to 318,295 by 1984.⁹

Chaskalson argues that the migrant population in Vereeniging's industry – predominantly from Lesotho and the then Orange Free State - was comparably much higher than in other areas of the Pretoria – Witwatersrand – Vereeniging (PWV) region.¹⁰ Due to the 'unpleasant and dangerous conditions', he states, many local people were unwilling to provide their labour. Agriculture in the Northern Free State and the Southern Transvaal provided generally lower-wage employment and often served as an entry point into the Vaal Triangle's labour market.¹¹ Hence a substantial number

⁶ C. Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa: Conquest, Discrimination and Development* (Cambridge, 2005), 120.

⁷ T. Lodge, "'We are Punished Because We are Poor'": The Bus Boycotts of Evaton and Alexandra, 1955-57', in T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (London, 1983), 173.

⁸ On urbanisation during this period, see P. Bonner, P. Delius and D. Posel, 'The Shaping of Apartheid: Contradiction, Continuity and Popular Struggle', in Bonner, Delius and Posel (eds.), *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935-1962*, 1-41; P. Bonner, 'African Urbanisation on the Rand Between the 1930's and 1960's: Its Social Character and Political Consequences', *Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS)* 21/1 (1995), 115-29. On the relation between the local state and local communities during this period also see H. Sapire, 'Apartheid's "Testing Ground": Urban "Native Policy" and African Politics in Brakpan, South Africa, 1943 – 1948', *Journal of African History*, 35/1 (1994), 99-123.

⁹ WHP AK2117, S8.3, S. Bekker, 'The Local Government and the Community of Sebokeng' (Stellenbosch, 1978), unpublished report, 8; WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ34, T. Van der Walt, 'Report on the Investigation into Education for Blacks in the Vaal Triangle Following upon the Occurrences in September 1984 and Thereafter', unpublished report, no date, 7.

¹⁰ Chaskalson, 'The Road to Sharpeville', 121.

¹¹ Chaskalson, 'The Road to Sharpeville', 122; S. Trapido, 'Putting a Plough to the Ground: A History of Tenant Production on the Vereeniging Estates, 1896-1920', in W. Beinart, P. Delius and S. Trapido (eds.), *Putting a Plough to the Ground. Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850 – 1930* (Johannesburg, 1986), 336-372.

of local residents had direct or indirect experiences of the harshness of farm labour.¹² By 1980, 33 per cent of the local population was employed in heavy industry.¹³ In 1978 Simon Bekker in his study described Sebokeng's workforce as 'stable'. He thought that they 'can be seen as privileged black workers. Their economic situation will probably compare favourably with that of most other groups of black urban residents in the Republic.'¹⁴ As a latter section will explore, this situation had changed drastically by 1984.

In the 1940s and 1950s, three new townships were built: Sharpeville, Bophelong and Boipatong. Sharpeville soon came to be known as the best administered township in the country and was regarded as a blueprint for successful social engineering.¹⁵ According to Chaskalson, it was used as a prototype for township planning during the 1950s. It provided infrastructure that was considered superior to that of other townships, including community halls, streetlights as well a relatively high number of schools and churches. The financing of these rested heavily on the revenues of local beer halls. Housing in particular was considered vital in ensuring social control; Chaskalson quotes an official in expressing concern that inadequate housing may foster the 'menace of Communism', or an uprising similar to Mau Mau in Kenya.¹⁶ It is interesting to note that the anti-colonial struggles in other countries and Kenya in particular seem to have influenced even the minds of small town administrators and bureaucrats. It was still a few years before the revolt in Pondoland would mark a new era of resistance and Sharpeville itself would become part of South Africa's violent history. But this was the 1950s and local administrators were part of what appeared to be one of the country's success stories. The Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960 changed the political and social landscape of the region and heralded a new era of repression.

¹² Unrecorded conversation, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, April 2010; interview, Sophie Mokoena, Johannesburg, 14 July 2010.

¹³ J. Seekings, 'Quiescence and the Transition to Confrontation: South African Townships, 1978-1984', (University of Oxford DPhil Thesis, 1990), 46.

¹⁴ WHP AK2117, S8.3, Bekker, 'The Local Government and Community of Sebokeng', 26.

¹⁵ Chaskalson, 'The Road to Sharpeville', 123.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

Both Bophelong and Boipatong were scheduled to be removed to Sebokeng – plans that never came to fruition. The creation of Sebokeng [the ‘meeting place’], that came to be the largest township in the area, followed the recommendations of the Mentz Committee, appointed to draw up plans for racial zoning in the Pretoria Witwatersrand Vereeniging (PWV) area. In 1954 it recommended to create one large township south of Evaton that would concentrate the black workforce in the Vaal Triangle.¹⁷ Urban planners projected the area should accommodate around 330,000 black people by the year 2000.¹⁸ A stretch of land that the authorities called N3-area between the Golden Highway, Houtkop Road and Residensia, a formerly white residential area that was reclassified as a black urban area in 1964, was set aside for the new location to be built.¹⁹ Residensia was directly adjacent to Evaton and its white population, who feared the proximity to a black township, asked the local authorities to buy their houses.²⁰ Zone 7 in Sebokeng, which gained notoriety for its gangs and high levels of crime, was eventually built on parts of the land where Residensia had once been.

The main road, named after king Moshoeshoe of Lesotho, originally divided the township of Sebokeng into the ‘Nguni’ and the ‘Sotho’ side. During the early 1960s, when Sebokeng was being planned, it was meant to provide space for a population that included 62.5 per cent Sotho people, 35.5 per cent ‘Nguni’ and 2 per cent ‘others’.²¹ This largely corresponds with population statistics provided by Simon Bekker.²² Following the logic of apartheid ideology segregation was not only enforced between members of different racial categories but also those considered to be belonging

¹⁷ M. Horrell (ed.), *A Survey of Race Relations: 1953-54* (Johannesburg, 1954), 59.

¹⁸ WHP AK2117, S8.3, Bekker, ‘The Local Government and Community of Sebokeng’, 8.

¹⁹ Various maps and correspondence, National Archives Pretoria (NAP) Department of Bantu Administration and Development (BAO), 125, A1/1914; also see NAP BAO, 125, A1/1914, Gebiedsbepaling, Residensia, Verklaring van Residensia tot Bantoegebied; NAP BAO, 1979, A19/1914, Bestuursrad van Sebokeng: Residensia: Aankoop van grond vir Bantoebehuisingdoeleindes.

²⁰ M. Horrell (ed.), *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1964* (Johannesburg, 1965), 219.

²¹ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the cultural history of violence and conflict. Rivalries between small groups and gangs organised along ethnic lines occurred; however, there is no evidence that ethnicity played a major role in shaping the conflict of the 1980s.

²² WHP AK2117, S8.3, Bekker, ‘The Local Government and the Community of Sebokeng’, 23-24.

to different ethnic groups.²³ This strict segregation however remained a pipe-dream and most areas were, to some extent at least, mixed.²⁴ Furthermore, meetings in busses, churches or sports fields guaranteed frequent interaction.²⁵

Sebokeng was what urban planners called a 'scientific' township and its physical layout reflected the authorities' obsession with spatial control. It further reflected the state's vision of the stabilising characteristics of suburban life. By the mid-1980s, Sebokeng included eight residential areas or zones enclosed by Houtkop Road to the South, the Golden Highway to the West, Sebe Street to the East and Evaton to the North. Moshoeshoe Street was the only main road leading in and out of Sebokeng while a vacant strip of land separated Sebokeng from Vereeniging and Vanderbijlpark. The physical layout of Sebokeng thus allowed for its cordoning off in times of disturbances. From above, the spatial arrangement of Sebokeng, like that of other townships in the Vaal including Sharpeville, Boipatong and Bophelong, looked mostly like a grid - each zone bordered by a main road and veined by smaller, mostly untarred streets that intersected at 90° angles. Some followed neat curves and circles that ended where they begun.²⁶ Houses were numbered with digits while places of worship, administrative buildings and shops or community halls were carefully planned and situated throughout the township.²⁷ Visibility and physical order, together with basic infrastructure, it was believed, would ensure social stability.

Zone 13, the first residential area to be developed in Sebokeng in 1965/66, was populated mostly by people from Meyerton - a small town whose black residents had been forcibly removed in

²³ NAP BAO, 9505, A19/1914/2, Sebokeng Bantoe-Woongebied: Aanlegplanne; also see A. Mabin, 'Comprehensive Segregation: The Origins of the Group Areas Act and Its Planning Apparatuses', *JSAS*, 18/2 (1992), 405-29.

²⁴ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

²⁵ Interview, Richard 'Bricks' Mokolo, Orange Farm, 20 March 2010.

²⁶ Jacob Dlamini elegantly describes the spatial layout of Kathlehong, see J. Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* (Johannesburg, 2009), 43-44.

²⁷ NAP BAO, 1798, A19/1914/3/1, Stedelike Bantoewoongebiede: Eenhede 8 tot 13, Sebokeng.

the 1960s – as well as from Sharpeville and Evaton.²⁸ Hence a large proportion of its population had a background of forced removals and shared some community spirit that predated their move to Sebokeng. From the late 1970s onwards Zone 13 emerged as one of the key areas for political mobilisation in Sebokeng and produced a large percentage of the local leadership. The population of Zone 13, the oldest residential area in Sebokeng, was more settled than elsewhere; a vital component for the establishment of social and political networks. Communal spirit seems to have developed very slowly in many areas of Sebokeng as its population was highly mixed, came from different locations and was frequently moved around by local authorities.²⁹ Adjacent to Zone 13, Zone 11 and 12 were built – the former housing Sotho speakers whilst the latter was planned as another ‘Nguni’ section, followed by Zone 7, 14, 8 and 10.³⁰

By 1978, Bekker’s study found that 70 per cent of Sebokeng’s residents were born and 77 per cent brought up in an urban environment. An overwhelming majority of 92 per cent and 93 per cent respectively came from non-homeland South Africa; two thirds were born in the Transvaal and 26 per cent in the Free State.³¹ Hence in spite of the region’s recent industrialisation and the role of migrant labour during earlier periods, by the late 1970s local communities had become largely urbanised.

Some of the zones had their particular characteristics and reputations: Zone 7 for example was notorious for its gangs and high levels of crime.³² It brought together the poorest sections of society;

²⁸ Interview, Gift Moerane, Vereeniging, 29 March 2010; interview Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010; interview, Dikeledi Tsotetsi, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

²⁹ WHP AK2117, S8.10.5, Memorandum on Vaal Triangle Background.

³⁰ NAP BAO, 1798, A19/1914/3/1, Stedelike Bantoewoongebiede, eenheide 8 to 13, Sebokeng.

³¹ WHP AK2117, S8.3, Bekker, ‘The local government and the community of Sebokeng’, 25.

³² Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010; interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010; interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010. Gangsterism and petty crime disturbed and aggravated the already difficult living conditions of township residents. At the same time members of gangs were admired for their ability to command respect, their social status and their ability to evade arrest, which created an aura of self-determination and power within a highly oppressive context. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the role of gangs further. The literature on gangs in South Africa includes J.Guy, ‘The Ma-Rashea’, in B.Bozzoli (ed.), *Class, Community, and Conflict. South African Perspectives* (Johannesburg, 1987), 198-212; C.Glaser, ‘Swines, Hazels and the Dirty Dozen: Masculinity, Territory and the Youth Gangs of Soweto,

furthermore, its close proximity to Evaton Small Farms, also known for its gangs, added to the distinct social character of Zone 7. Thami ka Plaatjie, who grew up in Zone 7, argued that it was for these reasons that some of the political dynamics of Zone 7 during the 1980s took on a 'criminal character'.³³ Zone 14 extension was occasionally referred to as 'Snobville' as it mainly accommodated the more affluent including civil servants, nurses, teachers and clerks.³⁴ Zone 1, 2, 4 and 5 were, according to maps from the 1960s, supposed to be built on the Evaton Small Farms but they were not developed there.³⁵ The threat of a replanning of Evaton was indeed one of the major grievances from the 1960s onwards.

While Sebokeng was carefully planned, Evaton represented everything urban planners and the authorities feared: a social geography that resembled a maze, winding streets, small roads, dark corners and a great number of shacks that were erected on plots of landowners. Evaton had its origins on a former farm that had been subdivided for freehold in 1904; its status as a freehold area shaped political dynamics throughout the century.³⁶ Effective control over Evaton was hence difficult if not impossible and the township was a thorn in the flesh of local authorities. The director of the Sebokeng Management Board John Knoetze wrote a letter to the Bantu Affairs Commissioner in 1971 pointing out that 'It is common knowledge that Evaton always has been and still is the hiding place for many Bantu who are illegally in the Vaal Triangle.'³⁷ Like Gcina Malindi's family, Evaton provided the possibility for newcomers and those without the right stamp in their pass to rent a shack.

Access to decent and affordable housing was a major grievance long before the rent boycotts started in the 1980s. From the mid-1960s onwards, development of infrastructure and the building of

1960-1976', *JSAS*, 24/4 (1998), 719-36; G.Kynoch, 'From the Ninevites to the Hard Livings Gang: Township Gangsters and Urban Violence in Twentieth-Century South Africa', *African Studies*, 58/1 (1999), 55-85; C. Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976* (Oxford, 2000); G.Kynoch, *We Are Fighting the World: A History of the Marashea Gangs in South Africa, 1947-1999* (Pietermaritzburg, 2005).

³³ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

³⁴ WHP AK2117, S8.10.5, Memorandum on Vaal Triangle Background.

³⁵ NAP BAO, 1798, A19/1914/3/1, Ligginsplan.

³⁶ On the background of Evaton see H.Mashabela, *Townships of the PWV* (Johannesburg, 1988), 79.

³⁷ NAP BAO, 9210, A14/1914/1, Ministerial Inquiry, Residential Problems: Residents of Evaton.

houses had concentrated on the new township of Sebokeng. In order to reverse the process of urbanisation, the government had cut back on the funds of housing for black people outside the homelands by 80 per cent from R14.5 million to R2.7 million between 1968 and 1976 – a process which was partly reversed in the aftermath of the Soweto Uprising when the government extended its 30-year leasehold scheme to 99-years in the Urban Areas Amendment Act of 1978.³⁸ A change in government policy to allow for investments by the private sector but did little to improve a serious shortage of housing, estimated at 4,825 units, as most families could not afford the houses.³⁹ Bekker's study found that by 1978, the average number of persons in a household was 6.5, half of the houses were overcrowded and one out of six households accommodated ten people or more.⁴⁰ Smaller families often had to take in lodgers – sometimes without being asked - and a number of houses were shared between two families, leaving very little space for privacy.⁴¹ Over the next few years, the situation got worse as overcrowding increased.

The majority of houses in Sebokeng – widely referred to as 'matchbox houses' - consisted of a four-room unit known as type NE 51/6 with an asbestos roof, two bedrooms, a kitchen and a lounge or sitting room. Toilets, particularly in older zones such as Zone 13, were outside. These houses were rented out without plastering, ceilings or internal doors and it was the responsibility of the tenants to improve these basic structures at their own expense.⁴² For those who had squatted in Evaton illegally, residing in a shack rented out by one of Evaton's standowners, the move into a house in Sebokeng was a major step towards improved living conditions such as access to one's own toilet and tap, more space, a backyard as well as more respectability, privacy and legality.⁴³

³⁸ P. Hendler, *Urban Policy and Housing* (Johannesburg, 1988).

³⁹ S. Blignaut, C.Cooper, L.Gordon et al. (eds.), *Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1978* (Johannesburg, 1979), 398.

⁴⁰ WHP AK2117, S8.3, Bekker, 'The Local Government and the Community of Sebokeng', 30.

⁴¹ WHP AK2117, S8.11, Statement by Lee Ndindwa; interview, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010; interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

⁴² WHP AK2117, S8.3, Bekker, 'The Local Government and the Community of Sebokeng', 29.

⁴³ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010; interview Richard 'Bricks' Mokolo, Orange Farm, 20 March 2010; interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

In Evaton some of the standowners overcharged their subtenants while providing little in terms of facilities.⁴⁴ In spite of its later reputation for dreariness and violence Sebokeng at first provided an alternative lifestyle that appeared attractive to many aspiring families and young couples. Hence interviewees whose families had been either renting a shack or sharing a house with another family recall the move to Sebokeng as positive.⁴⁵ Gcina Malindi's family, after years of insecurity and vulnerability, received Section 10 rights and moved into a house in Zone 13 in Sebokeng in 1974.

Houses in Sebokeng were geared towards the promotion of a stable family life, a concern that was at the heart of social engineering. Stable nuclear families would in turn prevent the proliferation of social ills that were seen to contribute towards a volatile political context. This type of 'racial modernism', as Leslie Bank argues, aimed to 're-engineer social relations and subjectivities on the local level' - 'a vision of black suburbia'.⁴⁶ As the positive response of some interviewees' highlight, this project was at least partly successful in its initial phase from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. From the late 1970s onwards increasing overcrowding and falling living standards began to transform the dream of 'suburbia' into an existence that was more shaped by social vulnerability and political oppression.

For others who had been removed from Meyerton, Evaton or Sharpeville, Sebokeng stood for the destruction of communities and a sanitised urban landscape with little communal spirit and less quality of life: a place that was 'desolate', 'inhospitable' and 'unwelcoming', to quote Thami ka Plaatjie or simply 'pathetic' as Reverend Gift Moerane stated.⁴⁷ Jeremy Seekings in his analysis of township politics in the PWV called it 'squalid and drab' and Njabulo Ndebele called the townships

⁴⁴ Interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 23 July 2010.

⁴⁵ Interview, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010.

⁴⁶ L. Bank, *Home Spaces, Street Styles: Contesting Power and Identity in a South African City* (London and Johannesburg, 2011), 24.

⁴⁷ Interview, Gift Moerane, Vereeniging, 29 March 2010; interview Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010. Quotes from interviews are not corrected as they are intended to capture the language of interviewees.

‘the very picture of poverty and oppression’.⁴⁸ While beerhalls offered some kind of recreation for men, women had little access to entertainment. There was hence a stark contrast between hopes and dreams of those who moved to the new township of Sebokeng and the bleak reality of a township that provided few of the facilities promised.

‘Not an easy childhood’: Structural conditions and the making of the self

By the 1970s the townships of the Vaal Triangle were not the most gentle or comfortable environment to grow up in. Poverty, high levels of crime and insecurity, continuous pass raids, rising unemployment, a shortage of housing and serious overcrowding all contributed towards a socio-economic environment that demanded great resilience and an ability to improvise. Furthermore, the neighbouring ‘white’ towns of Vereeniging and Vanderbijlpark were politically very conservative and included a large percentage of working-class Afrikaners. Interviewees recall the hostile interaction with the white population that included harassment and frequent assault.⁴⁹ Both towns were known for their harsh enforcement of racial segregation where, according to Gcina Malindi, ‘black people knew their place’.⁵⁰

By 1978 at least a quarter of the residents in Sebokeng were living below the Household Subsistence Level of R152.60 per month.⁵¹ Although the average monthly real wages increased by 70 per cent in manufacturing between 1970 and 1985, at least a quarter of the population in the Vaal

⁴⁸ Seekings, ‘Quiescence and the Transition to Confrontation’, 44; N.Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Johannesburg, 1991), 37.

⁴⁹ Interview, Tsietsi ‘Stompi’ Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011; interview, Edward ‘Chippa’ Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 22 November 2011.

⁵⁰ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 21 July 2010.

⁵¹ WHP AK2117, S8.3, Bekker, ‘The Local Government and the Community of Sebokeng’, 29.

Triangle was experiencing falling real incomes.⁵² Between 1980 and 1985, the percentage of households living below 'minimum living level' increased in most areas. However, the Vaal Triangle was amongst the hardest hit. In 1985, 30 per cent of households were reported to be beyond minimum living level compared to 26 per cent in Pretoria, 22 per cent in the East and West Rand and 25 per cent in Soweto.⁵³ Unemployment was widespread while the new educated young generation was barred from climbing the social ladder. Hence while Bekker had claimed in 1978 that the black workforce in the Vaal Triangle was privileged, the socio-economic situation including employment and living standards had declined within a short span of seven years.

Being part of the industrial heartland of South Africa, the Vaal Triangle had benefitted from the growth of the manufacturing industry since the Second World War but as a consequence, was particularly hard hit by the recession that set in the early 1980s and the faltering of industry.⁵⁴ A decline in subsidies on consumer items such as maize and bread and the introduction of a General Sales Tax in 1981 further shifted the burden of the fiscal crisis onto the shoulders of the consumers.⁵⁵ Within three years, the GST increased from five to ten per cent, crippling the consumer capacities of the poor, exacerbated by a surge in inflation from 9.5 per cent in 1977 to 17.2 per cent in 1981.⁵⁶ While the black middle class had been suppressed during the reign of Verwoerd and Vorster and Bantu education had had an equalising effect on the black population, the new reform policies under P.W. Botha provided for the strengthening of a black middle class. Thus the late 1970s saw the re-emergence of African entrepreneurship and professional opportunities at the same time as a majority of the workers were experiencing falling real incomes, recession and high level of

⁵² M. Chaskalson, M. Jochelson and J. Seekings, 'Rent Boycotts and the Urban Political Economy', in G. Moss and I. Obery, *South African Review* 4 (Johannesburg, 1987), 53-74; J. Seekings, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation in PWV Townships, 1980-84', in W. Cobbett and R. Cohen (eds.), *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (London, 1988), 56.

⁵³ Seekings, 'Quiescence and the Transition to Confrontation', 51.

⁵⁴ M. Sutcliffe, 'The Crisis in South Africa: Material Conditions and the Reformist Response', *Geoforum*, 17/2 (1986), 148; Seekings, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation in PWV Townships', 69.

⁵⁵ W. Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (2nd edn. Oxford, 2001), 237.

⁵⁶ C. Cooper, S. Motala, P. Randall, et al. (eds.), *A Survey of Race Relations: 1982* (Johannesburg, 1983), 59 and 207.

unemployment.⁵⁷ Social divisions deepened. While the changing economic context was not the sole factor in shaping local political dynamics, it contributed towards social identities that were increasingly infused with political understandings. These identities, as I will demonstrate, were at the core of emerging mass mobilisation.

Interviewees recall various factors that contributed towards the shaping of their political consciousness. Pass raids were indeed amongst the most common and serious grievances of black families in the townships. Pass as well as liquor raids not only heavily affected adults but children as well, forcing them from a young age to recognise potential dangers, distinguish those who could be trusted and giving them a bitter taste of apartheid legislation.

Another common denominator was poverty. Following the biographies of those who became Congress of South African Students (COSAS) activists in the early 1980s, growing up poor affected almost all spheres of their young lives and served as a recurring reminder of oppression and injustice. As the socio-economic situation became worse, less and less money was available in most households to pay for anything but basic food and rent.⁵⁸ Often there was no money for textbooks, for school fees, school uniforms, lunch at school, clothing, there was no electricity and many of the houses were seriously overcrowded with sometimes up to twelve people sharing a four-roomed house of about 50 square metres. Thami ka Plaatjie was born in 1967 in Evaton and grew up in Zone 7 in Sebokeng. He joined COSAS during the early 1980s and later became a member of the PAC and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA).⁵⁹ He immediately mentioned poverty when asked about memories that come to his mind when thinking about his childhood: 'Oh certainly poverty. I

⁵⁷ Chaskalson, Jochelson and Seekings, 'Rent Boycotts and the Urban Political Economy', 56.

⁵⁸ Interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 23 July 2010; interview, Tsietse 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010; WHP AK2117, S8.11, Various statements by residents.

⁵⁹ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

think it's one thing that is a recurring trend in the young adult life of Africans, especially during those days. Even to date, poverty.'⁶⁰

Besides poverty and a sense of insecurity, frequent exposure – whether direct or indirect – to violence was another factor that shaped people's lives. It has long been pointed out that violence was one of the endemic features of life under the apartheid regime: violence by representatives of the state, in the streets, at schools, at the work place and in private spaces such as homes or shebeens.⁶¹ As Clive Glaser and other others have noted, the state was more concerned with enforcing apartheid laws than the actual policing of townships.⁶² The risk of falling victim to some type of crime in Sebokeng in the early 1980s was very high, leading to a sense of insecurity, exposure to violence and the necessity to be streetwise, tough and fast in order to avoid entering the statistics of injury or death.⁶³ Being streetwise in this context included the intimate knowledge of the urban social landscape, the meanings imbued in spatial arrangements and an ability to navigate and read situations, people and places – skills that were essentially the same when dealing with police, as it became apparent during the 1980s. Young women in particular often had it rough. Dorcas Ralitsela, who emerged as one of the key ANC underground and civic activists during the 1980s recalls the precarious status of women.⁶⁴ To be on the streets after nightfall – which in winter is very early as the sun sets at half past five when most working residents are not yet home - often proved very dangerous and sexual harassment and rape occurred frequently.⁶⁵ As unemployment increased,

⁶⁰ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

⁶¹ C. Glaser, 'Violent Crime in South Africa: Historical Perspectives', *South African Historical Journal (SAHJ)*, 60/3 (2008), 334-52.

⁶² C. Shearing, 'Policing South Africa: Reflections on Botha's Reforms', *Canadian Journal of Sociology (CJS)*, 11 (1986), 293-307; J. Brewer, *Black and Blue: Policing in South Africa* (Oxford, 1994); C. Glaser, 'Whistles and Sjamboks: Crime and Policing in Soweto, 1960-1976', *SAHJ*, 52/1 (2005), 119-39; G. Kynoch, *We are Fighting the World: A History of the Marashea Gangs in South Africa, 1947-1999* (Pietermaritzburg, 2005).

⁶³ On attempts by the local police in Sebokeng to educate the population about safety and security, see *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, August 1983, 1-2.

⁶⁴ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010.

⁶⁵ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010.

becoming a gangster or tsotsi was not only attractive in terms of social status but also provided much needed income for unemployed youth.⁶⁶

This harsh environment hence created a new type of masculine identity that was defined by one's ability and skills to improvise, be creative, courageous and most importantly, to be streetwise. And while this is not to say that young women or women more generally were politically passive and did not become involved in politics and the street battles of the 1980s, the great majority of activists in the region were indeed male. This, it may be suggested, had to do with the different ways boys and girls were socialised and brought up.⁶⁷ Boys, spending more time out in the streets than girls, had to know their territories, the intricate and complex meanings of different spaces, recognise danger from an early age, and know how to make ends meet. These skills indeed shaped youth politics in the 1980s as young comrades both male and female were partly successful in evading arrest and developed new strategies to subvert and alter existing power relations.

For young people, having access to money was not only important in terms of buying school uniforms, text books or food; fashionable clothes were one of the means for youths to express their identity and to impress each other.⁶⁸ During the late 1970s and early 1980s, three different trends existed amongst the fashionistas of the townships: there were the Hippies or Ivies who generally wore jeans and were regarded by some as the 'softies' and less rough than members of other groups. A second group called themselves the Americans. They were inspired by the black American cultural trends both in fashion, language and music. The largest group however were the Pantsulas, whose clothes were inspired by French and Italian fashion.⁶⁹ Pantsula culture was heavily influenced by the

⁶⁶ A tsotsi is a township gangster.

⁶⁷ On masculinity, see R. Morrell, 'Masculinity in South African History: Towards a Gendered Approach to the Past', *SAHJ*, 37/1 (1997), 167-77; R. Morrell, 'Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies', *JSAS*, 24/4 (1998, Special Issue: Masculinities in Southern Africa), 605-30; L.Ouzgane and R.Morrell, *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late 19th Century to the Present* (New York and Pietermaritzburg, 2005); Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi*; C.Glaser and P.Delius, 'Sexual Socialisation in South Africa: A Historical Perspective', *African Studies (AS)*, 61/1 (2002), 27-54.

⁶⁸ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

⁶⁹ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, 14 June 2010; interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

dress codes and demeanour of the tsotsis and hence not surprisingly Pantsulas had a reputation for being rough.⁷⁰

Fashion, according to Themba Goba, had no relation with political ideas and hence young comrades belonged to all groups, depending on their personal taste and preference.⁷¹ Thus, a direct relation between popular culture and political strategies would lead to an oversimplification of the complexity of identity: the notion of being rough and tough could be embraced in certain contexts and rejected in others. However, Pantsula culture certainly did reflect and express a certain roughness that shaped the making of subjectivities born of a harsh environment.

Popular music styles in the 1970s included Mbanqanga - made famous by the Mahotella Queens - Jazz, Gospel and Bob Marley and other reggae groups. Disco music, Western pop music and bubble gum pop, played by Brenda Fassie and Yvonne Chaka Chaka became part of popular culture among the youth during the 1980s in particular.⁷² Music could either be listened to at home or in shebeens – the latter included a certain risk as it exposed particularly young people to liquor and violence as a result of drunkenness.⁷³ It was also very common to share records amongst friends and to write new lyrics for the tunes that would then be sung.⁷⁴ The same culture of sharing existed in relation to books. As Gift Moerane stated, reading books and newspapers was ‘actually an *exciting* thing for us you know. Because that was the only way of getting information.’⁷⁵ According to Sakhiwe Khumalo, ‘that time, having books was like having millions.’⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

⁷¹ Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

⁷² Interview, Gift Moerane, Vereeniging, 29 March 2010; interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010; interview, Sekwati Mokoena, Sharpeville, 30 March 2010; interview, Sakhiwe Khumalo, Vereeniging, 23 June 2010.

⁷³ Interview, Gift Moerane, Vereeniging, 29 March 2010. A shebeen is a drinking establishment.

⁷⁴ Interview, Gift Moerane, Vereeniging, 29 March 2010.

⁷⁵ Interview, Gift Moerane, Vereeniging, 29 March 2010.

⁷⁶ Interview, Sakhiwe Khumalo, Vereeniging, 23 June 2010.

Poetry, with its ability to invoke emotions and express shared sentiments and views, was another powerful literary device that was later used as a tool to mobilise larger crowds. One of the most popular poets of the 1980s, Ingoapele Madingoane wrote a poem called 'Africa my beginning, Africa my ending' which was first published in 1979. It influenced the thoughts, perceptions and ideology of an entire generation as it captured the increasing frustration and militancy of young people.⁷⁷ Popular magazines included *Drum* and *Pace*.

Books like *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country*, *Let my People Go* by Chief Albert Luthuli tackled issues of oppression, poverty and injustice. Additionally, a handful of activists recall the influence the work of African thinkers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Jomo Kenyatta or Chinua Achebe had in shaping awareness of struggles for independence and transmitting concepts of nationalism elsewhere on the continent.⁷⁸ Certainly in the 1980s, such books were keenly analysed and discussed amongst young political activists. Literature produced by the African National Congress, as chapter two will explore, began to be circulated in the townships from the late 1970s onwards. With the resurgence of ANC underground networks during the early 1980s, more material was brought into the country. During the 1970s, Black Consciousness (BC) literature provided more of an impetus than ANC material that was still scarce. The Black Consciousness Movement shaped the first generation of activists that founded the local branch of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) in particular. Schools, as will be discussed later, became a key environment for the shaping of reading cultures and it is indeed interesting to note the kind of literature former youth and civic activists quote and mention during conversations. Marxist literature, including the Communist Manifesto or Dialectic Materialism, books on Black Consciousness as well as literature by ANC stalwarts such as Chief Albert Luthuli or Govan Mbeki

⁷⁷ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

⁷⁸ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010; interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 23 July 2010; interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010.

were shared and discussed in informal settings, alongside poetry, classical literature and history books.⁷⁹

(II) 'Carrying the can' or 'learning to crawl'?: Local government and administration

The introduction of Community Councils, 1977

George Thabe, local resident and soccer patron of Sharpeville was a well-known figure in the area. Called the 'Pele of South African football' by some, Thabe was born in Top Location in Vereeniging - whose residents were later forcibly removed to Sharpeville - and grew up in Sharpeville.⁸⁰ In 1978, Thabe, the first chairman of the Vaal Triangle Community Council (VTCC), addressed the members of the white controlled Orange Vaal Administration Board (OVAB) outlining his vision of local government:

I and my Executive Committee of the Vaal Triangle Community Council, felt that we have not only friends, but equals who are prepared to support and guide us in finding our way on this new path, towards a better life for everybody in the urban areas.⁸¹

Thabe, seemingly aware of the difficult position he found himself in, made great efforts to reassure the white members of the Administration Board of his moderate political views while tentatively

⁷⁹ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

⁸⁰ The subsequent biographical information on George Thabe is drawn from I. Jeffrey, 'Street Rivalry and Patron Managers. Football in Sharpeville, 1943-1985', *AS*, 51/1 (1992), 69-94.

⁸¹ NAP BAO, 3/356, A2/14/3/S16, Verbal Comment by Mr George Thabe during the delivery of his budget speech and address to the Administration Board on the powers and duties of the community council (Vaal Triangle) at the fifty-fourth meeting of the Administration Board held at Sebokeng, on 22 February 1978 to consider and approve the estimates of income and expenditure for the Vaal Triangle black townships for 1978/79.

expressing some disagreement with apartheid legislation:

It should not be expected of us to change the laws of the country. [...] We will have to make everyone aware that those laws that we feel unhappy about, are either unjust or unfair and need to be removed. But we must not be expected to remove the laws as if the laws don't exist. This is not how we propose to do things. We seek for change through consultation and this will continue to be the policy of my council. [...] If we have to raise protest, it will not be in the newspapers; it will be round the conference table where we as a Community Council will say we feel this or that is unjust, can't something be done about it? [...] We will have a most difficult task in trying to convince the residents that we are the authority. You will realise, ladies and gentlemen, that after 300 years of saying the government will do it [...] it is now an almost impossible task to make these people realise that in future we will have to provide the roads, build the schools and that we will have to run our townships.

In this glimpse into the political thinking of community councillors and the role they envisaged for themselves as promoters of welfare, change and betterment, the speech barely addressed any tangible issues nor did it outline concrete suggestions of how to promote political or social transformation. Thabe's speech was in line with what the government and the Administration Board were promoting: limited access to political power on a local level.

The restructuring of local administration had begun in 1971 when the Administration Boards, which were directly linked to the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, took over control over the townships from the municipalities, reflecting the government's policy of separate development by bringing the townships under stringent influx control to contain African urbanisation.⁸² Administration Boards included six departments: administration, finances, housing, labour, trading projects and technical services. The Urban Bantu Councils or UBC's – nicknamed 'useless boys' clubs' as they were generally deemed ineffective and powerless by the urban black population – were created as a platform for consultation under the Urban Bantu Council Act, No 79 of 1961. As Jeremy Seekings argued, Urban Bantu Councillors, despite their reputation of being

⁸² The department's name was altered in 1976 to Department of Plural Relations and Development and then to Department of Co-operation and Development. On the role of Administration Boards, see J.Grest, 'The Crisis of Local Government in South Africa', in P.Frankel, N.Pines and M.Swilling, *State, Resistance and Change in South Africa* (London, 1988), 89-92; Seekings, 'Quiescence and the Transformation to Confrontation', 87-116.

'toothless bodies', nevertheless enjoyed a certain authority and respect in sections of the township population as arbiters of justice and distributors of patronage.⁸³

As a direct response to the failure of the Administration Boards to contain the crisis in the townships in 1976 and as part of a gradual move to reform apartheid, the Community Council Act, Proclamation 125 of 1977 was introduced. The Vaal Triangle Community Council was the first countrywide to be voted into power in November 1977.⁸⁴ The restructuring of local government was in line with a series of reforms, which were introduced by the government under P.W. Botha from the late 1970s onwards. What became known as Total Strategy (in response to the perceived threat of a communist total onslaught) rested on a curious blend of heightened repression and the reformation of certain aspects of apartheid.⁸⁵

The key reforms introduced concerned the reformation of urban policy, the formation of a regional as well as a national institutional framework, a shift in policies pertaining to homelands, a change in industrial relations as well as the strengthening of the security forces and intelligence and the military in particular.⁸⁶ It was in part an attempt to strengthen the black middle class, which would serve as a buffer between the increasingly militant youth and working class and the white minority. The decentralisation of local government aimed to strengthen separate development on one hand while ensuring administrative control based on less direct rule on the other hand.⁸⁷

The new Vaal Triangle Community Council consisted of 36 members, voted into power in a 20 per cent poll. The proposed budget for the financial year 1978/1979 by the Vaal Triangle

⁸³ Seekings, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation'.

⁸⁴ S. Bekker and R. Humphries, *From Control to Confusion: The Changing Role of Administration Boards in South Africa, 1971-1983* (Pietermaritzburg, 1985), 102.

⁸⁵ D.O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-1994* (Johannesburg, 1996), 323; *Sunday Times*, 13 February 1977; interview, Magnus Malan, Johannesburg, 10 May 2006.

⁸⁶ W.Cobbett, D.Glaser, D.Hindson et. al., 'A Critical Analysis of the South African State's Reform Strategies in the 1980s', in Frankel, Pines and Swilling (eds.), *State, Resistance and Change in South Africa*, 19-51.

⁸⁷ O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, 257.

Administration Board was R48 million of which R27 million should be generated in the townships.⁸⁸ Evaton, with its long history of struggling for its status as a freehold area and against the influence of the Sebokeng Management Board – the predecessor of the Vaal Triangle Administration Board – was given the possibility to establish its own community council, although it would normally have fallen under the jurisdiction of Sebokeng.⁸⁹ Elections in Evaton were held months later with only 10 per cent of eligible voters casting their vote.⁹⁰

Jeremy Seekings calculated the average poll for the entire PWV region to be around 15 per cent.⁹¹ As he has argued, low voting figures indicate the limited support Community Councils enjoyed. Local interviewees suggest that Community Councils were regarded as a substitute for meaningful political power from the outset. Nevertheless a small percentage of the population seem to have hoped that their socio-economic situation would improve. Over the next six years, popular support for the councillors remained static or decreased. In November 1983, the average poll was 14.7 per cent.

Evaton, the oldest township in the area including Evaton and Evaton Small Farms, was one of the last remaining urban areas where Africans had freehold rights. Over the years, various groups in Evaton, including the Evaton Resident's Vigilance Association and the Evaton Ratepayer's Association had fought against the replanning of the township. They had also repeatedly criticised the dire living conditions.⁹² With the establishment of Sebokeng, fears of being removed increased.⁹³ Thus in comparison to Sebokeng, Evaton had a longstanding tradition of protest mainly through petitioning

⁸⁸ WHP AK2117, S8.3, Bekker, 'The Local Government and the Community of Sebokeng', 19.

⁸⁹ NAP BAO, 3/356, A2/14/2/S16, Vaaldriehoek: Instelling van Gemeenskaprade; A2114/2/S16, Meeting on 9 August 1977, re: Establishment of Community Councils.

⁹⁰ These are the figures given by the South African Institute of Race Relations, see Blignaut, Cooper and Gordon (eds.), *Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1978*, 345. Figures provided by the defence for the Delmas Treason Trial quote a voting poll of 15 per cent in Sebokeng and 4 per cent for the Evaton Council, see WHP AK2117, S8.10.6, Memorandum on Vaal Triangle Background, Part II. Community Councils: Introduction and Reaction.

⁹¹ Seekings, *Quiescence and the Transformation to Confrontation*, 98-9.

⁹² NAP BAO, 125, A1/1914, Letter by Jacob Tshabalala, 21 September 1967.

⁹³ NAP BAO, 125, A1/1914, Letter by Jacob Tshabalala.

and writing letters to the Sebokeng Management Board as well as the Department of Bantu Affairs and Development.⁹⁴ Sam Rabotapi, like the aforementioned Thabe a trained teacher who had taught at the famous Wilberforce Institute for thirteen years, was born in Evaton in 1924 and had been involved in community affairs since the 1950s. He was elected to be the first chairman of the Evaton Community Council and later became the Mayor of the Evaton Town Council under the new Black Local Authorities Act of 1982, which was part of a new set of bills, popularly referred to as the 'Koornhof bills'.⁹⁵

It was clear that members of the two Community Councils did not aim to push for any meaningful political and social change on a national level. Their goal was for the Community Council to be granted full municipal status and to improve living conditions in the townships. In a highly paternalistic fashion, the Minister of the Department of Co-operation and Development, the successor of the Department of Bantu Affairs and Development, Dr. G. de V. Morrison stated in 1980 that 'People have to crawl before they can walk. We don't want to give you powers you can't handle. We are not afraid – but you don't have the experience or the know-how.'⁹⁶ Thabe however believed that 'the time has come for us to carry the can'.⁹⁷

In an exclusive interview with the *Rand Daily Mail*, Thabe stressed his intentions for the Community Council to receive for full autonomy from the Administration Board and compared his own ambitions to that of the Soweto Committee of Ten.⁹⁸ Only a few months later, in October 1978, Thabe was ousted as chairman of the VTCC and replaced by another football patron: Josiah 'Knox' Matjila, former head of the Transvaal African Football Association.⁹⁹ Matjila had initially been Thabe's

⁹⁴ NAP BAO, 9210, A14/1914/1, various letters.

⁹⁵ The Koornhof bills originally included the Black Local Authorities Act 102 of 1982, Black Communities Development Act 4 of 1984 and the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill. The Black Local Authorities Act 1982 followed the recommendations of the Riekert Commission report of 1979.

⁹⁶ *Sunday Post*, 30 July 1979; WHP AK2117, S7.20.34, Nusas: Ruling the Townships.

⁹⁷ WHP AK2117, S7.20.34, Nusas: Ruling the Townships, 4.

⁹⁸ *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 October 1977.

⁹⁹ *Sunday Post*, 15 October 1978; *Sunday Times Extra*, 15 October 1978.

protégé in the early 1970s but was expelled from the South African National Football Association in the mid-1970s, after rumours had circulated that he was attempting to replace Thabe as president.¹⁰⁰

By 1978, the Vaal Triangle Community Council was described in the press as the 'smoothest running council in the country' and was according to Thabe 'well-respected'.¹⁰¹ Sebokeng was praised as a 'model township' with a local government, which in the words of sociologist Simon Bekker, was 'reputed to be one of the best in nonhomeland South Africa'.¹⁰² The OVAB was said to be 'enlightened' and indeed, John Knoetze praised his Boards' ability to consult with the local population and believed that the higher living standards in the area had resulted in its relative quiescence during the student revolts in 1976.¹⁰³ A member of the security branch who was transferred to the region in 1974 remembered it as 'a nice area' with 'well-run' townships.¹⁰⁴ Like Sharpeville during the 1950s Sebokeng was seen as an administrator's dream, a tranquil township with a local population that appeared to abstain from oppositional political engagements. The area itself was seen as a testing ground for government policies. Knoetze's complacency was however misplaced; as socio-economic grievances and dissatisfaction with local government increased, conflict began to emerge that led to a large-scale uprising in 1984.

The passing of the Black Local Authorities Act in 1982 abolished further aspects of ministerial control by giving the newly formed black Town Councils full municipal status and were required to finance the administration of townships as well as developmental projects.¹⁰⁵ The replacement of Community Councils with Town Councils was an attempt to improve their reputation and to gloss over the fact that the tricameral parliament, consisting of three different houses of parliament for different racial categories, once more excluded the black majority from participation. Elections were

¹⁰⁰ Jeffrey, 'Street Rivalry and Patron-Managers'.

¹⁰¹ *Sunday Post*, 15 October 1978; *Sunday Times Extra*, 15 October 1978.

¹⁰² WHP AK2117, S8.3, Bekker, 'The Local Government and the Community of Sebokeng', 1.

¹⁰³ *Bantu*, January 1978, 17.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 29 September 2011 (name has been changed).

¹⁰⁵ Grest, 'The Crisis of Local Government', 93; Seekings, 'Quiescence and the Transition to Confrontation', 58.

held on 27 November 1983 with 14.7 per cent of registered voters (or 9 per cent of the adult population) voting the Lekoa Town Council into power.¹⁰⁶ Elections for the Evaton Council were held separately. In Evaton, eleven councillors were elected with an average poll of five per cent. The Lekoa Town Council included thirty-nine seats and represented six townships: Sebokeng, Boipatong, Bophelong, Sharpeville, Zamdela and Referengskgotso. The latter two, as indicated in the introduction, formed separate political networks and are hence not included in this thesis. Both town councils came into being on 1 January 1984.¹⁰⁷ Statistics released by the United Democratic Front (UDF) suggest that the poll for the Lekoa Town Council was one of the lowest in the PWV region; the average poll was 19.5 per cent.¹⁰⁸

In 1984 newly elected councillors were vested with augmented powers that had previously been exercised by Administration Boards.¹⁰⁹ Under the Black Communities Development Act 4 of 1984 Administration Boards became Development Boards; in popular perception, however, they were regarded as the same and in fact key financial powers remained with the minister.¹¹⁰ Esau Mahlatsi, leader of the Lekoa People's Party (LPP) was elected Mayor of the Lekoa Town Council. Councillors of the two opposition parties, the Bafutsana Party ['party of the poor'], the Mbumba Party of Josiah 'Knox' Matjila and the Mahlasedi Party were discriminated against; councillor Mofokeng alleged that they were prevented from using the community halls during the election campaign.¹¹¹ Shortly after the inauguration of the Lekoa Town Council, the *Star* newspaper published a report on floor-crossing.¹¹² According to the *Star*, a group of councillors – including Dlamini who had been elected deputy Mayor – joined the LPP; for those voters who had elected members of the Bafutsana Party hoping that their socio-economic situation would be addressed, it certainly came as a heavy blow and further undermined the councillors' reputation.

¹⁰⁶ WHP AK2117, S8.5.6, Black Local Authorities Elections 1983.

¹⁰⁷ WHP A2243 (State v Sefatsa and 7 Others), Case No.698/85, A, Vol.1, Testimony Louw, 28.

¹⁰⁸ WHP AK2117, J3.12, AM59, UDF statistics.

¹⁰⁹ Grest, 'The Crisis of Local Government', 97.

¹¹⁰ WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ34, van der Walt, 'Report', 35.

¹¹¹ WHP AK2117, I1.7, Vol.50, Testimony Mofokeng, 2,530.

¹¹² *The Star*, 28 February 1984.

After being voted into power, councillors of all parties were told by Mahlatsi that they should forget about party politics and serve in unity.¹¹³ Furthermore it appeared that only councillors of the LPP were members of the trade committee – one of the most lucrative posts in the council as it was in charge of distributing business and liquor licences.¹¹⁴ Whether by coincidence or not, all three councillors of the Lekoa Town Council who died during the Vaal Uprising of 1984 – Kuzwayo Jacob Dlamini, Johannes Chakane and Caesar Motjeane were members of the trade committee, as chapter three will examine.¹¹⁵ The fourth councillor who died, Philemon Leburu ‘Dutch’ Diphoko was a member of the Evaton Town Council.

Evictions, rent increases and corruption

Election promises in 1977 and again in 1983 included the building of more schools and houses, an improved provision of services such as tarring of roads, that people would not be locked out of their houses if their rent payments were in arrear, no eviction of widows and others who had lost their title as well as a reduction of rents. In Evaton, councillors promised to regain land that had been acquired by the Administration Board.¹¹⁶ However, given the economic and political base of local government and administration, councillors could not possibly stick to their election promises as both councils were suffering from a series lack of revenues.

Since their introduction in 1971, the Administration Boards were required to be self-financing, partly as a consequence of the policy of separate development and partly because it allowed the central government to withdraw from its financial involvement. Revenues for the administration and maintenance of the townships were generated mainly from beer and liquor sales, house rentals and

¹¹³ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.63, Testimony Mahlatsi, 3,340.

¹¹⁴ WHP AK2117, S8.5.6, Handwritten notes.

¹¹⁵ WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ31, Lekoa Town Council. Members of the Special Committees.

¹¹⁶ WHP AK2117, S8.10.6, Memorandum on Vaal Triangle Background, 4-5.

service tariffs.¹¹⁷ Capital expenditure, including housing projects were covered by the allocations from the Department of Co-operation and Development.¹¹⁸ As Jeremy Seekings notes, by 1983 most Administration Boards in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging area had accumulated financial deficits.¹¹⁹ This fiscal crisis had a number of causes including increasing costs for administering the townships, a lack of taxable industries in the townships and an increase in costs for building houses.¹²⁰ The fiscal crisis was further exacerbated with the privatisation of liquor and beer licences in 1983, depriving the Administration Board of one of its most important revenues.¹²¹ In 1984 for example, licensed liquor sales were said to produce an annual turnover of R40 million.¹²² Prior to the introduction of the Vaal Triangle Community Council in 1977 and the Evaton Community Council in 1978, the Administration Board had announced an increase in rents of 35 per cent to cover for the costs of upgrading the townships, especially to construct housing and other infrastructure and – most controversially – to contribute towards the development of the homeland of Qwa Qwa.¹²³ Knoetze testified at the Cillie Commission that R30,000 had been budgeted for the financial year 1977/78 for the development of Qwa Qwa.¹²⁴ He stated that according to government policy, it was the duty of Administration Boards to develop homelands and as the majority of the population in the Vaal Triangle was South Sotho, the Vaal Triangle Administration Board had close relations to the (Basotho) homeland of Qwa Qwa. However, few of the urban population of the Vaal triangle originated from this area.

¹¹⁷ On the fiscal base of township administration and government see Seekings, 'Quiescence and the Transition to Confrontation', 59-66.

¹¹⁸ J.Grest, and H.Hughes, 'The Local State' in G.Moss and I.Obery (eds.), *South African Review 1* (Johannesburg, 1983), 122-141.

¹¹⁹ Seekings, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation in PWV Townships', 60; also see NAP BAO, 3/3546, A11/4/3/S16, Budget report for the financial year 81/82, Sebokeng and other urban residential areas; for figures the monthly deficit in 1984 see WHP AK2117, G3.10, Affidavit of EHK Matthysen.

¹²⁰ Sutcliffe, 'The Crisis in South Africa', 145; Seekings, 'The Origins of Political Mobilisation in PWV Townships', 60; I.Van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams: The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa* (Charlottesville and London, 2000), 155.

¹²¹ Seekings, 'Quiescence and the Transition to Confrontation', 61.

¹²² *Sunday Mirror*, 2 September 1984.

¹²³ S.Blignaut, C.Cooper, L.Gordon, et al. (eds.), *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1977* (Johannesburg, 1978), 410.

¹²⁴ Excerpt from Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Other Places in South Africa held on 1 March 1977 (Cillie Commission), Vol.122, Statement by J.M. Knoetze, 5864ff., accessed 14 January 2013 at <http://www.aluka.org/action/showAllText?doi=10.5555/AL.SFF.DOCUMENT.tra19770301.026.019>; also see *Post*, 6 November 1979; *Financial Mail*, 3 March 1978.

Between 1977 and 1984, average rents in the townships of the Vaal Triangle were increased by 427 per cent with the steepest increase from R30 to R46 per month in 1982.¹²⁵ Simon Bekker's study suggested that rent increases were among the key grievances of local residents in Sebokeng as early as 1977.¹²⁶ The term 'rent' is however confusing as it included service tariffs, levies as well as basic rent for housing. By 1984, the Vaal Triangle had become the most expensive area for black people to live in South Africa. Bekker and Humphries argue that by 1982, the Orange Vaal Administration Board was the only Administration Board that had managed to introduce full economic rentals. For the majority of township residents, rents including service charges and tariffs were 'uneconomic' in the sense of being unaffordable.¹²⁷ The reason as to why rents, service charges and tariffs were increased so drastically in comparison to other townships is difficult to assess. As argued previously, the region was regarded as a testing ground for the implementation of new government policies and hence the introduction of economic rentals was perhaps decided centrally. Election promises that included the provision of better services, the upgrading of townships as well as reduction of rents therefore stood in sharp contrast with the reality of the fiscal capacities of the Administration Board and while rents were increased, hardly any improvement of infrastructure, housing or services were visible.¹²⁸ In addition, those in arrear of rent were often either locked out of their houses or evicted.¹²⁹ According to councillor Mokoena, the locking of houses 'was a usual practice'.¹³⁰ Dozens of statements by local residents confirm that evictions from houses were widespread: either because councillors wanted to give the house to someone else, because the male breadwinner had passed away and the widow lost the right to stay, or because rents could not be paid.¹³¹ Other councillors alleged that the allocation of housing was often tied to bribery.¹³²

¹²⁵ WHP AK2117, S8.10.17, Comparison of Vaal rents and other urban areas in South Africa.

¹²⁶ WHP AK2117, S8.3, Bekker, 'The Local Government and Community of Sebokeng', 32.

¹²⁷ Bekker and Humphries, *From Control to Confusion*, 151.

¹²⁸ WHP AK2117, S8.11, Various statements by residents.

¹²⁹ WHP AK2117, S8.11, Various statements by residents.

¹³⁰ WHP AK2117, I1.7, Vol.45, Testimony Mokoena, 2,222-3.

¹³¹ WHP AK2117, S8.11, Various statements by residents; interview, Dikeledi Tsotetsi, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

¹³² WHP AK2117, I1.7, Vol.50, Testimony Mofokeng, 2,545-6.

Members of the Community Councils were however very aware of the volatility of the socio-economic situation in the townships and the increasing opposition to rent increases. As early as 1979 when Dr. Piet Koornhof, Minister of Co-operation and Development, visited the Vaal Triangle, the Vaal Triangle Community Council presented him with a memorandum, stating the anticipated difficulties local government was facing should the fiscal base not somehow be improved. In perhaps surprisingly strong words, it pointed out that:

The Government is alleged to have given the Soweto Council the sum of R11m so that they can meet their deficits [...]. If indeed there is some type of free money [...] we wish to make an urgent and earnest appeal to the Government to come to our rescue so that our credibility should remain undented.¹³³

The requests of the Community Council were strongly supported by the OVAB, as a letter by D.C. Ganz, its chief director highlights. Ganz argued that the Community Council was under 'tremendous pressure from its residents not to again increase tariffs and rentals' and warned of the dire consequences if rent increases were not paid and the government gave financial assistance to some Community Councils and not others.¹³⁴

However, a telex from the Ministry for Co-operation and Development denied that government had given any financial assistance to the Soweto Community Council.¹³⁵ The correspondence between the Vaal Triangle Community Council, the Orange Vaal Administration Board and the Ministry for Co-operation and Development highlights the tension that existed between local and central government. While the Ministry expected Administration Boards and the Community Councils to be self-financing and rentals to be charged on an economic basis, on a local level the difficulties of implementing this policy were clear to everyone and conflict with residents

¹³³ NAP BAO, 3/4562, A13/4/2/S16, Memorandum by the Vaal Triangle Community Council: Presented to Hon. Dr. P. Koornhof, Minister of Co-operation and Development on the occasion of his visit to the area, 28 November 1979, 4.

¹³⁴ NAP BAO, 3/4561, A13/4/2/S16, Letter by D.C. Ganz, chief director, to the private secretary to the Hon. Deputy Minister of Co-operation and Development, Dr. G. de V. Morrison, M.P.

¹³⁵ NAP BAO, 3/4561, A13/4/2/S16, Telex by the under-secretary of Co-operation and Development.

over service charges and rent increases were anticipated as early as 1979. This sentiment seems to have been shared by councillors in other regions.¹³⁶

Between consultation and confrontation

According to Bekker and Humphries, most councillors had an occupational background as traders or businessmen, with a few teachers and unskilled labourers.¹³⁷ Most councillors in the Vaal Triangle were local residents who lived in the townships. Their political background was usually rather conservative and they operated through systems of patronage and hierarchical power relations that made political opposition very difficult.¹³⁸ Seekings argues that councillors were 'popular conservatives' who were 'inclined towards non-confrontational politics over limited goals'.¹³⁹ Usually opposed to rapid change, councillors lacked a coherent political programme and had a paternalistic attitude towards community and leadership. In many ways, it was this particular style of leadership that increasingly began to clash with popular perceptions and expectations.

While they never enjoyed widespread legitimacy from the broader population, councillors managed to gain the very limited support they needed to be voted into power by distributing favours. Testimonies of local residents demonstrate that support came from their family and other networks that predated their formal involvement in local political structures. Activists suggest that elderly residents were either too afraid not to support the councillors for fear of being evicted from their houses, or losing their bi-monthly pension grants or were bribed with blankets the councillors had received from the Administration Board for distribution.¹⁴⁰ Undoubtedly a small percentage of

¹³⁶ Seekings, 'Quiescence and the Transition to Confrontation', 90.

¹³⁷ Bekker and Humphries, *From Control to Confusion*, 105-6.

¹³⁸ C.Charney, 'Vigilantes, Clientelism, and the South African State', *Transformation*, 16 (1991), 1-28.

¹³⁹ Seekings, 'Quiescence and the Transition to Confrontation', 109.

¹⁴⁰ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 15 April 2010.

the local population believed in the capacity of councillors to improve everyday matters and to promote limited social and political change. Furthermore, despite their reputation, some councillors believed in the possibility of gradual change. Limited by a number of constraints, including a weak fiscal basis and an authoritarian leadership, councillors neither expressed radical dissent nor did they promote strategies that differed from those of the apartheid regime.

The powers given to the newly formed Vaal Triangle Community Council under the chairmanship of George Thabe included the allocation of housing, the right to make recommendations with regards to 'illegal' residents, the allocation of church, school and trading sites (the latter were allocated by a committee consisting of three members of the Community Council and three members of the Administration Board), the determination of moral and social welfare, the promotion of community development, a say in the 'beautification and neatness of the different townships', the awarding of bursaries and a say in the destruction of abandoned buildings. All decisions taken by the Community Councils were to be implemented by the Executive Committee of the Administration Board. Other responsibilities included the provision of housing for single people, regulation of animals, the administration of sports and recreational facilities, administration of library services as well as the general maintenance of services in the townships.¹⁴¹

The augmented powers in distributing business and trading sites, business licences (and from 1984 onwards liquor licences) as well as housing soon led to widespread corruption and bribery.¹⁴² Josiah 'Knox' Matjila, chairman of the Vaal Triangle Community Council between 1978 and 1982, went on trial together with his former deputy Ananias Ramogonako Sekobane and councillor and member of the trade committee Johannes Mabane Monnakgotla at the Vereeniging Magistrate's Court in 1985 for alleged corruption and bribery.¹⁴³ According to Matjila, corruption within the

¹⁴¹ NAP BAO, 3/356, A2/14/2/S16, Gemeenskapaade: Oorname van funksies, Sebokeng.

¹⁴² WHP AK2117, S8.5.2, Incidents of corruption by councillors. The historical legacy of corruption in local and national government and administration during the apartheid period warrants greater research.

¹⁴³ *Sowetan*, 20 November 1985; *The Star*, 12 March 1985.

Community Council was endemic during the period of his chairmanship between 1979 and 1983. Councillor Mokoena confirmed that rumours around councillor's corruption were rampant in the townships.¹⁴⁴ Various statements by local residents highlight this issue further: councillors were bribed in exchange for business licences, the allocation of houses as well as business and trading sites.¹⁴⁵

Struggles over access to resources were the cause of conflicts not only between residents and councillors but also within the Community Councils. During his chairmanship between 1979 and 1983, Josiah 'Knox' Matjila established a reputation for exercising politics through nepotism – allegedly he formed a small and closed group of alliances within the council, excluding those councillors outside his group from receiving bribes and acquiring trading and business licences.¹⁴⁶ In 1980 conflict ensued between Matjila and some of the members of the trade committee including councillor Sonny Mofokeng of Zone 3 in Sebokeng and Sam Kolisang from Sharpeville who accused him of irregularities in the distribution of trading licences. When confronted by Mofokeng, Matjila threatened to call the council police to have him evicted from the meeting.¹⁴⁷

Members of the trade committee distributed business and trading licences and sites first and foremost to themselves, their families and their friends. By 1984 Esau Mahlatsi, Mayor of the Lekoa Town Council, and member of the trade committee from 1978, together with his two brothers Paul and Meshack Mahlatsi had built a business empire that included bottle stores and supermarkets: twelve out of 25 bottle stores belonged to his family and he had interests in another eight.¹⁴⁸ One councillor alleged that out of 12 liquor outlets only one was allocated to someone who was not connected to the council.¹⁴⁹ In November 1984, two months after the beginning of the Vaal Uprising

¹⁴⁴ WHP AK2117, I1.7, Vol.45, Testimony Mokoena, 2,208.

¹⁴⁵ WHP AK2117, S8.11, Various statements by residents; I2.26, Vol.319, testimony Zulu, 18,290.

¹⁴⁶ WHP AK2117, S8.10.6, Memorandum on the Vaal Triangle background.

¹⁴⁷ *Sunday Post*, 20 July 1980.

¹⁴⁸ P. Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches: The Final Dramatic Events that Scuttled Apartheid* (Bellevue, 2003), 109.

¹⁴⁹ WHP AK2117, I1.7, Vol.45, testimony Mokoena, 2,188.

two councillors called on the Orange Vaal Development Board (OVDB), the successor of the OVAB, to set up a commission of enquiry into Mahlatsi's nepotism, which they blamed for popular dissatisfaction.¹⁵⁰ The motion was rejected by Mahlatsi over a spelling mistake as 'Lekoa' had been spelt as 'Lekwa'.¹⁵¹ With the phasing out of liquor outlets during 1984 that had hitherto been under the control of the OVDB, struggle over liquor licences became another cause for widespread corruption and nepotism.

Meanwhile, there were a number of stories in the media that an overseas choir was brought out, cars were repaired at council's expense and that councillors were planning a trip to Europe, funded by council money.¹⁵² In May 1984, the *Rand Daily Mail* reported on Mayor Sam Rabotapi's dismay regarding the purchasing of a mayoral car.¹⁵³ Cause of Rabotapi's anger, the newspaper report alleged, was the cutting of the budget from R28,000 to R25,000 for buying 'a silver grey' car which, Rabotapi was quoted in saying he needed for a public function.

In addition to corruption and evictions, councillors had a reputation for not listening to grievances. As Elizabeth Lefoke, a local resident stated in 1985 'I have complained to councillors at meetings. They don't listen. I didn't believe the councillors because they never consulted the people.'¹⁵⁴ More often than not, rent increases were implemented without prior consultation of the local population, nor was there any serious attempt - at least from 1983 onwards - to discuss the socio-economic grievances with representatives of the Administration Board and later the Development Board.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ26, Motion of no confidence.

¹⁵¹ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.61, Testimony Mahlatsi, 3,209.

¹⁵² WHP AK2117, S8.10.6, Memorandum on Vaal Triangle Background; *Sowetan*, 5 February 1982.

¹⁵³ *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 May 1984.

¹⁵⁴ WHP AK2117, S8.11, Statement by Elizabeth Lefoke.

¹⁵⁵ WHP AK2117, I1.7, Vol.45, Testimony Mokoena, 2,239; I.1.8, Vol.55, Testimony Matthysen, 2,835-7.

Political conflicts and the growth of opposition

On 27 July 1980 Knox Matjila addressed a meeting at Khutlo-Tharo Junior Secondary School to announce a rent increase of R2.40.¹⁵⁶ During Matjila's speech residents called for no rent increases, no evictions of widows from their houses and an improvement of facilities and infrastructures. Matjila, having a reputation for being aggressive, was threatened with assault by members of the audience. Policemen who appeared on the scene were stoned and Matjila subsequently had to be escorted out in a police van. As a newspaper report stated, 'Tempers ran high when the police came to Mr Matjila's rescue. The crowd shouted at him and demanded that the police should go away.'¹⁵⁷ A year later, the conflict sharpened in Evaton and Sebokeng as well as Tembisa in the East Rand when, according to journalists, shops were looted, buses burnt down and buildings set alight in the aftermath of another meeting regarding rent increases. In the vicinity of Sam Rabotapi's house, then Mayor of the Evaton Community Council, shots were heard and a crowd of approximately 300 people was seen outside his house. However, nobody was injured.¹⁵⁸

Another meeting in 1982 to announce a steep rent increase of R16 per month led to a heated confrontation between councillors and the public. Angry residents challenged the councillors saying that they were no longer going to pay rent increases as they could not see any improvements. Councillor Mofokeng, one of the councillors who addressed the meeting, threatened residents saying that 'I am not afraid of anybody here. I am a Tsotsi councillor. I can fight anybody anywhere.'¹⁵⁹ Other councillors were nearly beaten up after the meeting. During that year, a number of councillors resigned, including George Thabe and Sam Kolisang. Thabe publicly criticised the council system and stated that it was a powerless body.¹⁶⁰ Sam Kolisang was quoted by the *Sowetan* newspaper saying that the rent increases were 'ridiculous and exorbitant' while other councillors promised to call for

¹⁵⁶ *Post*, 28 July 1980.

¹⁵⁷ *Post*, 28 July 1980.

¹⁵⁸ *Sowetan*, 7 April 1981; *The Star*, 6 April 1981.

¹⁵⁹ *Sowetan*, 2 February 1982; WHP AK2117, I2.3, Vol.179, Testimony Nkopane, 9,187.

¹⁶⁰ *Sowetan*, 15 July 1981.

public meetings where they would challenge the decision of the council to increase rents.¹⁶¹ According to Kolisang most councillors were not in favour of rent increase. Matjila's leadership was described as 'inconsiderate and dictatorial'.¹⁶² And yet, subsequent sources demonstrate that although councillors promised to address the rent issue, there was no real effort to alter the situation.

Shortly afterwards, Kolisang was back in the council. Kolisang gained a dubious reputation for running a lekgotla, an informal court. While such forms of popular justice had a long history in townships, Kolisang's lekgotla was not seen to resolve disputes in a fair way, as the statement of a local resident demonstrates. Celystina Letseka, a widow, had approached the lekgotla run by Kolisang to report a conflict with her nephew as well as her sub-tenant. She had done so 'in good faith because I wanted to discipline the young man but instead it turned out that the councillor was a crook.'¹⁶³ Roy Matube, a youth activist during the 1980s, recalls the punishment meted out in 'Kangaroo courts' by councillors: 'The common charge is assault. If you have assaulted your wife. [...] They will beat you with sjamboks.'¹⁶⁴ Stories of councillor's violent conduct are manifold. Caesar Motjeane, one of the councillors who died during the uprising of 1984, was said to once have 'broken a man's jaw' when evicting him from his house.¹⁶⁵ Motjeane allegedly also praised himself for being able to fight with a knobkierrie, a fist and a gun.¹⁶⁶

Both the discourse and practice of violence seem to have been intrinsic to the political culture of councillors. Given their lack of support and their inability to ensure compliance with peaceful means, the use of violence was an expression of a fragile hierarchy of power relations that was under threat by increasing popular protest. This attitude, however, did not sit well with those who were

¹⁶¹ *Sowetan*, 8 February 1982.

¹⁶² *Sowetan*, 8 February 1982.

¹⁶³ WHP AK2117, S8.11.1, Statement by Celistyna Letseka.

¹⁶⁴ Interview, Roy Matube, Vereeniging, 20 April 2010; a sjambok is a whip made of hippopotamus or rhinoceros hide.

¹⁶⁵ WHP AK2117, S8.5.4, Memorandum on councillor Caesar Motjeane.

¹⁶⁶ A knobkierrie is a club.

confronted with this aggression and violence. The period between 1979 and 1984 thus saw an erosion of peaceful means to resolve conflict – violence and threats became ingrained in expressions of conflict and inscribed difference between increasingly antagonistic groups.

Furthermore, lack of communication and accountability gave rise to a number of suspicions that focussed on councillor's abuse of their power and the misuse of public funds. Councillor's lifestyle and behaviour became widespread topics of discussion. Motjeane, who had gained a dubious reputation for his aggressiveness, was further rumoured to be a womaniser who would 'take away' other men's girlfriends and make inappropriate advances on women.¹⁶⁷ Jacob Kuzwayo Dlamini, who like Motjeane died on 3 September 1984, was rumoured to be responsible for the dismissal of workers employed by African Cables.¹⁶⁸

Hence the physical proximity to the township population in combination with a lack of communication and transparency with regard to political affairs and the spending of revenues proved a dangerous cocktail that gave rise to a number of rumours. In the absence of open communication and information, rumours and gossip were vehicles for discussion and gave meaning to events and people's behaviour. As Luise White argues, rumour and gossip 'occupy the interstices of respectability, they follow exactly the contours of local and regional concerns. Rumour and gossip allocate responsibility; they contextualise extraction.'¹⁶⁹

While there had been a certain fluidity of social and political boundaries in the days of Advisory Boards and the Urban Bantu Councils the political and most importantly social identities of councillors became bounded from the late 1970s onwards. An increasing level of direct confrontation and the circulation of stories around councillors expelled them symbolically from the popular

¹⁶⁷ WHP AK2117, S8.5.4, Memorandum on councillor Caesar Motjeane.

¹⁶⁸ WHP AK2117, S8.11, Various statements by residents.

¹⁶⁹ L. White, 'Between Gluckman and Foucault: Historicising Rumour and Gossip', *Social Dynamics*, 20/1 (1994), 78.

imagined communities of the townships. The use of language in particular was key in turning the councillors into a social and political group with a collective identity. While it is difficult to establish with certainty when the naming of councillors as ‘puppets’, ‘stooges’, ‘sell-outs’ or ‘dogs’ began – it increasingly contributed towards the shaping of a collective identity. By 1984, as Matime Moshele Papane, a political activist from Sharpeville, pointed out, ‘layers and layers of anger’ existed towards councillors, ‘around the ways they conducted themselves’.¹⁷⁰

(III) The roots of political mobilisation

The impact of the Sharpeville massacre

Our parents became so... excuse the word, shit scared. They were so *scared* of the regime.¹⁷¹

Political mobilisation in the Vaal was very slow. Reasons included the impact of the Sharpeville massacre, the social geography of the townships, an exodus of the younger generation to places like Soweto for schooling as well as a history of continuous removals that resulted in a sense of unsettlement within local communities. Furthermore, the townships of the Vaal Triangle suffered from discontinuity in political leadership, in contrast to the Eastern Cape, for example, where leaders could draw upon a long history of resistance and politicisation. A lack of tertiary institutions further hampered the formation of political networks.

The Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960 and subsequent state repression of political opposition created a climate of fear and an expectation of violence that shaped the collective psyche and discouraged local residents in the townships of the Vaal Triangle from confronting the state. The

¹⁷⁰ Interview, Matime Moshele Papane, Johannesburg, 28 April 2010.

¹⁷¹ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

older generation in the Vaal, as Philip Frankel observed, recounted an 'almost palpable sense of disaster which seemed to pervade the whole atmosphere, seeping into the most intimate and private social relations'.¹⁷² By the early 1980s, a 'culture of mutual distrust' pervaded and local residents were still hesitant to talk about the fateful day.¹⁷³ People were, as one of Sharpeville's residents recalled, 'still crying within'.¹⁷⁴

In 1976, as student protests spread like a wildfire through Soweto, Alexandra and other parts of the country, young people in the Vaal Triangle were discouraged by their parents from participating.¹⁷⁵ In the words of Thami ka Plaatjie, the older generation was 'shit scared of the regime'.¹⁷⁶ Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, a COSAS activist, remembers the reaction of the older generation as follows: 'They say that "No, I don't want to see. You were not there my child. I was there"'.¹⁷⁷ Apartheid rule had - at least to some extent - led to a psychological condition in which repression and fear had become internalised and in this sense the hegemonic project of the apartheid state partially succeeded.

Although the townships in the Vaal had been more or less quiescent during 1976, a new group of students emerged with a more defiant attitude towards the state and with a keen interest in politics. The group of students that formed the first generation of the Congress of South African Students activists had all experienced the 1976 uprising. As elsewhere, they were heavily influenced by the Black Consciousness ideology and literature.¹⁷⁸ Black Consciousness was first and foremost a liberation of the mind and hence aided in overcoming the internalisation of repression that had persisted since 1960. Common to this generation was an experience of injustice, combined with a

¹⁷² P. Frankel, *An Ordinary Atrocity: Sharpeville and its Massacre* (Johannesburg, 2001), 200.

¹⁷³ T. Lodge, *Sharpeville. An Apartheid Massacre and its Consequences* (Oxford, 2011), 334.

¹⁷⁴ WHP AK2117, S8.10.17, Rent grievances, Sharpeville. Interview with resident.

¹⁷⁵ Interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010; interview, David Moisi, Pretoria, 13 July 2010; interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010; also see P. Parker and J. Mokhesi-Parker, *In the Shadow of Sharpeville. Apartheid and Criminal Justice* (Basingstoke, 1998), 25.

¹⁷⁶ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

¹⁷⁷ Interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010.

¹⁷⁸ Interview, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010.

perceived passivity from the older generation from an early age onwards. Most interviewees recall that first seeds of their political consciousness were sown through daily experiences of oppression, poverty and injustice.¹⁷⁹ Other factors influencing the shaping of a political consciousness were manifold. Dorcas Ralitsela for example became further politicised during her studies at the University of Turfloop, which she attended during the time of widespread student protests in the early 1970s.¹⁸⁰ Others regularly visited Soweto where they met a politically active student body.¹⁸¹

Despite the apparent quiescence of the Vaal townships during the student protests of 1976, local students identified with the grievances of students in Soweto and elsewhere.¹⁸² In the words of Oupa Mareletse, quite a number of students were 'waiting for these people to come and help'.¹⁸³ David Moisi, born in 1956 in Kroonstad, had gone to Tshepo Themba Secondary School in Residensia but decided to further his education in Soweto from 1975 onwards, due to a lack of classes in mathematics and science at matric level in the Vaal.¹⁸⁴ Soweto was the place to be and close enough for students from the Vaal Triangle to commute on a daily basis.¹⁸⁵ Although the number of high school students attending school in Soweto was small in comparison to the entire Vaal Triangle student body, these outside influences brought new ideas to the townships and created political and cultural networks that would survive. As the townships of the Vaal Triangle were unorganised during the late 1970s, activists from the area attended rallies and commemorations in Soweto as well as the

¹⁷⁹ Interview, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010; interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010; interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010; interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

¹⁸⁰ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010.

¹⁸¹ Interviews, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010; interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010.

¹⁸² Interviews, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010; interview Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010; interview, Dikeledi Tsotetsi, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010; WHP AK2117, S7.6, Statement GP Malindi.

¹⁸³ Interview, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010.

¹⁸⁴ Interview, David Moisi, Pretoria, 13 July 2010.

¹⁸⁵ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 15 April 2010.

East Rand.¹⁸⁶ These connections between the Vaal Triangle and Soweto and the Vaal Triangle and the East Rand were maintained throughout the 1980s.¹⁸⁷

Moisi, who was the chairman of the small local branch of the South African Student Movement (SASM), was one of a small group who organised the first protest march against rent increases in 1977.¹⁸⁸ As protestors marched from Zone 13 to Zone 14 in Sebokeng, their numbers swell rapidly from around 35 to about 500. After three kilometres, the marchers were stopped by the police and dispersed. Oupa Mareletse recalled: 'And the police appeared from nowhere. And for the first time, I inhaled teargas. And they sjambokked us and they arrested one of us. Because we ran away in different directions.'¹⁸⁹ However, in stark contrast to the protest march that heralded the beginning of the Vaal Uprising on 3 September 1984, participation was comparatively low and no public violence such as stoning or petrol bombing of vehicles and buildings or assaults on individuals seem to have occurred. In a statement to the press, Knoetze argued that 'most of the people have already paid their rent', thus suggesting that rent increases were not a widespread concern in area.¹⁹⁰ Moisi left South Africa to join Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) in late 1977, returning three years later for the successful bombing of SASOL II in Secunda on 31 May 1980 – for which he was subsequently arrested.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 21 July 2010.

¹⁸⁷ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010; interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

¹⁸⁸ Blignaut, Cooper, Gordon et al. (eds.), *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1977*, 410.

¹⁸⁹ Interview, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010; *The World*, 3 July 1977.

¹⁹⁰ *The World*, 3 July 1977.

¹⁹¹ Interview, David Moisi, Pretoria, 13 July 2010.

The formation of networks

Shortly after being released from detention for their involvement in the rent protests of 1977 Mareletse and his co-accused were driven to a conference on black theology in Hammanskraal, organised by Christian Institute, that had paid for the legal fees. According to Mareletse, this is where he met Esau Ralitsela for the first time.¹⁹² Ralitsela, who together with his wife Dorcas Ralitsela was instrumental in establishing an ANC underground cell in the Vaal Triangle and who pushed for the formation of civic structures in the region, had become politically involved during the same year as Mareletse. He was introduced to new political ideas by Ntsizi Moremi, a priest and member of the Christian Institute who was running community-based self-help projects in the townships and who was later banned.¹⁹³ In 1978, after receiving training at the Industrial Aid Society, run by students at the University of the Witwatersrand, Ralitsela opened up a local branch called the Industrial Aid Centre in Vereeniging. His contacts with students such as Thabiso Ratsomo from 1977 onwards as well as his involvement with workers laid the basis of a network of people who later became involved in the formation of the Vaal Civic Association in 1983, as chapter two will analyse.¹⁹⁴

Meanwhile, a group of students began forming networks at schools and through church groups. The Vaal Youth Crusade, a cultural club based at the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Evaton and the Young Christian Workers, an organisation that had become prominent in the 1970s produced part of the future leadership in the Vaal, including Gcina Malindi, Edith Letlhake and Simon Nkoli.¹⁹⁵ These cultural clubs, although not openly political, often exposed their members to political ideas and served as platforms for discussion and the formation of networks.¹⁹⁶ In the late 1970s, Tshepo Themba in Residensia, Jordan High School in Evaton and Lekoa Shandu High School in Sharpeville were known to be schools with a politically conscious student body. None of the schools

¹⁹² Interview, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010.

¹⁹³ Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010.

¹⁹⁴ Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010.

¹⁹⁵ WHP AK2117, S7.6, Statement GP Malindi.

¹⁹⁶ J. Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?: Youth Politics in the 1980s* (Johannesburg, 1993), 23; Van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*, 161ff.

in Sebokeng during that period had such a reputation. This only changed when a new generation of students began to mobilise at schools like Maqhaka Secondary School in Zone 11, Fundulwazi Secondary School in Zone 12 and Sizanani in Zone 13 – the three zones which formed the spatial node of resistance and political mobilisation in the 1980s.

One of the turning points in terms of political mobilisation was the funeral of Johannes Matsobane in August 1978. Matsobane, a student member of SASM in Sebokeng, had been involved in the burning of a school in 1977 and was subsequently charged with sabotage and sentenced to imprisonment on Robben Island, where he died in 1978.¹⁹⁷ The circumstances of his death as well as his popularity attracted large numbers to attend his funeral on 26 August 1978. After the funeral, police threw teargas into the crowd and chased those who tried to escape. Subsequently five young men were arrested and charged for attending an 'illegal gathering'.¹⁹⁸

Matsobane's funeral had a substantial impact on political conscientisation and mobilisation of the local population. It was the first large public political event in the Vaal Triangle since the Sharpeville protests of 1960 and therefore provided space and the opportunity for people to discuss their grievances.¹⁹⁹ The defence lawyers later argued during the Delmas Treason that

There is a strong view that this funeral played a very significant role in opening up the people of the Vaal Triangle to the idea of organisations. [...] It gave people who had several grievances, the sense that they were not alone in such grievances.²⁰⁰

Furthermore, police conduct at the funeral and the ensuing brutality and disrespect radicalised people who may not have been politically conscientised before.

¹⁹⁷ *Work in Progress*, 6 June 1978.

¹⁹⁸ *Post*, 27 January 1979.

¹⁹⁹ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010; interview, Gift Moereane, Vereeniging, 29 March 2010; interview Richard 'Bricks' Mokolo, Orange Farm, 20 March 2010; interview, Lord McCamel, Evaton, 2 May 2006.

²⁰⁰ WHP AK2117, S8.4.1, Memorandum on the emergence of the VCA.

(IV) Conclusion

Until the mid-1980s, the townships of the Vaal Triangle were seen as a testing ground for government policies. Sharpeville, as suggested at the beginning, was seen as a prototype for successful social engineering. In the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, local administrators and government focussed their attention on the newly built township of Sebokeng. Like Sharpeville during the 1950s, it was seen as a tranquil and peaceful place with a local population that appeared content, privileged and not prone to engage in popular resistance against the state. The impact of the Sharpeville massacre, as witness testimonies demonstrate, was palpable. During the student protests of 1976, the townships of the Vaal Triangle remained fairly quiescent and political mobilisation was generally very slow.

Being part of the industrial heartland, the area attracted workers and grew very rapidly. Employment seemed to be stable until the late 1970s when recession and the faltering of the manufacturing industry hit the Vaal Triangle. By the mid-1980s, the area was experiencing disproportionately high levels of poverty and unemployment; living standards were plummeting while the introduction of the GST and prices for staple foods further shifted the burden of the economic recession unto the shoulders of the poorest.

It was within this context that the state embarked on its reform programme that included the introduction of Community Councils in 1977. Initially aimed to diffuse popular discontent, the Community Councils were marred from the beginning: a weak fiscal basis and limited possibilities (and indeed willingness) to promote far-reaching change soon undermined the last pillars of support. The council system suffered from a lack of transparency, legitimacy and accountability. By 1984, rumours of corruption, nepotism and other forms of malpractice were rife and the relations between councillors and local residents had become increasingly hostile.

The moulding of social and political subjectivities were deeply rooted in experiences of the everyday, the lived reality of daily social, cultural and political interactions within communities as well as between the black population and white authorities. Political mobilisation inspired and gave rise to new discourses that focussed on accountability and legitimacy. Meanwhile, social and political identities of representatives of the local state that had previously been fairly fluid had become bounded by the early 1980s, as councillors moved from consultation to confrontation.

CHAPTER TWO

‘Quite a fertile soil’: Between secrecy and mass mobilisation, 1980 – 1984

When people came to set up the UDF structures in the region here they found the soil to be quite fertile.¹

It all began with a door. The house door made of Meranti wood had been purchased by Tebello Ephraim Ramakgula for R78 to provide his rented house in Zone 7, Sebokeng with safety and privacy. Sebokeng and Zone 7 in particular, nicknamed ‘slag pan’ [slaughter pan] by some, was notorious for its high levels of crime and prevalence of gangs.² Ramakgula had purchased the door in 1977 to replace the old, rotten front door the house had come with when he moved in. Months of discussions with the Orange Vaal Administration Board (OVAB) and the ward councillor in his area had convinced him that he had to take matters in his own hands as the authorities appeared unwilling to provide a new door. Furthermore he was told to pay the rental arrears of four months of the previous tenant.³

In 1983 the door went missing. Ramakgula, an assistant electrician in his thirties with little

¹ Interview, Tsietsi ‘Stompi’ Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

² Interview, Edward ‘Chippa’ Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 8 April 2010; interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010; interview, Gift Moerane, Vereeniging, 29 March 2010.

³ University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers (WHP), AK2117 (State v Baleka and 21 Others), Case No. 482/85, I2.3, Vol.179, Testimony Ramagula [sic], 9,199-9,200.

formal education, enquired at the offices of the OVAB and was informed that the door had been removed due to his failure to pay rent: a widespread strategy aimed to enforce the payment of rent arrears.⁴ With high crime rates, a missing door was no minor matter but exposed him to insecurity and danger. Ramakgula's experiences, typical for township communities in the Vaal triangle, prompted him to attend the launch of the Vaal Civic Association (VCA) on 9 October 1983 and subsequently to join the area committee in Zone 7. Less than four years later, on 23 February 1987, Ramakgula appeared in court as one of the Delmas trialists for his alleged involvement in fomenting a revolutionary climate in South Africa.⁵ Examined by George Bizos, he explained his reasons for joining the Vaal Civic Association in 1983.

The incident that caused him particular grief, he explained in court, was the removal of his house door. Rampant corruption, unaccountability and ambiguous behaviour of members of the Vaal Triangle Community Council and later the Lekoa Town Council, the practices of the Administration Board and his dire economic situation had shaped the context in which the removal of the door came to symbolise everything that was wrong with the system. In his words, the VCA provided a platform 'to come together and discuss with my fellow Blacks, my fellow people, to discuss the problems we have'.⁶

The hundreds of volumes of court evidence given by members of the Vaal Civic Association paint a picture that their involvement was entirely divorced from any broader ideologies of the banned liberation movements but was solely based on addressing bread-and-butter issues.⁷ Although a few of the witnesses explained their understanding of liberation and the need for a representative government, they denied any relation to the goals of the African National Congress

⁴ WHP AK2117, I2.3, Vol.179, Testimony Ramagula [sic], 9,202.

⁵ WHP AK2117, I2.3, Vol.179, Testimony Ramagula [sic], 9,217; also see Boston Review, February 1989, accessed 11 January 2013 at <http://www.bostonreview.net/BR14.1/moss.html>.

⁶ WHP AK2117, I2.3, Vol.179, Testimony Ramagula [sic], 9,217.

⁷ The court evidence by the accused includes WHP, AK2117, I2.1, Vol.158 – I2.24, Vol.306.

(ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) or the South African Communist Party (SACP).⁸ Interviews however revealed that core members of the VCA had close contact with the ANC in exile since the early 1980s.

However, the sources have to be understood in the context of the trials. Furthering the aims, or membership, of banned organisations was a serious offence. It is true that in contrast to other areas, political mobilisation was rather slow and the various groups that were established from 1980 onwards often battled to find committed members who were willing to serve in executive functions. And yet the period between 1980 and 1984 saw the emergence of a variety of organisations including local branches of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) and the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), a number of community and youth organisations such as the Bophelong Youth Congress, as well as the VCA. Besides these above ground structures, more than one ANC underground cell was formed around 1982; its members became heavily involved in the formation of a semi-clandestine structure, the Vaal Action Committee (VAC), which worked towards the establishment of civic structures that would facilitate mass mobilisation and deal with the daily grievances of local residents.

The four years leading up to the Vaal Uprising were marked by a dual character of political mobilisation: namely mass mobilisation above ground and the emergence of underground structures that were defined by high levels of secrecy and included very few people. A general perception of infiltration and surveillance by the police not only created fear and distrust amongst communities but profoundly shaped emerging politics from the early 1980s onwards and influenced forms of communication, use of space as well as the boundary between inclusion and exclusion. The two different forms of organisation however intersected in various ways and it was at the nexus of the two that popular protest became most powerful. The confluence of everyday grievances on the one hand, and broader ideologies and cultural and political influences on the other fuelled both patterns

⁸ WHP AK2117, I2.1, Vol.165, Testimony Vilakazi, 8,319-21.

of political mobilisation. As police interviews demonstrate, small and clandestine groups in particular were very difficult to infiltrate; in most cases the police seemed to have substantial information on above ground structures and less so on underground structures.⁹

The rigid spatial landscape of the townships of the Vaal, with the exception of Evaton, and the social fabric of its local communities produced particular forms of political mobilisation and organisation that were deeply rooted in the natural and the built environment of the townships. With their poor facilities, the Vaal townships provided little public space to conduct meetings. The use of community halls such as the Mphatlalatsane Hall in Zone 14, Sebokeng, became increasingly restricted. The dual nature of political mobilisation - mass mobilisation above ground and the emergence of clandestine structures that were operating underground - was therefore also reflected in the use of space.

The personal sacrifices of those who became involved in politics - be it underground or above ground - were often very high. Frequent harassment by the police not only affected the activists themselves but their families, friends or neighbours. Detention, torture and harassment left psychological as well as physical marks; interviewees frequently recalled that particular sounds, smells or places evoke memories of painful experiences. Some of the activists were ostracised by their families for attracting the attention of the security branch while a great many lost their jobs and were unable to find new employment due to their status as political activists.¹⁰ Families were broken up and distrust was sown by police amongst sisters and brothers, neighbours and friends. Creating splits within communities was a central strategy of the police to counter political mobilisation and they also attempted to discredit activists by creating the impression that they were working with the

⁹ It is however also possible that the monitoring of underground structures in the Vaal was done by specialised units operating from Pretoria.

¹⁰ Interview, Sekwati Mokoena, Sharpeville, 30 March 2010; interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 15 April 2010; interview, Oupa Hlomoka, Vanderbijlpark, 9 July 2010.

police.¹¹ From 1984 onwards, involvement in political work further often meant a life in hiding, as chapter five will explore. Political mobilisation and organisation, in various ways, transcended the narrow structures of actual membership of an organisation and included broader networks and even entire communities. There was often no clear distinction between direct political involvement and more hidden support. Private roles and spaces inevitably became bound up in the public political realm.

(I) From organisation to mobilisation

Mandela's soldiers: Youth structures and the formation of COSAS

On 21 March 1980, the twentieth anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre, Mphatlalatsane Hall in Zone 14, Sebokeng was packed. AZAPO, the only political organisation in the townships of the Vaal Triangle at that time, had organised a commemoration service and had invited Curtis Nkondo and Khehla Mthembu as speakers.¹² During those early years, COSAS and AZAPO occasionally collaborated when it came to the organisation of commemoration services. They also joined forces to mobilise the broader population against rent increases, the council system and apartheid more broadly.¹³ Serious rivalries between AZAPO and organisations aligned to the ANC only started from 1985 onwards, when tolerance for other political views began to erode.¹⁴ By 1983, COSAS was further in alliance with the Orange Vaal General Workers Union (OVGWU) and the Commercial

¹¹ Dorcas Ralitsela recalls that the police would park a car near their house at random hours, thus suggesting that they were visiting them. Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010.

¹² WHP AK2117, S7.6, Statement GP Malindi, 7.; WHP AK2117, I2.12, Vol.243, Testimony Nkoli, 12,957-58.

¹³ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

¹⁴ On a national level rivalries existed prior to 1984. See M.V. Mzamane and B.Maaba, 'The Azanian People's Organisation, 1977-1990', in SADET (ed.), *The Road to Democracy, Volume 4* (Pretoria, 2010), 1299-58.

Catering and Allied Workers Union.¹⁵

By the end of the meeting, a call was made for students to stay behind. Among others, Simon Tseko Nkoli had pushed for the formation of a local branch of COSAS, which had taken up the plight of the students two years after the banning of the South African Student Organisation (SASO) in 1977. COSAS subscribed to the Freedom Charter and, according to local COSAS activists, it had been clear from the beginning that the ANC had inspired and secretly funded its formation.¹⁶ In his evidence during the Delmas Treason Trial, Nkoli would however argue that he mostly became aware of COSAS during the meeting of 21 March, as he was 'one of the people who was interested to know more about this organisation'.¹⁷ As most politically conscious youth had been attending rallies and meetings in Soweto, they felt the time was right to form local structures. Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, recalled that 'Most of the time we find that we are the culprits who are being arrested in somebody's backyard. While our yard is not organised.'¹⁸ Gcina Malindi a close friend of Mokatsanyane, was elected chairman in October 1980 and Nkoli became secretary.

While some of the youth had a clear idea that they wanted to become politically active in relation to apartheid as a whole, others joined COSAS as a more specific platform for their student grievances.¹⁹ Corporal punishment in particular was cited frequently by interviewees when explaining their reasons for engagement in student politics. Mandla Mazibuko, born in 1968 in

¹⁵ WHP A2675 (Karis-Gerhart Collection of South African Political Materials), III (396), National Council, 22 June 1983, branch reports.

¹⁶ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010; also see G. Gerhart and C. Glaser, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990. Volume 6: Challenge and Victory, 1980-1990* (Bloomington, 2010), 59.

¹⁷ WHP AK2117, I2.12, Vol.243, Testimony Nkoli, 12,957.

¹⁸ Interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010.

¹⁹ Interview, Mandla Mazibuko, Vanderbijlpark, 22 June 2010; interview, Tebogo 'Exec.' Moepadira, Vanderbijlpark, 23 June 2010; interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 23 July 2010 and 26 July 2010.

Evaton Small Farms, attended Khutlo Tharo High School in Zone 3 until 1985 when he was expelled.

He explained:

You see when I was still in high school we could feel there was something wrong in South Africa but we didn't understand. When I went to high school I then met with guys there who belonged to an organisation called COSAS. I was then recruited into COSAS due to harsh treatment we were receiving at school. The prefect systems, the beatings and all those things.²⁰

Furthermore, the availability of free text books, an end to sexual harassment of female students, the provision of better resources and the introduction of democratically elected Student Representative Councils (SRC's) were all issues on the agenda of students. Some were also concerned about the imposition of age restrictions at schools that disallowed students above a certain age from attending classes. COSAS, in the minds of students, also provided them with a certain degree of protection and freedom at school, as Themba Goba explained:

Then we went to school the next day wearing our COSAS t-shirts to show the students and the teacher that we are now COSAS. They cannot beat us as much as they used to do. So we can do our things as much as we like now because we are now COSAS!²¹

Goba attended Fundulwazi High School in Zone 12, which became a hotbed for COSAS and provided a large part of the membership of the Vaal Liberation Movement (VALIMO), a clandestine group promoting political violence, at a later stage.

Oupa Masankane, another founding member of VALIMO, was 17 years old when he became interested in student politics: 'We are kids and we are inquisitive and so on. We attended. And we hear these elder brothers talking about politics.'²² He subsequently joined COSAS together with his close friend: 'We fill in this form, two of us. Now we are now comrades. Ja. [...] In our school there was prefects. Neh. Now we're going to fight them.'

²⁰ Interview, Mandla Mazibuko, Vanderbijlpark, 22 June 2010.

²¹ Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

²² Interview, Oupa Masankane, Vereeniging, 29 June 2010.

However, most students conceived their struggle as going beyond localised issues experienced at schools. It was the structure of society, and political oppression and socio-economic injustice more broadly that shaped the daily experiences of young people in the townships.²³ As in 1976 students' demands rapidly transcended narrow boundaries and COSAS could tap into financial and organisational networks of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the ANC. The socio-economic difficulties and rent increases in particular affected students profoundly as their families experienced being locked out of houses and less and less money was available for school fees, textbooks or uniforms.²⁴ Electricity cut offs prevented students from studying at night and hence endangered their progress at school. Sakhiwe Khumalo, part of the younger generation of COSAS activists who resumed a leadership function from late 1984 onwards emphasised this point. His attitude reflected COSAS' approach and policies as outlined in the constitution of 1979.²⁵ He argued that

Remember one thing that as COSAS we said before we are students we are members of the community. The struggle of our fathers and mothers is our struggle. We could not isolate ourselves from the struggle of the civic movement that of bread and butter issues of rents and so on because if rent increases it affects our going to school. Yebo.²⁶

According to Gcina Malindi, the Vaal branch of COSAS was not functioning well in these early years.²⁷ They lacked funding for more sustained activity.²⁸ The membership was small and its main activities were restricted to the organisation of commemoration services together with AZAPO as well as a series of protests against rent hikes.²⁹ They led protest marches in the early 1980s as no civic structure existed that could take up the issue of rent increases.³⁰ However, one of their aims

²³ WHP A2675, III (396), Speech delivered at the 4th National Council, December 1982 on organisation; WHP A2675, III (397), United Action for Democratic Education. Interview with COSAS activists. Printed in *Africa Perspective*, 24 (1984), 77-80.

²⁴ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

²⁵ WHP A2675, III (395), 4th National Council.

²⁶ Interview, Sakhiwe Khumalo, Vereeniging, 23 June 2010; interview, Thomas Togo Maleka, Vereeniging, 21 June 2010.

²⁷ WHP AK2117, S7.6, Statement GP Malindi; also see interview, Pelamotse Jerry Tlhopane, Sebokeng, 22 November 2011.

²⁸ WHP A2675, III (396), National Council, 22 June 1983, branch reports.

²⁹ Interview, Pelamotse Jerry Tlhopane, Sebokeng, 22 November 2011; WHP AK2117, S7.6, Statement GP Malindi.

³⁰ WHP AK2117, S7.6, Statement GP Malindi.

was to push for the formation of a community organisation led by the older generation that would take up bread-and-butter issues.³¹ In 1982, after the announcement by the Vaal Triangle Community Council that rents would go up by R10, COSAS held a series of meetings at the Roman Catholic Church in Evaton Small Farms – one of the churches that became a focal point for political mobilisation.³² One of the key activities was to encourage students to attend additional classes, run by the Education Information Centre and the South African Institute of Race Relations held at the University of the Witwatersrand, aimed at helping students to pass their matriculation exams.³³

Joining COSAS however provided all of them with a new home, a new identity and a sense of belonging. Thami ka Plaatjie recalled his excitement when he first attended a meeting: ‘My first time in a political rally! I was so excited. [...] I have a vivid memory.’³⁴ Part of the popular political culture of COSAS included songs and toyi-toying, as ka Plaatjie remembered:

There was a song that they sing ‘Singama soja, soja, ka Mande...’ it’s is like in a military parade. We are the soldiers of Mandela. Hayi singama soja soja soja Mandela, singama soja...[...] wherever he goes, we will go because we are anticipating death anytime, we have surrendered ourselves to the inevitability. Hayi singama soja soja, soja... we moved around! And I said ja this is where I wanted to be [...]. Somebody was saying ja ja ja... ja ja we have arrived! [...] I was happy. It was my first time, I was excited, [...] I was rewarded. Emotional reward. Come back home and say ‘ah I’m part of the soldiers’, you know, of Mandela.

Ka Plaatjie vividly expresses some of the meaning that political structures provided for local youth: it gave them a new identity, a sense of purpose and excitement that things were finally going to change. COSAS provided an emotional and ideological home that transcended issues of poverty and repression and allowed young activists to dream of a better future. The political culture of youth activists was becoming militarised and it is striking in the aftermath of the student uprisings of 1976 and during the 1980s in particular they regarded the soldiers of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) as their heroes. At this time MK had at last succeeded in infiltrating cadres into the country and their exploits

³¹ Interview, Pelamotse Jerry Tlhopane, Sebokeng, 22 November 2011; WHP A2675, III (396), National Council, 22 June 1983, branch reports.

³² *Sowetan*, 26 February 1982.

³³ WHP AK2117. I2.12, Vol.243, Testimony Nkoli, 12,958; WHP A2675, III (397), Letter to the principal.

³⁴ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

were reported in the press, Radio Freedom and along township networks. According to Tom Lodge, there were 533 recorded MK attacks between 1977 and June 1986 with the vast majority occurring in 1985/86.³⁵ Sabotage acts such as the bombing of SASOL II in May 1980 or the attack on Voortrekkerhoogte military base in August 1981 aimed to instil hope in South Africa's black majority by reminding them of MK's ability to attack industry and government institutions.³⁶

The rise of the new young comrades or the 'young lions', associated with COSAS, provided the bedrock of the organised student movement who came to dominate politics particularly in the aftermath of the uprising.³⁷ Being a comrade however meant much more than being interested in politics: it further included a moral code, and particular characteristics including street wisdom and bravery. It was a highly masculine culture where only few young women assumed a leading role.³⁸

In May 1982, the National Executive Committee of COSAS took a resolution that non-school going youth should no longer be allowed to be in leadership positions within COSAS. Hence in early 1982, a meeting attended by over a hundred youth was held to elect a new committee: Gcina Malindi was replaced by his brother Mkhambi as chairman.³⁹ Mkhambi Malindi like his brother Gcina was later imprisoned and charged with treason in the Delmas Treason Trial.⁴⁰ Around February 1983 Jerry Tlhopane assumed the position of acting chairman. Tlhopane, yet another Delmas trialist, had

³⁵ T. Lodge, 'State of Exile: The African National Congress of South Africa, 1976 – 86', in P. Frankel, N. Pines and M. Swilling (eds.), *State, Resistance and Change in South Africa* (London, 1988), 229 – 258.

³⁶ Interview, David Moisi, Pretoria, 13 July 2010.

³⁷ C. Bundy, 'Street Sociology and Pavement Politics: Aspects of Youth and Student Consciousness during the 1985 School Crisis in Greater Cape Town', *JSAS* 13/3 (1987), 303-330; J. Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?: Youth Politics in the 1980s* (Johannesburg, 1993); J. Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa, 1940-1990* (Pietermaritzburg, 1999); M. Marks, *Young Warriors: Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 2001); B. Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Johannesburg, 2004); A. Sitas, 'The Making of the 'Comrades' Movement in Natal, 1985-91', *JSAS*, 18/3 (1992, Special Issue: Political Violence in Southern Africa), 629-641.

³⁸ Interview, Sakhiwe Khumalo, Vereeniging, 23 June 2010; interview, Pelamotse Jerry Tlhopane, Sebokeng, 22 November 2011; interview, Dineo 'Mapikoko' Mokoena, Sebokeng, 22 October 2011.

³⁹ WHP AK2117, I2.7, Vol.205, Testimony Malindi, 10,740.

⁴⁰ Interview, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010.

attended high school in Orlando in Soweto where he had joined the local branch of COSAS.⁴¹

Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi and Gcina Malindi individually travelled to Botswana to establish contact with the ANC in exile: Motubatsi had already been recruited by Esau Ralitsela and after his return from Botswana, where he had joined MK, he returned to the Vaal with the mandate to oversee the establishment of youth structures.⁴² Malindi, due to his high profile in the region was encouraged by the ANC in exile to continue operating above ground and to aid the formation of youth structures; he was too well known to the security branch to operate underground.⁴³ Malindi's contacts with the ANC were sporadic. Instead, he stated, he used to receive further instructions from Esau Ralitsela and from ANC operatives during mass rallies.⁴⁴ In spite of his status as non-school going, he continued to represent the Vaal branch of COSAS at the National Conference.⁴⁵ It was not until 1984, however, that more general regional youth structures were formed.

According to Jerry Tlhopane, their generation of COSAS activists were militant but well disciplined, hard working and focussed.⁴⁶ Interviewees emphasised that this first generation of COSAS activists in particular greatly valued debates and the exchange of knowledge on politics, history, economics or literature. Their socio-economic background was similar in most cases for they came from impoverished working-class families. Contrary to the perception of a 'lost generation' of 'young lions', these (mostly) young men had a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve and - at least in retrospect - condemned acts of violence that became widespread during the mid-1980s such as the burning of people. In the Vaal Triangle, the transition to a new leadership generation of students, who were politicised in a different way, came a little later than elsewhere.

⁴¹ Interview, Pelamotse Jerry Tlhopane, Sebokeng, 22 November 2011.

⁴² Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 22 November 2011.

⁴³ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

⁴⁴ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 21 July 2010.

⁴⁵ WHP A2675, III (396), List of representatives at the annual congress, November 1983.

⁴⁶ Interview, Pelamotse Jerry Tlhopane, Sebokeng, 22 November 2011.

Thus COSAS activists who were vital during the Vaal Uprising included two different generations: the first generation had been - at least to some extent - influenced by the student uprisings of 1976 and the Black Consciousness Movement and its literature.⁴⁷ A younger generation who became increasingly involved from 1983/84 onwards were born between the late 1960s and early 1970s, most of them were between the age of 14 and 18 at the time of the Vaal Uprising. It was this latter generation that produced the most militant clandestine groups from 1985 onwards. Their political subjectivities were influenced by experiences of violence and they partly gained their political education once they were in prison. Their militancy was born of experiences of extreme violence that produced an anger and frustration - coupled with a certain naivety that made them vulnerable to arrest and less effective in the disciplines required to conduct clandestine operations, as chapter five discusses. This shift in student leadership was vital as it introduced a younger generation into politics at a time when South Africa was starting to change profoundly.

From 1982 onwards, a group of COSAS activists began to look into the formation of a regional Youth Congress, which would accommodate non-school going youth. At this point, unemployed and working youth were not organised in any structures.⁴⁸ It appears that no structures existed prior to the uprising that steered and coordinated the actions of individual youth groups in the Vaal. A letter inviting youth groups to a meeting at the Roman Catholic Church in Evaton Small Farms on 9 June 1984 stated that 'In a recent meeting of our working group it was reported that the steering committee that was formed to work towards the launching of a Vaal Youth Organisation no longer existed.'⁴⁹

A few community organisations had been formed that dealt with local grievances and issues. The Bophelong Youth Association was established around 1982/83. Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, one of

⁴⁷ Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?*, xiii.

⁴⁸ Interview, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010; WHP AK2117, I2.7, Vol.205, Testimony Malindi, 10,742.

⁴⁹ WHP AK211, J3.13, AN4, Invitation by Sebokeng working group to launch of Vaal Youth Organisation.

the leading members of the organisation, remembers that they used to run seminars educating the communities about everyday matters including for example the use of contraception. To improve the poor quality of education pupils were receiving in local schools, afternoon classes were held to teach mathematics and science or to help those who were struggling at school. For this generation of activists, political education and knowledge about history, politics and the law was key in understanding the situation and assessing potential strategies to oppose the regime. As Mokhele recalls, they used to hold night vigils where 'We used to sit through the night, discussing politics, read literature, you know. Explaining things amongst ourselves inviting activists from other places to come and educate us about the struggle about history about the law, about a lot of things.'⁵⁰

'Asinamali!': The formation of civic structures

In 1982, a small group of people came together to form an action committee that was later named the Vaal Action Committee (VAC). The group included Thabiso Ratsomo, who had been imprisoned on Robben Island for his involvement in the student protests of 1976, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Esau and Dorcas Ralitsela, Edith Letlhake, Sam Matlole, Ernest Sotsu and Gcina Malindi.⁵¹ Unknown to the other members, Esau and Dorcas Ralitsela had established contact with the ANC in exile during the same year and, as they stated in a number of interviews, had received instructions to establish a civic structure that would be in line with the policies and the goals of the ANC.⁵² In fact the majority of members of the VAC had in one way or another established contact with the ANC in exile. The directives of the ANC, according to Malindi, were clear: to form organisations inside the

⁵⁰ Interview, Tsiesi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

⁵¹ Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010.

⁵² Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010; interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010.

country that would steer mass mobilisation.⁵³ The establishment of civic structures in the Vaal, somewhat later than in other urban areas, was hence closely related to the broader aims and strategies of the ANC.

Malindi and Motubatsi had both visited the ANC in Botswana while Sotsu, who had grown up in the Eastern Cape, had joined the ANC in 1949.⁵⁴ According to Sotsu's testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), he had been part of the ANC underground in the Vaal between 1980 and 1983.⁵⁵ He emerged as a key figure in the region as he facilitated the import of weapons from the mid-1980s onwards and was vital in setting up Self Defense Units (SDU's) during the early 1990s when the townships of the Vaal were ravaged by violence. Sotsu's involvement in politics however not only exposed him but his family as well. His family was murdered on 3 July 1991 at their house in Boipatong.⁵⁶

The Vaal Action Committee, in the words of Esau Ralitsela, 'was a semi-clandestine thing. Because we didn't want to involve a lot of people. So it was just a small think-tank.'⁵⁷ Between 1982 and October 1983, members of the VAC met to discuss the establishment of a permanent civic structure - the Vaal Civic Association. Meetings were held at private houses or in cars - the only two safe spaces available at that time. The particular character of mobilisation was reflected in the use of space: while mass mobilisation necessitated the use of halls - or broad streets for protests - clandestine groups mostly met in smaller and private spaces. Private spaces therefore became politicised. Although this was perhaps nothing new - townships had never offered much opportunity for political gatherings - it necessitated the broader collaboration of families, communities or neighbour while exposing the activists to the risk of betrayal and being overheard. The townships

⁵³ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 21 July 2010.

⁵⁴ Truth and Reconciliation, Human Rights Violations. Submission Ernest Sotsu, Case No.211 (6 August 1996), accessed 13 January 2013 at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/sebokeng/seb211.htm>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010.

were, in the words of Bozzoli a 'private world without privacy' where 'living took place in the street, in the yard's open space or within earshot of either'.⁵⁸

Mass meetings, however, mostly took place in churches as community halls were less and less accessible as approval for use had to be sought from OVAB – and later the OVDB – and the community councils. Not all churches could be used as venues, as some of the local parish priests were either too conservative or could not get approval from their councils. Two of the key churches in Sebokeng that provided sanctuary and space for meetings were the Nyolohelo Roman Catholic Church in Zone 12 in Sebokeng and the Roman Catholic Church in Evaton Small Farms. The Nyolohelo church was located at the nodal point of social interaction in Sebokeng, opposite the post office at the corner of Moshoeshoe Street and Houtkop Road, where Zone 11, 12 and 13 converged. The area around the post office, renamed 'Beirut' in 1984, became one of the most embattled places in Sebokeng. Other popular churches included St. Michaels Anglican Church in Sharpeville and the Evaton Church of God under Lord McCamel in Evaton.

On 16 June 1983, a watershed meeting took place at the Nyolohelo Roman Catholic Church in Zone 12 in Sebokeng, chaired by Jerry Tlhopane, the acting chairman of COSAS.⁵⁹ The annual commemoration of the student uprisings of 1976 was attended by approximately 900 people including all ages although there was a predominance of young people.⁶⁰ Speakers included Mkhambi Malindi representing COSAS, Thabiso Ratsomo, Oupa Hlomoka of AZAPO, Esau Ralitsela as well as Philip Masia, the general secretary the Orange Vaal General Worker's Union (OVGWU). The assemblage of ideologically diverse speakers was not unique but represented a certain openness that began to erode rapidly from 1984. All speakers called for the formation of a civic association that would tackle local grievances. The incentive for the call to form a civic association is however disputed. While Jerry Tlhopane emphasised that it had been the students who encouraged the older

⁵⁸ Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid*, 22.

⁵⁹ Interview, Pelamotse Jerry Tlhopane, Sebokeng, 22 November 2011.

⁶⁰ WHP AK2117, S8.4.3, Memorandum on the background of the formation of the VCA.

generation to become involved and that the VCA was 'the baby of COSAS', civic leaders and Esau and Dorcas Ralitsela argue that they had been secretly working towards the establishment of the VCA for over a year.⁶¹ In comparison to other areas the formation of a civic structure in the Vaal came fairly late and it was difficult to find committed members to serve in executive functions. As Dorcas Ralitsela recalled 'It took very brave people or very naïve people to go to these meetings. You see people sometimes find themselves in meetings because they were curious to go and listen.'⁶²

The next meeting on 18 June attracted a small audience and participants resolved to conduct a survey to gauge the attitudes of local residents towards the formation of a civic association.⁶³ According to court evidence, a majority of people who had participated in the survey were indeed in favour of a civic association. Key issues that were identified included high rents, lack of proper roads and road signs, lack of electricity, lack of recreational facilities and a lack of trust and confidence in community councils. Despite the impetus given nationally by the foundation of the UDF in August 1983, the launch of the Vaal Civic Association was postponed from September to 9 October due to poor preparations.

At the meetings held between 16 June and 9 October a core group of local activists emerged whose task it was to plan for the official launch of the VCA. While some of them had been politically active since the late 1970s, others had become involved fairly recently. Evidence suggests that police informers had already been planted in the audience by that stage. This is by no means surprising. Members of the local security branch claimed during interviews that all major organisations were infiltrated prior to the Vaal Uprising.⁶⁴ The resolution to carry on with the meeting – despite suspicions of the presence of an informer – is also indicative and suggests the strong separation

⁶¹ Interview, Pelamotse Jerry Tlhopane, Sebokeng, 22 November 2011; interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010; interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010; also see WHP A2675, III (396), National Council, 22 June 1983, branch reports.

⁶² Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010.

⁶³ WHP AK2117, S8.4.3, Memorandum on the background of the formation of the VCA.

⁶⁴ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011 (names have been changed).

between meetings that were potentially incriminating and those that were open to the public. According to Dorcas Ralitsela, they knew that there was a continuous presence of informers at meetings and gatherings; as suggested earlier, this awareness of surveillance and infiltration profoundly shaped the nature of politics and created a dual system - with sometimes blurry boundaries - of above and underground structures. Discussions during meetings of the VCA as well as COSAS were strictly kept to bread-and-butter issues and the executive ensured that all actions planned were within a legal framework and not directly linked to any strategies or ideologies of the ANC.⁶⁵

Reverend Lord McCamel was most likely unaware of what he was getting himself into. McCamel was a local priest from Evaton who was running his own church, the McCamel Church of God.⁶⁶ A well-known community leader in Evaton, he had been involved in struggles against the loss of freehold title. Both his background as a teacher at Wilberforce Institute, his status as a clergyman and his access to church facilities made him an ideal candidate for the VCA executive. On 9 October 1983, at the official launch of the Vaal Civic Association at the Roman Catholic Church in Evaton Small Farms, McCamel was elected chairman, Esau Ralitsela became the vice chairman, Thabiso Ratsomo treasurer, Johnny Motete was elected secretary and Mike Kgaka vice secretary.⁶⁷ Kgaka, a local lawyer had his office in the same building as the Industrial Aid Centre that Ralitsela was running. He had also studied at the University of the North (Turfloop) during the early 1970s and retained strong leanings towards the Black Consciousness Movement. Ralitsela, being an ANC underground operative, had not wanted to be involved in the executive of the VCA but found it, in his words, impossible to reject his nomination. This overlap, however, was unfortunate as it exposed him to renewed attention from the security branch, which ANC underground members were encouraged to avoid at all costs.

⁶⁵ Unrecorded interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 4 November 2011.

⁶⁶ Interview, Lord McCamel, Evaton, 2 May 2006.

⁶⁷ *Sowetan*, 11 October 1983.

McCamel remembers his election resulting from his long community involvement. The Ralitselas however argue that McCamel's election as chairman was pushed after consulting with the ANC in exile as he was able to offer his church for meetings, had standing in the community and had no particular reputation with the security branch.⁶⁸ The members of the Vaal Civic Association thus came from a variety of backgrounds and where possible each zone in the township had representatives.

Similar to the collection of demands when the Freedom Charter was drafted, pieces of paper were distributed to encourage the audience to write down the resolutions they deemed important.⁶⁹ The draft constitution was discussed the following day at the house of Lord McCamel.⁷⁰ It appears, however, that it was never circulated. It resolved to

- demand decent housing and security for all
- demand low rentals that we can afford
- demand that we must not be charged for the maintenance of houses
- demand proper roads with adequate road signs
- condemn the disparity between black and white pension grants and the distressing conditions under which African pensioners receive, meagre (little) as they are, their pension grants
- demand unhindered access into community facilities like halls, schools and demand that they be at our disposal
- demand adequate schools and call on our teachers not to turn away pupils for petty issues such as uniforms
- condemn the high bus fares
- demand adequate recreational facilities
- condemn the concerted efforts by the government to strip the Evaton people of their freehold rights; we demand that our people be left in peace
- condemn the community councils as puppet bodies and to boycott the Black Local Authorities elections since we believe that nothing would be achieved by voting
- condemn and reject the homeland system and in particular, the Ciskei government for its atrocities committed against our people
- condemn the banning of SAAWU and to pledge our solidarity with our people in the Ciskei
- elect an interim committee comprising five office-bearers and area-representatives.⁷¹

While the majority of issues that the VCA took up were local, it also clearly stressed its rejection of

⁶⁸ Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010.

⁶⁹ WHP AK2117, I2.1, Vol.162, Testimony Vilakazi, 8,021-2.

⁷⁰ WHP AK2117, I2.1, Vol.163, Testimony Vilakazi, 8,128ff.

⁷¹ WHP AK2117, J3.13, AN13, Resolutions of the Vaal Civic Association.

the community councils and the homeland system. Another meeting at McCamel's house a week later discussed a potential affiliation to the UDF and the coming Black Local Authorities elections that were scheduled for November 1983.⁷²

The formation of the VCA marked the beginning of a period of organised protest. Calculations by the defence lawyers of the Delmas Treason Trial later suggested that between 1,500 and 5,000 people attended the launch of the VCA - a vague number, and less than some Soweto rallies but indicative of the support the new civic structure attracted. The rallying slogan of the VCA 'Asinamali ['we have no money'] - organise or be homeless' was well chosen for its powerful simplicity and its ability to evoke memories of past slogans of the 1950s. It had been used during the bus boycotts in Alexandra and Evaton in 1955.⁷³ Guest speakers included Curtis Nkondo, chairman of the Transvaal branch of the UDF, Dr. Motlana, chairman of the Soweto Civic Association and Elliot Shabangu, another senior member of the UDF. Shabangu had been involved in underground work in Soweto from the 1970s onwards in a network that had been initiated by Winnie Mandela.⁷⁴ These speakers connected the VCA to a history and tradition of resistance.

In January 1984, another civic structure was launched, this time to accommodate specific needs of women.⁷⁵ The Vaal Organisation of Women, chaired by Elizabeth Letanta, popularly known as Ma Letanta, and including Dorcas Ralitsela and Edith Letlhake as secretary pursued a rather conservative programme. Like the VCA, its focus on bread-and-butter issues was, as Dorcas Ralitsela stressed, another way of mobilising residents in the townships.⁷⁶ Its abbreviation VOW was reminiscent of the ANC publication *Voice of Women* and chosen for that reason. VOW resolved to

⁷² WHP AK2117, Vol.2.1, Vol. 163, Testimony Vilakazi, 8,131ff.

⁷³ T.Lodge, "'We are being Punished Because we are Poor": The Bus Boycotts of Evaton and Alexandra, 1955-1957', in T.Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg, 1983), 153-187.

⁷⁴ G.Houston, 'The ANC's Internal Underground Political Work in the 1980s', in SADET (ed.), *The Road to Democracy, Volume 4*, 373.

⁷⁵ WHP AK2117, I2.27, Vol.328, Testimony Oliphant, 18,764ff.; WHP AK2117, I2.27, Vol.328, Testimony Nyembe, 18,678ff.

⁷⁶ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010.

affiliate to the UDF and collaborated with the Federation of Women (FEDSAW), another charterist organisation.⁷⁷

Women were often the ones who had to make ends meet and in a highly patriarchal society, women faced a series of issues. Domestic violence was rife and young women in particular faced the threat of rape and other forms of sexual assault. While men were typically acting as heads of household, in many instances women informally resumed the role. Struggling to access men's wages to pay for household expenses, school fees, books and school uniforms as well as rent, women were in a particularly vulnerable position. Furthermore they had few rights if their husband died and were often evicted from their houses as they could not rent houses in their own name. As Dorcas Ralitsela recalled, 'Whatever women did, nothing was in their favour.'⁷⁸ At a workshop organised by the Transvaal Women Interim Co-ordinating Committee, the group reported on its success in launching a programme of childcare and adult literacy as well as a grocery co-operative.⁷⁹ Mobilisation and recruitment was done through tea parties where women's issues as well as broader political concerns were discussed.

Aided by trade unions, one of the first campaigns - and possibly the most important one - to be taken up by the Vaal Civic Association was to campaign for a boycott of local government elections in October and November 1983. Trade Unions assisted in community mobilisation in various ways and particularly by providing printing facilities.⁸⁰ In Bophelong, the campaign was particularly successful: 'We told people that there's no voting the following day, we did house to house. Because the area was small. We actually could cover the whole area. Knocking from the first house up to the last

⁷⁷ WHP AK2117, J3.13, AN1, Letter by the Vaal Organisation of Women to UDF re affiliation.

⁷⁸ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010.

⁷⁹ WHP A2675 III (440), Report Federation of South African Women: Transvaal Workshop.

⁸⁰ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 22 November 2011.

house, the 1,400 houses.⁸¹ According to Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, not a single vote was cast.

Mokhele, who was studying Chemical Engineering in Pretoria at a Technikon until he had to abandon his studies in 1983, became involved in community work in his late teens and later emerged as one of the key civic leaders in Bophelong. His involvement as an MK commander and ANC underground operative shaped the political landscape of the region; it was through him that dozens of young comrades left the country to join MK in the aftermath of the Vaal Uprising, as chapter five will highlight. Bophelong ['vitality' or 'liveliness'] was a small township adjacent to the ultra-conservative town of Vanderbijlpark. With only 1,400 houses it was, together with Boipatong ['place of hiding'], the smallest of the Vaal townships and for decades was off the radar of authorities, activists and journalists.⁸² The smallness of Bophelong had a double effect on the emergence of political networks. On one hand, the few activists could be easily identified and monitored by the security branch. On the other hand the relatively small number of households facilitated conscientisation and campaigns such as that against the vote.

Mokhele suggests an interesting link between networks that predated political mobilisation and their ability to organise communities within short periods. According to him, networks that had been established through stokvels, burial societies and other cultural associations effectively linked people from different households, streets and neighbourhoods and facilitated communication between them.⁸³ These structures of mobilisation, based on familiarity and trust were later replicated in the larger township of Sebokeng where zonal committees aimed to represent the different areas. Esau Ralitsela explained the purpose of zonal structures as follows:

We managed to mobilise a large number of people because we had what we called zonal structures. Like for instance, Zone 7 we had people who were responsibly for Zone 7. Zone 3

⁸¹ Interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

⁸² Interview, Kedibone Mogotsi, Vereeniging, 26 July 2010.

⁸³ Interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011. A stokvel is a saving or credit society. The most common type of stokvel is a weekend party that produces profit for the host; see W.Beinart, *Twentieth-century South Africa* (2nd edn. Oxford, 2001), 194-5.

we had people who were responsible for Zone 3. Bophelong same. Sharpeville same. So those people were able to mobilise people in those small areas. And as a result, combined all those small meetings whatever people were having, we were able to move people. And those people were moved by people whom they knew. I didn't go to Sharpeville to impose myself or go to Bophelong. We worked with people from those areas. And they are the ones who then organised whatever meetings.⁸⁴

The strength of the different zonal committees, however, varied greatly. While the area committee for Bophelong for example was established in November 1983, and in Zone 7 of Sebokeng in February 1984, that for Zone 3, a fairly new residential area in Sebokeng was only launched in August 1984.⁸⁵ Two of the key areas that emerged in Sebokeng were Zone 13, the oldest area as well as Zone 7, adjacent to Evaton Small Farms. From 1984 onwards Zone 12 and Zone 11 further provided a large number of the student leadership of COSAS. However, until 1984, it was Zone 13 where a great number of activists lived; newer areas such as Zone 10 or Zone 6 seem to have been quiescent. Boipatong and Bophelong produced their own small leadership. Two of the key figures in Boipatong were Sekwati John Mokoena and Ernest Sotsu. The former later was detained and became one of the Delmas trialists whilst the latter managed to evade arrest.⁸⁶ Evaton, with its special status as a freehold area had developed separate forms of community organisation that cooperated, to some degree, with the VCA. Sharpeville was claimed by the PAC and AZAPO and the VCA barely managed to make any inroads⁸⁷

The different route of Sharpeville

By the time of the uprising, AZAPO was the strongest presence in Sharpeville. Although not necessarily strong in numbers, it was certainly influential. Reverend Teboho Geoffrey Moselane, an Anglican priest, had been running community projects since the early 1980s including feeding

⁸⁴ Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010.

⁸⁵ WHP AK2117, I2.1, Vol.160, Testimony Vilakazi, 7,856.

⁸⁶ Interview, Sekwati Mokoena, Sharpeville, 30 March 2010.

⁸⁷ Interview, Oupa Hlomoka, Vanderbijlpark, 9 July 2010.

schemes for the poor. In 1984, the feeding scheme provided food parcels to 34 families. One of Moselane's beneficiaries, a Mrs Bheme and her mother with whom she was sharing a house, received a bi-monthly pension of R100 each.⁸⁸ After paying rent, bills, and other monthly expenditures, the two women were left with about R6 per month to pay for food and transport – simply not sufficient to survive. Moselane had spent his student days at the Seminary in Alice, known for its engagement with Black Theology and adjacent to the University of Fort Hare, which was a hotbed of Black Consciousness.⁸⁹ Through his involvement with the South African Student Organisation (SASO), Moselane had met prominent leaders of the BCM on several occasions, including Steve Biko.⁹⁰ These encounters had had undoubtedly a conscientising and radicalising effect on him. During the student uprisings of 1976, Moselane had been a priest in Soweto – where he engaged with some of the student leaders of the Vaal including Simon Nkoli.

Black Theology was prominent among many of the local ministers in the Vaal Triangle. Moselane's support for Black Theology was no secret. His sympathies for AZAPO however, for which he was Vice-president in Soweto in 1979, were less public because of his position as a clergyman within the community.⁹¹ AZAPO had been established in 1979 as successor of the banned Black Consciousness Movement. At the founding meeting in April 1978, the principles of Black Consciousness were adopted. AZAPO like other political organisations rejected the introduction of the tricameral parliament and the 'Koornhof bills' that included the Black Local Authorities Act as discussed in chapter one.⁹²

⁸⁸ WHP AK2117, S8.11, Statement Lilian Ndaba and Magdalene Bheme.

⁸⁹ On Black Theology and Black Consciousness, see D. Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets. Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968-1977* (Athens, Ohio and Johannesburg, 2010); J.de Gruchy and S.de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (25 anniversary edn. London, 2004), 163.

⁹⁰ WHP AK2117, I2.10, Vol.229, Testimony Moselane, 12,152-4.

⁹¹ WHP AK2117, I2.10, Vol.229, Testimony Moselane, 12,152-4; interview, Oupa Hlomoka, Vanderbijlpark, 9 July 2010; *Frank Talk*, 1/5 (1984), 5-6.

⁹² See footnote 95, page 47.

In the Vaal Triangle, an interim AZAPO committee was established in March 1980.⁹³ During the same year, a new committee was elected with Oupa Hlomoka as its chairman. Hlomoka, born in Evaton in 1954, had grown up in a poor household in which the children sometimes did not eat all day. Hlomoka passed matric, became involved in the Black Worker's Union. A keen admirer of Gibson Kente's theatre, the poetry by Ingoapele Madigoane, the novels by Mosibudi Mangena and Biko's writing, he first came into contact with Black Consciousness through reading *The World* and was radicalised by Steve Biko's death on 12 September 1977. His leanings towards BC taught him that 'I don't have to fold my arms and cry. And say there's nothing I can do. I believe that in any situation there is a solution.'⁹⁴

On 21 March 1983 Hlomoka was involved in organising a prayer meeting to commemorate the Sharpeville shootings of 1960. The pamphlet announcing the commemoration outlined AZAPO's strategic focus for 1983: 'Our theme for this year is: mobilise and consolidate the liberatory efforts of the oppressed masses.'⁹⁵ According to Hlomoka it was difficult to rally support for AZAPO:

You organise a venue for a small group of people. Tomorrow those people are going to be harassed by the police. You see. That's what made it difficult. Some people thought no no. These people are just calling us and expose us to the police.⁹⁶

In contrast to the remarkable success of civic structures to mobilise and organise the township population, AZAPO's strength was elsewhere: namely in the conscientisation of communities, the running of welfare projects and the organisation of commemoration services. Hence while AZAPO rejected government structures and called for non-cooperation with local councils, it never developed a systematic approach on how to organise the population.⁹⁷ It was not a mass-based movement, but a vanguard organisation, often of more highly educated people whose political

⁹³ WHP AK2117, S22.3, Notes on formation of Vaal branch AZAPO.

⁹⁴ Interview, Oupa Hlomoka, Vanderbijlpark, 9 July 2010.

⁹⁵ WHP AK2117, J6, CA13, Invitation from AZAPO to prayer meeting to commemorate the 23rd anniversary of the Sharpeville shooting.

⁹⁶ Interview, Oupa Hlomoka, Vanderbijlpark, 9 July 2010.

⁹⁷ WHP AK2117, S22.3, A brief history of the Azanian People's Organisation, prepared by the President of Azapo, Ishmael Mkhabela.

language was perhaps at times not accommodating the broader population.⁹⁸ However, AZAPO and COSAS collaborated to organise important commemorations such as 16 June (Soweto), 21 March (Sharpeville) or 12 September, the commemoration of Biko's death.⁹⁹ Speakers during various big gatherings often included high ranking UDF leaders, local members of the charterist VCA, students as well as adherents of Black Consciousness and AZAPO in particular.

In January 1984, Ernest Sotsu, a member of the VCA and an ANC activist, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Sowetan*, which he was hoping to have published.¹⁰⁰ Titled 'The concept of racism divides and weakens the liberation struggle', it was a call for unity between adherents of different ideologies including the charterist groups and those promoting BC. According to Sotsu, racism was the root of division. Sotsu, a supporter of the Freedom Charter, called for non-racialism but stated that 'It is on this basis that they are taking advantage of our political divisions to defuse the power of the liberation struggle at all costs.'¹⁰¹ Sotsu further made a strong call for unity when he said:

I therefore appeal to our brothers in the B.C. camp to join forces with all those progressive organisations affiliated to the U.D.F. And fight our common enemy once & for all through peaceful means at disposal. United we stand, apart we fall should be our motto.

But by early 1984, relations between AZAPO and charterist organisations in the Vaal Triangle were tense as Sharpeville followed different strategies.

⁹⁸ For an analysis of AZAPO's strategies see Mzamane and Maaba, 'The Azanian People's Organisation, 1977-1990'.

⁹⁹ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

¹⁰⁰ WHP A2675, III (952), Letter to the editor.

¹⁰¹ WHP A2675, III (952), Letter to the editor.

(II) The UDF and the ANC underground

The UDF in the Vaal

On 18 September 1983, during the same period as the preparations for the launch of the Vaal Civic Association were underway and shortly after the launch of the United Democratic Front, a meeting was organised at the Roman Catholic Church in Evaton Small Farms by local supporters of the UDF to introduce the Front's aims.¹⁰² Amongst the speakers were Popo Molefe, the National Secretary of the UDF and Mmereki Bokala, an executive member of the UDF Transvaal. They introduced the audience to reasons for the formation of the UDF, its opposition the 'Koornhof bills' as well as the problematic housing situation in the townships. Molefe asked the audience for their participation in the formation of a UDF committee in the area and was told by Thabiso Ratsomo that a civic structure was to be established shortly and that all efforts should be concentrated on this.

The introduction of a series of reforms, which were widely regarded as cosmetic by a majority, opened up the space for challenging the system on a new level. With the formation of the UDF on 20 August 1983, these civic structures together with a large variety of other groups including for example COSAS, youth structures, church groups and trade unions found an umbrella organisation that, on a national level, provided direction and leadership. From the Vaal, a number of activists attended the launch of the UDF, including representatives of COSAS.¹⁰³ However, as various records demonstrate, the National Executive of the UDF was often not well informed about the dynamics and happenings in the various townships. The UDF was more concerned with its opposition to the tricameral parliament and was not in a position to steer the struggle against bread-and-butter issues in the townships.¹⁰⁴ It was not particularly strong in the Vaal and thus, during a meeting held on 10

¹⁰² WHP AK2117, S8.4.3, Memorandum on the background of the formation of the VCA; WHP AK2117, I2.13, Vol.251, Testimony Molefe, 13,460-2.

¹⁰³ Interview, Pelamotse Jerry Tlhopane, Sebokeng, 22 November 2011.

¹⁰⁴ J. Seekings, "Trailing behind the Masses": The United Democratic Front and Township Politics in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal Region, 1983-84, *JSAS*, 18/1 (1992), 93-114.

December 1983, members of the General Council complained that the UDF was not in a position to guide the struggle for liberation in the townships.¹⁰⁵ To improve access to the different regions, the UDF General Council Meeting of the Transvaal region, held on 30 June 1984 concluded that area committees should be set up, including the Vaal region. The committees were called a 'priority and matter of urgency', which highlights how much the individual regions were cut off from the central structures of the UDF.¹⁰⁶

Hence during the township revolt in the Vaal Triangle in 1984, as chapter three and four will discuss, the UDF's engagement was indirect. Seekings points out that 'Its formation and initial campaigns inspired and informed local political mobilisation and its structures facilitated contacts between activists from different areas but it rarely provided direct co-ordination or instigation.'¹⁰⁷ The main reason for the physical absence of the UDF as a steering force for change in the townships can be explained by the initial impetus to the formation. Launched in August 1983 to co-ordinate broad opposition to the introduction of the tricameral parliament, it focused on national rather than local politics and was 'born in a context which distracted it from local issues central to African township politics'.¹⁰⁸ Affiliates thus often followed their own agenda and only loosely associated themselves with the national program of the UDF.

The UDF hence mainly provided ideological leadership as well as access to resources including printing of pamphlets, T-shirts and stickers. It further linked various regions by organising workshops. From 27 to 29 April 1984, a handful of activists from the Vaal participated in a workshop organised by the UDF education committee.¹⁰⁹ Other organisations that participated included the Soweto Civic

¹⁰⁵ WHP AK2117, J2.13, N3, Secretarial report to the general council meeting held on 10th December 1983.

¹⁰⁶ WHP AK2117, J2.16, Q1, Letter to affiliates in the Transvaal region, 5th of July 1984; Seekings, 'Trailing Behind the Masses', 97.

¹⁰⁷ J. Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991* (Cape Town, 2000), 18.

¹⁰⁸ Seekings, 'Trailing Behind the Masses', 94.

¹⁰⁹ WHP AK2117, J2.20, U4-e, U.D.F. Education Committee – Education Programme for Civics. 27-29 April 1984, Daleside.

Association, the Alexandra Civic Association as well as the East Rand People's Organisation. The report of the workshop stressed very clearly that it perceived all issues such as the education crisis, high rents or the homeland system to be part of an attempt of the government to 'reorganise oppression'.¹¹⁰ The next tasks, the report stated, was to 'destroy the Black Local Authorities and to strengthen our civics'. Other issues that were discussed included house-to-house campaigns, the Million Signature campaign and the relation between homelands and townships. In one of the final sessions, participants discussed the future of civic structures and emphasised the need for co-ordination, infrastructure, training, discipline, education, the establishment of recreational facilities and the need to politicise the communities by inviting speakers representing a variety of concerns. In a final point the report concluded that the 'powerlessness of local government' should be exposed by 'using day to day issues'.¹¹¹ From the Vaal Triangle, a handful of people attended the workshop, including Esau Ralitsela, Edith Letlhake and two of the Delmas accused, David Mphuthi and Sam Matlole.¹¹²

The ANC underground

Research on the ANC underground, as a variety of authors have noted, is difficult and literature is still scarce.¹¹³ Information is difficult to corroborate, posing a constant risk of over - or

¹¹⁰ WHP AK2117, J2.20, U4-e, U.D.F. Education Committee.

¹¹¹ WHP AK2117, J2.20, U4-e, U.D.F. Education Committee, 8-9.

¹¹² WHP AK2117, I2.6, Vol.200, Testimony Mphuthi [sic], 10,464ff.

¹¹³ Jabulani Sithole analyses the complex relation between the ANC underground and popular struggles around Pietermaritzburg. See J.Sithole, 'The ANC Underground, Armed Action and Popular Resistance in Pietermaritzburg and the Surrounding Natal Midlands Townships', in SADET (ed.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa. Volume 4*, 223-77; for the role of the ANC underground during the 1980s also see Houston, 'The ANC's Internal Underground Political Work in the 1980s', in SADET (ed.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa. Volume 4*, 133-221; for a general discussion see R. Suttner, 'The African National Congress (ANC) Underground: From the M-Plan to Rivonia', *South African Historical Journal (SAHJ)*, 49/1 (2003), 123-146; R. Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa to 1976* (Johannesburg, 2008); Jeremy Seekings in a recent article stressed that the relation between the underground and above ground structures warrants greater attention, see J. Seekings, 'Whose Voices? Politics and Methodology in the Study of Political Organisation and Protest in the Final Phase of the "Struggle" in South Africa', *SAHJ*, 62/1 (2010), 7-28.

underemphasising the role of the political underground. Underground units were established as early as the 1960s in various parts of the country. However, aside from a few individuals such as the Ralitselas, I found it impossible to prove or disprove the existence of such units in the Vaal Triangle prior to the early 1980s. Interviews certainly affirm that from that time, local underground operatives connected with above ground structures in the Vaal in the period leading up to the Vaal Uprising.¹¹⁴ The PAC, on the other hand, was rather dormant. In Sharpeville, a traditional stronghold of the PAC, activists had been detained in the aftermath of the shootings of 1960 and it appears that neither the police nor local residents perceived the PAC to be particularly strong in the region.¹¹⁵

When the student uprisings began on 16 June 1976, the ANC was caught off-guard. While one of its results was the swelling of the ranks of MK with students who fled the country, the leadership in exile realised that both its capacity to organise political protest inside South Africa and its political influence were rather limited.¹¹⁶ This realisation led the ANC to reassess its strategies. After the ANC's National Executive Committee's (NEC) delegation's visit to Vietnam in October 1978, a joint meeting between the NEC and the Revolutionary Council (RC) was held in Luanda. In its aftermath the Politico-Military Strategy Commission redefined its priorities. Summarised in the Green Book (apparently named after the Green Book by Muammar Gaddafi), the politico-military strategy commission stressed, among other things, the need for popular mobilisation

The character of the South African ruling class and the nature of its state apparatus dictates that national liberation and people's power can only be won by revolutionary violence in a protracted armed struggle which must involve the whole people and in which partial and general mass uprisings will play a vital role. Such a people's war can only take root and develop if it grows out of, and is based on, political revolutionary bases amongst the people.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Howard Barrell writes about the ANC's influence on civic and student organisations, see H. Barrell, 'Conscripts to Their Age: African National Congress Operational Strategy, 1976-1986' (University of Oxford DPhil Thesis, 1993), 258.

¹¹⁵ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011; interview, Aik Makiti, Sharpeville, 15 July 2010.

¹¹⁶ See H. Barrell, 'Conscripts to Their Age', 178ff.

¹¹⁷ The Green Book: Report of the Politico-Military Strategy Commission to the ANC National Executive Committee, August 1979, accessed 10 January 2013 at <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=79>.

The strategy outlined in the Green Book clearly stated that the military aspect of the struggle was secondary to the political one and that the masses needed to be mobilised in order create a situation in which the broader population would become engaged in a People's War.¹¹⁸

This approach, already reflected in the M-Plan stressed the need to move from organisation to mobilisation, from mobilisation to protest and from protest to challenge, a formula that was called MOPC.¹¹⁹ However, the initiative to establish the unit in the Vaal Triangle came from people who had remained inside South Africa, the Ralitselas. Around 1982 the couple travelled to Botswana to find Dorcas Ralitsela's sister who had left for exile and joined the ANC with her husband in the late 1970s. Upon arrival they were introduced to ANC members in Gaborone and underwent training.¹²⁰ Their tasks included to act as couriers, distribute ANC material, the formation of above ground structures and the identification of potential new recruits.

In their authorised history of the liberation movements Houston and Magubane argue that the 'ANC underground spread its tentacles nationally'. In contrast to their terminology about 'networks' to describe underground activities in Soweto, my evidence suggests that activities were more limited in the Vaal Triangle and it may be more adequate to speak of a few individual units or cells. Indeed, Dorcas Ralitsela stressed that there was no contact between members of different units as in-depth knowledge about other units would have posed a great risk in case of detentions.¹²¹ Each unit, the Ralitsela's explained, had a leader and, in order to protect information and to minimise the risk of infiltration, units were kept very small and usually included not more than three or four people.

The recruitment of potential members of an underground cell was shaped by strict rules. Ideal candidates were people who were well known to the leader of the cell, who had a reputation for

¹¹⁸ Barrell, 'Conscripts to Their Age', 184ff.

¹¹⁹ Interview, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010.

¹²⁰ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010; unrecorded interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 4 November 2011.

¹²¹ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010 and 4 November 2011.

being reliable and honest, who were able to keep a secret, somebody who, in the words of Dorcas Ralitsela wasn't 'boastful' and who had a low profile with the security branch.¹²² In a manual called 'The ANC Covert Operations Manual: How to Master Secret Work', published in 1985, the ideal ANC underground activist was described as a person who must be 'politically clean, determined, disciplined, honest and sober'.¹²³ It was furthermore evident that members of an underground cells were not to become involved in leading positions within civic structures. Due to a lack of committed leaders, the reality on the ground, as discussed earlier, looked different.

Around winter 1984, Elizabeth Letanta travelled to Botswana. Popularly known as Ma Letanta, she was described as an ordinary woman who had met Esau Ralitsela through his work at the Industrial Aid Centre in Vereeniging.¹²⁴ The Ralitselas subsequently recruited her into their underground cell. Ma Letanta's mission was straightforward: to bring back ANC material from Botswana. Due to her unsuspecting appearance, her age and her low profile, she was an ideal candidate to act as a courier. According to Dorcas Ralitsela, the security branch usually looked out for men and if they suspected women it was the young women and not the middle aged ones.¹²⁵ After arriving back in the Vaal, Ma Letanta produced the material she had wrapped around her body to avoid detection.¹²⁶

ANC material had begun to circulate from the late 1970s onwards. Journals such as *Sechaba*, *Mayibuye*, the *African Communist* or *Dawn* were however read only by few activists inside South Africa. In addition to journals pamphlets were distributed. An analysis of the material demonstrates that the ANC was not only providing ideological leadership but published advice on practical matters

¹²² Unrecorded interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 4 November 2011.

¹²³ How to Master Secret Work, accessed 14 January 2013 at <http://www.sacp.org.za/docs/history/secretwork.html>.

¹²⁴ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010, 21 July 2010 and 4 November 2011; interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010.

¹²⁵ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010 and 4 November 2011.

¹²⁶ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010 and 4 November 2011.

including slogan painting, sabotage and the use of hand made weaponry.¹²⁷ More important than published material was Radio Freedom.¹²⁸ Anyone with a radio could tune in and it was less risky than printed material as no traces could be found during police raids.

While it is difficult to gauge to what extent Radio Freedom influenced the political consciousness of the broader population in the townships, activists recall that they used to meet at particular houses to listen to Radio Freedom.¹²⁹ Prior to the Vaal Uprising and their going to exile, the Ralitsela's house was a popular meeting point for a few selected activists. Radio Freedom introduced many of the songs sung by MK in the neighbouring countries to listeners in South Africa and also provided practical advice including instructions on how to produce and use petrol bombs.¹³⁰

Written material was placed at strategic places that were often frequented or near police stations such as Vereeniging to indicate the strength and presence of the ANC.¹³¹ The police, in the meantime, had their suspicions about certain individuals but didn't always have enough evidence to make arrests. In the understanding of Dorcas Ralitsela, however, it was the interest of the police to make sure that the entire network would be crushed and not to detain a few key people. Although the police during one of their raids found tapes with speeches of Oliver Tambo and recordings of Radio Freedom, neither Dorcas nor Esau Ralitsela were ever charged with the possession of banned material.¹³² Contrary to popular perceptions that the security branch detained anyone they could get their hands on, their motivation was not always to lock up local leaders for this would have enhanced their status, prevented the monitoring of potential networks and opened up space for being challenged by defence lawyers if the evidence was not sound enough.

¹²⁷ University of the Western Cape (UWC) Mayibuye Archive (MA), MCH01 (Records of the African National Congress), 10, Pamphlet slogan painting.

¹²⁸ P. Lekgoathi, 'The African National Congress's Radio Freedom and its Audiences in Apartheid South Africa, 1963-1991', *Journal of African Media Studies*, 2/2 (2010), 139-154.

¹²⁹ Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010; interview, Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Boipatong, 16 September 2011.

¹³⁰ UWC MA MCH01, 15.2, Radio transcripts *Dawn Breaks*.

¹³¹ Interviews, Esau Ralitsela; Dorcas Ralitsela, 4 November 2011.

¹³² Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010; unrecorded interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, 4 November 2011.

The key mandate for underground units, certainly from 1984 onwards, was to work towards making the country ungovernable and apartheid unworkable.¹³³ Within a local context, this meant the abolition of the council system as councillors were viewed to be representatives of the regime. In his annual speech on 8 January 1984, Oliver Tambo stated that

We must begin to use our accumulated strength to destroy the organs of government of the apartheid regime. We have to undermine and weaken its control over us, exactly by frustrating its attempts to control us. We should direct our collective might to rendering the enemy's instruments of authority unworkable. To march forward must mean that we advance against the regime's organs of state-power, creating conditions in which the country becomes increasingly ungovernable.¹³⁴

The statement further specified how ungovernability was to be achieved:

You are aware that the apartheid regime maintains an extensive administrative system through which it directs our lives. This system includes organs of central and provincial government, the army and the police, the judiciary, the bantustan administrations, the community councils, the local management and local affairs committees. It is these institutions of apartheid power that we must attack and demolish [...]. Having rejected the community councils by boycotting the elections, we should not allow them to be imposed on us. We do not want them. We must ensure that they cease to exist. Where administration boards take over their functions, then these must be destroyed too.¹³⁵

Calls to reject the Community Councils could be found in various journals including *Mayibuye*.¹³⁶

While leaders of the banned liberation movements could not be directly quoted, their messages found their ways into progressive newspapers, pamphlets and other publications. During political rallies strategies to oppose the constitutional reforms were openly discussed and in many instances the ANC's ideological influence was thinly veiled. From late 1984 onwards, in the aftermath of the eruption of mass protest in the townships across South Africa, ungovernability and the rejection of the councils became even more explicitly an open rallying call.¹³⁷

¹³³ Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010; interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010.

¹³⁴ *Sechaba*, March 1984, 4.

¹³⁵ *Sechaba*, March 1984, 6.

¹³⁶ *Mayibuye*, 6, 1984.

¹³⁷ *Mayibuye*, 8, 9, 1984.

Gcina Malindi suggested that the ANC was sceptical about the strength of political commitment in the Vaal:

And I think the ANC thought that people in the Vaal were too politically dormant. That they didn't involve themselves in political activism. Because you can see from '76 to 1983, the Vaal had no real political activity. It was COSAS, it was the Youth Congresses and the Vaal Civic Association comes only in 1983 and then within a year, by 1984 it organises the biggest uprising in the country. The ANC was not ready.¹³⁸

Hence link the between the ANC's call for action and the formation of civic structures and upsurge of popular protest is not as direct as the readings of ANC material might suggest and Anthea Jeffery claimed in her recent book.¹³⁹ On the contrary, while the ANC in exile provided ideological and symbolic leadership and guidance, a great many of ordinary township residents participated as a result of immediate local grievances at first and perhaps only in a second instance in support of the ANC's national strategies. This is highlighted by the fact that after their arrival in exile in the aftermath of the Vaal Uprising, Dorcas and Esau Ralitsela were questioned by the leadership in Gaborone about what had happened in the townships of the Vaal.¹⁴⁰ During the Delmas Treason Trial the prosecution attempted for years to prove a direct link between the ANC and the UDF - and failed dismally. Likewise, the Pietermaritzburg Treason Trial collapsed due to insufficient evidence and the poor quality of evidence given by state witnesses.¹⁴¹

In the aftermath of the Vaal Uprising, Esau and Dorcas Ralitsela went into exile while Ma Letanta was detained under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act. According to Dorcas Ralitsela, the continuation of the cell had been one of the key concerns of its members, however it appears that this was impossible. From late 1984 onwards, new units emerged.

¹³⁸ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

¹³⁹ A. Jeffery, *People's War: New Light on the Struggle for South Africa* (Johannesburg, 2009).

¹⁴⁰ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010.

¹⁴¹ Interview, Gilbert Marcus, Johannesburg, 18 March 2010.

(III) Policing and surveillance

Policing and control

With the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1995, South Africans and the world learnt more about the extent of repression and brutality that had marked the apartheid state. During countless hours of amnesty hearings, policemen and other members of the security forces described practices of torture and assault and shed light on disappearances and death. However, the agenda of the TRC with its focus on gross human rights violations provided little insight into the workings of the police or the state more broadly; instead it transmitted the impression that human rights violations had been committed by rogue policemen that seemed to be out of control. Many authors have questioned the failing of the TRC to historicise these human rights abuses and situate them within a broader context of the workings of the state.¹⁴² Hence despite the detailed information provided by former members of the security forces and representatives of the state, information on policing and systems of surveillance in South Africa remains anecdotal and parochial. Furthermore, no member of the security branch based in Vereeniging ever came forward to account for abuses during the 1980s. Only three policemen from the Vaal applied for amnesty; all of them relating to the 1990s.¹⁴³

Political policing in particular was fraught by internal tensions over contradictions between the use of excessive force and the need to co-opt at least part of the population. We have no in depth study of the history and the workings of the security branch to assess their overall strategy and destruction of records about the branch itself and the police more generally may also make this a difficult task. In East Germany by contrast, the records proved very detailed. And yet strategies of

¹⁴² See for example D. Posel and G. Simpson, *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Johannesburg, 2002).

¹⁴³ Unrecorded conversations, Pule Zwane, July 2010 – May 2011; O'Malley Collection (OA), Response Piers Pigou from Boipatong, accessed 14 January 2013 at <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv02039/04lv02133/05lv02139/06lv02148.htm>.

protest and dissent are difficult to understand if they are entirely divorced from modalities of control and oppression. Policing was a direct reflection of the ability of the state to maintain control and power over a population and the degree of authority it had in the townships.

The nature of policing in colonial states or states ruled by minority regimes is, not surprisingly, generally different from policing of democratic states.¹⁴⁴ In the introduction to their book on colonial policing David Anderson and David Killingray point out that colonial policing in India and Africa essentially aimed to defend the colonial state - and not its population. South Africa was no exception; as Brewer has noted, the policing of townships had less to do with crime prevention and detection and focussed more on maintaining social and political control over the urban African population.¹⁴⁵ Despite the rigid spatial order of the townships, state control was, to varying degrees, incomplete and hinged on the ability to generate knowledge and access through local intermediaries. While the use of intermediaries - or people passing on information to the police - is a general feature of policing all over the world, in repressive regimes these methods are generally more systematically geared to gather information on political opponents.

In spite of its oppressive nature, the power of the apartheid state was neither monolithic nor was the government able to enforce obedience in all spheres. It never managed to reach all levels of society and was heavily dependent on a range of local actors to operate elements of the state or to provide information. The rule over the townships of South Africa was thus characterised, to borrow Ranajit Guha's phrase, as 'dominance without hegemony'.¹⁴⁶ Policing South Africa therefore rather resembled the policing of colonial or totalitarian states, and had less in common with the policing of

¹⁴⁴ D. Anderson and D. Killingray, *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830-1940*. (Manchester, 1991), 5.

¹⁴⁵ J. Brewer, *Black and Blue. Policing in South Africa* (Oxford, 1994), 259.

¹⁴⁶ R. Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony. History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1997). Guha argues that the colonial Indian state was profoundly different from the European, bourgeois one. While for the latter consent outweighed coercion, the former was marked by high degrees of coercion and little consent. Paul Routledge applies Guha's model to the Nepali state, see P. Routledge, 'A spatiality of Resistances. Theory and Practice in Nepal's Revolution of 1990', in S. Pile and M. Keith (eds.), *Geographies of Resistance* (London, 1997), 73.

democratic countries. It rested rather on coercion than consent but once it lost its coercive power, its role became murkier and more reliant on covert operations and 'dirty tricks'.

In apartheid South Africa political policing rested on four pillars: a legal framework that criminalised radical political dissent – especially any connected with banned movements, the creation of a climate of fear and insecurity that aimed to discourage the majority from engaging in political action, the maintenance of networks of informers and the incorporation of other intermediaries such as black policemen that aimed to make the townships legible as well as strategies to achieve a partial cooperation from the broader population.

The need to operate (at least partially) within a legal framework as well as the increasing use of courts by lawyers to challenge police conduct limited the scope of members of the security forces. In 1984 for example, ten members of the security branch were standing trial for torture charges brought forward by Aurret van Heerden while another had had been sentenced to ten years of imprisonment for having caused the death of a detainee.¹⁴⁷ Such convictions were however the exception. Negative publicity through media and networks of international solidarity in the 1980s further entrenched the perception that the use of extreme force undermined the reputation of the South African state both internally and abroad. While torture, serious assault and harassment were intrinsic features of the security branch, it appears that its members went to some lengths to cover up the use of extreme force. Thus the inability to crush resistance through sheer force entailed a heavy reliance on black intermediaries, as discussed above. This created a balance of power that was inherently unstable and fragile. This instability was caused by the inability of the state to enforce compliance by sheer force and its resulting reliance on intermediaries to rule the majority of the country. Once the wider population withdrew its consent, effective rule became undermined.

¹⁴⁷ WHP AG2918 (Kairos Collection), 2.2.4.5.1, March 13: Spotlight on detentions in South Africa, by the Press Trust of South Africa.

According to Brewer, the student uprisings of 1976 had demonstrated the incapacity of the South African Police to maintain control over the townships through coercive power alone.¹⁴⁸ This awareness led to a re-organisation of both the administrative and executive apparatus of apartheid governance to increase its legitimacy and its ability to order the social and political space of urban black South Africans.¹⁴⁹ From the late 1970s onwards, different forms of community policing and the role of black members of the security branch were strengthened. Hence while apartheid legislation provided a wide range of effective tools to suppress political opposition, the police were increasingly unable to contain the emergence of mass mobilisation, as General Johan van der Merwe, head of the security branch from 1986, argued in an interview.¹⁵⁰

From the late 1970s onwards the apartheid regime began to resort to covert and more informal ways of policing the townships. This shift in policing reflected the growing weakness of the apartheid state and the loss of its coercive capacity. A letter from the Detainee's Support Committee (DESCOM) to various organisations in March 1984 for example stated that since 1981, the security police had increasingly used methods such as 'house-raids, spy-rumours, alleged beatings of activists, unidentified attacks on activists and family members, bannings of meetings, preventing organisations from getting venues to hold meetings and road blocks'.¹⁵¹ Police harassment not only affected activists or anyone suspected to be involved in politics but often entire families. This led, in some instances, to people being ostracised for causing troubles and attracting the attention of the security branch.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Brewer, *Black and Blue*, 280.

¹⁴⁹ Brewer, *Black and Blue*; C. Glaser, 'Whistles and Sjoboks: Crime and Policing in Soweto, 1960-1976', *SAHJ*, 52 (2005), 122.

¹⁵⁰ Interview, Johan van der Merwe, Pretoria, 18 May 2011.

¹⁵¹ WHP AK2117, J3.9, AJ37, DECOM circular re changing nature of State repression (19 March 1984).

¹⁵² Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 8 and 15 April 2010.

According to Philip Frankel, the townships of the Vaal Triangle had been singled out for strict police surveillance in the aftermath of the Sharpeville shootings of 21 March 1960.¹⁵³ Police stations in the Vaal Triangle were numerous, including two in Vereeniging, at least one in Vanderbijlpark, one next to the Vaal river called Barrage, one in Sharpeville, one in Residentia/ Evaton and one in Zone 12 in Sebokeng. Bophelong and Boipatong, it seems, did not have their own police stations at that time. These largely focussed on everyday policing and the enforcement of pass laws. The headquarters of the riot squad were in Vanderbijlpark under the command of Major Johan Louw.¹⁵⁴ The Vaal Triangle security branch, with its headquarters at Vereeniging, was under the divisional command of the West Rand based in Krugersdorp to whom members reported on a daily basis.¹⁵⁵ Daily reports were channelled from the divisional offices in the West Rand to Pretoria. Until 1981, the security branch of the West Rand was under the command of Captain Jan Coetzee - who took over the command of Vlakplaas from Dirk Coetzee at the end of 1981. Joe Mamasela, the infamous Vlakplaas askari who gained notoriety for his involvement in hit squad activities, was at that stage also working for the security branch in the West Rand.¹⁵⁶ Although it is unclear whether he already had any connections to the Vaal Triangle by that time, it was rumoured that he had managed to infiltrate the Vaal by the mid-1980s.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ P. Frankel, *An Ordinary Atrocity: Sharpeville and its Massacre* (Johannesburg, 2001); interview, Aik Makiti, Sharpeville, 15 and 22 July 2010.

¹⁵⁴ *Vaal Weekblad*, 12 January 1982.

¹⁵⁵ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁵⁶ Vlakplaas was farm north of Pretoria. It was established in 1979 under section C of the security branch and dissolved in 1993. According to Eugene de Kock, one of its former commanders, the task of section C was to monitor and curb the activities of the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress. Vlakplaas served as a base for the counter-insurgency unit C10 (later called C1) of the South African Police where captured guerrillas of Umkhonto we Sizwe and the Azanian People's Liberation Army were 'turned' to work for the police as spies (known as askaris). In most instances, askaris were however drawn from the ranks of MK and not APLA, as APLA was less active. The unit became particularly infamous for its role in political assassinations and other covert operations. Joe Mamasela was one of the most infamous askaris who was involved in a number of political assassinations. See Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, Volume 2* (Cape Town, 1998), 30; E. De Kock, and J. Gordin, *A Long Night's Damage: Working for the Apartheid State* (Johannesburg, 1998), 95; interview, Johan van der Merwe, Pretoria, 18 May 2011.

¹⁵⁷ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010.

Between the late 1970s and the mid-1980s approximately 20 to 30 members of the security branch - both black and white - shared the offices on the 2nd floor in Stanley Avenue, a bland and modernist structure that housed the police station in Vereeniging. Their numbers however expanded from 1984 onwards to about 60.¹⁵⁸ A steel gate separated this section of the police station from other departments. Some of the nine offices to the left and right of a long corridor were used for specific purposes while most of them provided desk space for members of the security branch. Daily meetings took place at the office of the commander to distribute tasks and the discuss strategies and concerns. While it seems to be impossible to establish the precise chain of command, it is nevertheless clear that local members of the security branch enjoyed a certain degree of independence when it came to making decisions on an everyday basis, including arrests, the handling of informers, interrogations and surveillance. However, permission had to be sought from a magistrate for the tapping of phones or detention under Section 50 of the Internal Security Act (ISA), for restrictions or the banning of people. Contrary to popular perceptions, members of the security branch claim that they were never above the law, as one former Captain for example stressed during an interview.¹⁵⁹ Their approach, was, however different to that of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), as Captain du Toit recalls:

You see a lot of our information was just information. Actually in the normal investigation, criminal investigation you get a murder and then you had to see who did it. In our case, we know who did it. But you had to get the witnesses and the evidence for that.¹⁶⁰

Furthermore, informers were usually not used as state witnesses - with a few exceptions - and hence evidence in court had to be provided as well. The local security branch was feared by many activists.

Gcina Malindi remembers that

The Vaal security branch had a reputation. [...] There are a few comrades who were detained outside of the Vaal who knew that if they were transferred to the Vaal, it meant trouble. So

¹⁵⁸ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁵⁹ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011; interview, Gerrit Erasmus, Johannesburg, 22 May 2006 and 6 May 2011.

¹⁶⁰ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

they had that reputation as being good, as being efficient and people feared them.¹⁶¹

And yet different policemen had different reputations. While some of them could be engaged in debates, other ones were notorious for their brutality.¹⁶² Members of the security branch, it appears, were usually recruited from the ranks of the CID. Detectives who had proved to be efficient investigators or interrogators were transferred to the security branch – although former members claim that they had little say in the process. To become a member of the security branch was therefore not a voluntary process.¹⁶³ Decisions on placements were taken, according to Johan van der Merwe, by headquarters in Pretoria.¹⁶⁴ Members of the security branch were chosen very carefully and had to have a family history that was free from any political activism or opposition to government.¹⁶⁵ Training took place at the police academy in Hammanskraal and included physical training, basic knowledge of riot control, the handling of weapons, drill training, criminology as well as first aid.¹⁶⁶ Depending on the level of education of the police trainee, it lasted for six to twelve months. According to a former member of the security branch, neither political education nor the handling of informers was part of their initial training.¹⁶⁷

The security branch was sub-divided into different ‘desks’ or sections that were in charge of the policing of various political groups or issues related to security including legal aspects and insurgency.¹⁶⁸ But according to former members of the security branch in Vereeniging, they did not

¹⁶¹ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 21 July 2010.

¹⁶² Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010; interview, Tsietsi ‘Stompi’ Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011; interview, Sakhiwe Khumalo, Vereeniging, 23 June 2010.

¹⁶³ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011; interview, Johan van der Merwe, Pretoria, 18 May 2011.

¹⁶⁴ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011; interview, Johan van der Merwe, Pretoria, 18 May 2011.

¹⁶⁵ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁶⁶ Interview, Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 29 September 2011 (name has been changed); interview, Gerrit Erasmus, Johannesburg, 25 August 2011.

¹⁶⁷ Interview, Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 29 September 2011.

¹⁶⁸ Interview, Johan van der Merwe, Pretoria, 18 May 2011.

have the manpower to allocate personnel to specialise on one structure or area.¹⁶⁹ COSAS as well as the Vaal Civic Association gave them particular difficulties, while they deemed AZAPO fairly ineffective and didn't consider it to be a big threat.¹⁷⁰ The local security branch tried to collect information on everyone who had left the country - either through informers or from parents who reported that their child had gone missing.¹⁷¹ The security branch reportedly kept files including photographs of everyone from the locality who had left the country. However, such claims are difficult to corroborate.

The two different layers of intermediaries included black policemen and black local councillors, whose function was to bridge the distance between the administration and the black population, as well as networks of informers.¹⁷² As members of the white security branch had no access to the social and political world of the black townships and did not understand its languages and spatial set-up adequately, it was the local black security branch members who usually identified, monitored and arrested political activists.¹⁷³ Gcina Malindi recalls

And I had two experiences where I knew well, where the white security branch police could not see me. But the black guy sees me and when they are about to go he says 'no here he is'. And I think 'shit, why didn't you just turn a blind eye and walk past as well'. [...] You know the first thing they will do is to radio Major Steyn to say 'we've got him'. So Steyn says 'I'll be there in twenty minutes'. So you get rushed to the police station to be booked in and taken to the interrogation room.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ See J. Rauch, 'Deconstructing the South African Police Force', Centre of the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (1991), accessed 20 November 2011 at <http://www.csvr.org.za/wits/papers/papdsaps.htm> (website doesn't seem to work any longer); interview du Toit and Niemand.

¹⁷⁰ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁷¹ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁷² Not enough information is available to determine whether local black policemen and councillors shared a similar educational and social background.

¹⁷³ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 21 July 2010.

¹⁷⁴ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 21 July 2010.

Black members of the security branch worked in teams with their white colleagues at the headquarters in Vereeniging.¹⁷⁵ As a former policeman, who was working for the security branch for over fifteen years, recalls:

Because you must have somebody who understand [sic] the language and can go into the township and talk to the people. [...] So on many occasions they will identify a person you can approach.¹⁷⁶

While white policemen in other areas were sometimes fluent in local languages, this appeared not the case for the white policemen in the Vaal. And hence black policemen not only provided access to the social and political world of the townships but also functioned as interpreters during interrogations. This function provided them with a certain degree of power that could not be controlled by their white counterparts. Interviewees however don't recall incidents where black policemen used this power in favour of detainees.¹⁷⁷ Black policemen were, according to Niemand, 'like brothers, there for each other'.¹⁷⁸ This gave them a certain solidarity in the face of the communities in the townships, for whom 'they represented oppression. In the closest and intimate sense'.¹⁷⁹ Black members of the security branch in the Vaal Triangle seem to have been mostly local.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ Interview, Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 29 September 2011; interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁷⁶ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁷⁷ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 21 July 2010.

¹⁷⁸ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁷⁹ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 21 July 2010.

¹⁸⁰ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

Surveillance or 'to counter them with their own people'¹⁸¹

While the Soviet Union under Stalin for example employed 366,000 policemen in 1939 working for the Narodny Kommissariat Wnutrennich Del (NKVD), meaning a ratio of one policeman per 500 civilians, the South African security branch certainly did not employ such high numbers.¹⁸² Precise numbers are elusive but interviews highlighted that the contingent of the security branch for the Vaal Triangle during the late 1970s to mid 1980s included 20 to 30 members.¹⁸³ This was a ratio of one policeman per 10,000 to 20,000 civilians. As Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately argue for the case of Nazi Germany, self-policing, denunciation and networks of paid informers came to play an important role. In certain cases the police was informed when a family member or friend had 'disappeared', alerting the security branch to the possibility that said person had gone into exile to join the African National Congress. In other instances information was passed on by those who felt a degree of loyalty towards the state.

There is ample evidence that their intelligence network provided police with much of the information needed. However, in contrast to other regimes, methods of surveillance were perhaps not as sophisticated. In East Germany for example, the Stasi was notorious for its methods to collect information, monitor people and places.¹⁸⁴ According to information by former members of the security branch, phones were hardly ever tapped as the security branch barely had the personnel to monitor somebody's phone calls on a continuous basis.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, few people had telephones in the townships. Cases of phone tapping did however occur. Dorcas Ralitsela for example recalls that

¹⁸¹ Interview, Gerrit Erasmus, Johannesburg, 22 May 2006.

¹⁸² S. Fitzpatrick and R. Gellately, 'Introduction to the Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History', in S. Fitzpatrick and R. Gellately (eds.), *Accusatory Practices: Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789-1989* (Chicago and London, 1997), 9. Other figures suggest that there was one policeman for every 5,830 people in Stalin's USSR, one Gestapo agent per 2,000 civilians in Hitler's Germany and up to one in 6.5 East Germans spied for the Stasi, see A. Funder, *Stasiland: Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall* (2nd edn. London), 57. The relation between the numbers of policemen employed and the relative strength or weakness of the state warrants further research.

¹⁸³ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁸⁴ Funder, *Stasiland*.

¹⁸⁵ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

their phone was usually fixed before they had even informed the authorities that it was not working.¹⁸⁶ To monitor a public meeting was equally difficult for informers carrying a tape recorder were under continuous threat of detection and the transmission of sound was often poor.¹⁸⁷ Better than tape recorders were transmitters as the quality of the sound appeared to be better and there was less chance of being discovered.¹⁸⁸ Larger meetings organised by the UDF for example were often videotaped - which was easy as journalists had been invited to attend. In the past police tended to openly take notes during meetings – a practice which appeared to be rather uncommon in the Vaal during the 1980s. The smaller meetings in the Vaal however, taking place mostly in churches or people's houses could not be videotaped and hence the police had to rely on informers reports afterwards.¹⁸⁹ Evidence therefore suggests that while the security branch was highly concerned with extracting information, their methods often relied on information provided by informers or the use of brute force during interrogations.

According to the information of former policemen, each 'handler' worked with approximately five to ten informers, depending on how active the informer was.¹⁹⁰ Some of them had been recruited by the security branch and were paid according to how much information they passed on to the police.¹⁹¹ Others were policemen who were used undercover to infiltrate organisations while a third category included so-called casual informers who occasionally passed on information to the police but were not fully recruited.¹⁹² Thus it would be misleading to assume that the security branch operated a large network of paid informers; instead information was also passed on by neighbours, family members, principals, school teachers or librarians who, according to one interviewee, notified

¹⁸⁶ Unrecorded interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 4 November 2011.

¹⁸⁷ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁸⁸ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁸⁹ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁹⁰ According to police, the term 'handler' was used to refer to a policeman who was working with informers.

¹⁹¹ It remains almost impossible to access information on the social, political and educational background of paid informers. However it appears that some of them were petty criminals who had been arrested and later released by the police in exchange for information.

¹⁹² Interview, Johan van der Merwe, Pretoria, 18 May 2011.

the police if anyone borrowed books with a political content.¹⁹³ School principals and teachers occasionally provided information on their students.¹⁹⁴ These were the so-called 'goed gesind' – [well disposed] in the words of Captain du Toit.¹⁹⁵ This corresponds with the distinction Fitzpatrick and Gellately draw between denouncing and informing. They argue that the term 'informer' usually implies a 'regular, often paid, relationship to the police'.¹⁹⁶

Informers who were regularly providing information to the security branch were given a number so as to protect their identity - only the handler knew about the identity of his informers while the station commander kept a list with all the names and numbers to ensure that no informer would provide information to two handlers.¹⁹⁷ Information provided by informers usually had to be verified by at least one other person - ideally by two to make sure that the information was reliable and that all informers had identified the same information as being relevant.¹⁹⁸ The ideal person to become an informer was somebody who was already a member of structure such as the Vaal Civic Association, COSAS or AZAPO.¹⁹⁹ It was therefore more important to have informers who were well placed than to work with thousands of them. The protection of networks of informers was vital as it often took a while to place and recruit another informer in key organisations. Police interviewed thought that they had been highly successful in infiltrating above ground structures by 1984 but had failed to gain access to the ANC underground structures.²⁰⁰ It is accepted that Philemon Velapi Letsele, a security branch policeman in training nicknamed 'Verras' had infiltrated COSAS but was discovered to be working for the police.²⁰¹ Letsele was killed on 1 September 1985 outside a shebeen

¹⁹³ Interview, Sekwati Mokoena, Sharpeville, 30 March 2010; interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁹⁴ Interview, Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 29 September 2011.

¹⁹⁵ Interview, Sekwati Mokoena, Sharpeville, 30 March 2010.

¹⁹⁶ Fitzpatrick and Gellately, 'Introduction', 1.

¹⁹⁷ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁹⁸ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁹⁹ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

²⁰⁰ Interview, Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 29 September 2011; interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

²⁰¹ Interview, Morris More, Sebokeng, 2 December 2011.

in Sebokeng by the brother of a prominent member of COSAS.²⁰² On 5 August, less than a month before his death, he reported that he feared for his life.²⁰³ Rumours about alleged informers certainly circulated. According to Patrick Noonan, it was rumoured that one out of five households had been recruited by the security branch - a claim that is heavily disputed by the police.²⁰⁴

Distrust against certain individuals was strong, as a number of cases demonstrate. Three residents from Sharpeville testified about a certain M. whom they suspected to be an informer. One witness for example stated:

I think that M. [name has been anonymised] is a spy. I did not think so at the time but some youngster came and told me a story. One day, I don't remember when, two policemen brought somebody who [sic] they had just detained to M's house. One policeman remained in the car with the detained person and the other policeman went out of the car and knocked on the door of M's house. M. came out and had a discussion with the policeman. Then the police left, and released the detained person. They then went and detained the neighbour of the detained person. I think that, the police were bringing the person to M. for identification. [...] M. also had a brother who is a member of the security police. And at the moment, although he is not working, he has bought himself a Toyota 1600.²⁰⁵

Another resident expressed his sentiments as follows: 'I am suspicious of M. He attended all the meetings. At the third meeting, he said that some of the people are sellouts.' In the witness's opinion, this made M. suspicious:

He said that even his brother is a sellout. He was saying things which were not so important, but he was trying to prove that he was not a sellout. I think he was already suspected. [...] I got suspicious of him at the last meeting. He was looking for the people who were talking too much. He was taking notes or taking names, I'm not sure.²⁰⁶

If M. was indeed an informer, he was rather clumsy in his demeanour - paid informers usually had

²⁰² State v Tsawane and Another, Case No. 560/87, Supreme Court of Appeal, accessed 14 January 2013 at <http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZASCA/1988/125.html>; also see WHP AK2117, I1.1, Vol.2, Testimony Conradie, 32ff.; AK2117, I1.1, Vol.3, Testimony Moklaudsi [sic], 47-116; interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010.

²⁰³ WHP AK2117, G1a, Velapi Philemon Letsele verklaar, Sebokeng, No. 578/7/85, (5 August 1985).

²⁰⁴ Interviews, Patrick Noonan, Sebokeng, 24 March 2010; interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

²⁰⁵ confidential source.

²⁰⁶ confidential source.

strict guidelines not to 'agitate' during meetings, not to attract any attention and never to take any notes.²⁰⁷ The security branch, according to their own claims, continuously worried about the safety of their informers. As mentioned before, the maintenance of a network of informers was vital for the gathering of intelligence but on a more personal basis, former policemen claim, a handler and his informer would to some extent become 'friends'.²⁰⁸ As a former policeman recalled: 'Especially the younger ones here you become like a father to him.'²⁰⁹

(IV) Conclusion

Political mobilisation in the townships of the Vaal Triangle was, as suggested in Chapter one, slow. In 1979 and 1980, local branches of AZAPO and COSAS were established. And yet both organisations struggle to attract committed membership and further suffered from a lack of funds to run successful campaigns. In 1983 the Vaal Civic Association was formed. Despite its rather weak structures during its initial phase, it became the key player in civic politics. While its formation had been pushed by ANC underground activists, the majority of the membership were drawn to the VCA for its role in addressing bread-and-butter issues. Despite occasional protests, local authorities displayed a remarkable unwillingness and incapacity to address grievances. The period between 1980 and 1984 thus saw the tentative establishment of civic and student networks that took up the daily grievances of the local population. Due to the increasing influence of the ANC in exile and a handful of ANC underground activists in the region, civic politics were infused by charterist ideology as well as broader strategies and goals of the ANC.

²⁰⁷ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

²⁰⁸ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

²⁰⁹ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

Although the ANC in exile was by no means in any position to steer popular protests in the townships, it did provide ideological leadership. As police testimonies demonstrate, they possessed little knowledge on ANC underground networks prior to the uprising of 1984. Above ground structures had however become infiltrated by police informers who provided detailed information on planned strategies as well as debates.

CHAPTER THREE

‘When all hell broke loose’:

3 September 1984

Well 1984 was bigger than anything that’s ever happened in the country. But it’s huge and it happens like that sporadically.¹

The first day of September is traditionally known as Spring Day in South Africa, marking the end of winter and the reawakening of nature. Winter in the Vaal Triangle is harsh, with greatly varying temperatures that occasionally drop below zero degrees at night and reach up to twenty degrees during the day. Blue skies, uninterrupted by clouds give a sense of infinity while red and brown dust covers the dry grassland vegetation that characterises the majority of the South African highveld. The mighty summer thunderstorms are still a few weeks away. However, when September arrived in 1984, more than a new season had started: 3 September, later referred to as ‘bloody Monday’ by some, heralded the beginning of the most sustained period of popular protest against the apartheid regime. As advocate George Bizos later recalled, it was in the townships of the Vaal Triangle where ‘the liberation revolution began in earnest’.²

¹ Interview, Matime Moshele Papane, Johannesburg, 28 April 2010.

² Comment by advocate George Bizos at a thanksgiving function at the Mmabatho stadium in November 1996, quoted in P. Noonan, *They’re Burning the Churches: The Final Dramatic Events that Scuttled Apartheid* (Bellevue, 2003), 13.

The nature and timing of uprisings can never be predicted - for the presence of a committed and organised leadership and an ideological programme are not enough. Without the participation of the population and the formation of crowds there is no uprising.³ For many outsiders, the Vaal Triangle was an unusual and perhaps unexpected locus for the eruption of sustained popular protests. Yet archival sources, and the records of the Delmas Treason Trial in particular demonstrate that its residents felt the force of apartheid as strongly as in other parts of South Africa. My interviews confirm the volatility of the situation and the incapacity and unwillingness of both local and central government to address the socio-economic and political grievances of the population.

By the 1980s, the collective memory of the Sharpeville shootings was fading for a new generation of activists. And yet the shooting of school children in Soweto and other townships in 1976, the quelling of school protests in the Western Cape in the early 1980s as well as the repression of protests in Tumahole in July 1984 left little doubt that the police was likely to show little restraint. The growing conflict between local residents and police during the days preceding the protest march affirmed this. However, while expectations of police violence may have been widespread, the extent and violent nature of confrontations took many by surprise. By September 1984, fear and expectations of state violence were certainly ubiquitous and yet the political, social and economic factors had created a historical context in which mass mobilisation could occur. The ingredients that facilitated a broad-based participation included, as argued previously, the decentralisation of apartheid power, falling living standards, heightening socio-economic grievances, the emergence of political networks that promoted opposition to the regime as well as the ability to mobilise social and political identities. These factors each contributed towards a situation that was highly volatile and

³ The preferred term in this thesis to describe the events of September 1984 is 'uprising'. Other terms with similar meanings include 'revolt' and 'rebellion'. However, the period between 1984-86 can be described as insurrectionary once the uprisings turned into a more sustained challenge to the political and social order. The term 'riot' is contested as it often implies a negative action. It was mostly used by government officials such as police. A 'revolution', on the other hand, implies a change in government. In the media as well as government discourse 'unrest' was frequently used. The protest march that eventually culminated in the Vaal Uprising was supported by a few thousand local residents.

explosive; it was, however, the confrontations between councillors and crowds as well as crowds and the police that eventually stirred protests in a new direction - that of an uprising.

The perceptions and agendas of actors including the police, civic leaders, ordinary residents, youth activists, councillors and by-standers were as diverse as their backgrounds. The means by which dissatisfaction would or should be expressed was equally heterogeneous and contributed towards the multi-layered and eclectic character of the Vaal Uprising. It was clear that not everybody agreed with the strategies the Vaal Civic Association (VCA) was promoting and hence some groups thought that peaceful protest marches were a waste of time while the leadership in Sharpeville initially hadn't intended to join the march at all.⁴ Young people in particular had a sense of urgency and impatience. They wanted freedom. And they wanted it now. Interviews confirmed that some youth anticipated violence.⁵ Thus by 1984 a variety of groups had been formed with diverse interpretations and understandings of appropriate political strategies. Styles and repertoires of resistance that emerged varied from boycotts, strikes and protest marches to the use of violence such as petrol bombings, stone throwing and physical attacks on councillors, which had not occurred in this area prior to the early 1980s. It was ultimately this multiplicity and intensity of resistance that caught the Botha regime off-guard.

While the emergence of popular protest, culminating in the protest march on 3 September 1984, can be situated within a context of social and political change, the use of extreme physical violence against black representatives of the apartheid state should not be conflated with mass mobilisation. Instead, a careful analysis of the spatial and temporal character of the uprising highlights that the use of violence in particular was heavily contested and reflected divisions over acceptable political or, perhaps in a broader sense, emancipatory strategies.

⁴ Interview, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010; interview, Oupa Hlomoka, Vanderbijlpark, 9 July 2010.

⁵ Interview, Peter Nhlapo, Vereeniging, 8 July 2010 (name has been changed).

In this chapter I firstly discuss the prelude to the Vaal Uprising from July to the end of August 1984, examining the political tensions and strategies that emerged. Secondly, I trace the various narratives and understandings of what happens on 3 September until the moment when the protest march was stopped by the police. Lastly I analyse the role of the crowd. The narrative structure of the second part of this chapter in particular mirrors the language of the sources to highlight the diversity of experiences and perceptions. Tempting though it may be to discard the evidence of the police, their accounts contribute towards a more nuanced understanding of the events. It is thus the aim of this section to juxtapose the various explanations, descriptions and narratives in order to gain a fuller understanding of the fragmented nature of the revolt. While the section covering the protesters is based on trial records and interviews, the evidence for the narratives of the police and councillors rest exclusively on trial records. The youth, as noted before, did not give evidence in the Delmas Treason Trial and hence my understanding of their involvement is based largely on interviews.

(I) A change of mood

Tumahole, 15 July 1984

According to interviewees, the decision that 3 September was going to be a day of protest and mass action had been taken during the commemoration of the 1976 student uprisings on 16 June 1984 at the Nyolohelo Roman Catholic Church in Zone 12, Sebokeng. Plans began to take further shape in July, around the time when a protest march against rent increases in Tumahole, a small township outside Parys in the Free State, which fell under the jurisdiction of the Orange Vaal

Development Board, escalated into violence.⁶ Mandla Mazibuko, a young student of 16 at that time, recalls that between June and September 1984 the mood in the townships was changing as its black population became increasingly fed-up with the council system and the rent increases.⁷ The eruption of protest in Tumahole on 15 July was the first clear indicator that popular protest relating to socio-economic grievances and the rejection of the council system was gathering momentum. Tumahole was not a centre of political dissidence and the rent protests in Tumahole inspired civic and student leaders in the townships of the Vaal Triangle. Equally the failure to maintain an organised and sustained boycott and protest there signalled to activists in the Vaal that thorough organisation was key for success.⁸

Activists from the townships in the northern Free State and the Vaal Triangle had maintained relations as Tumahole was only 50 kilometres to the south of the Vaal Triangle. Fezile Dabi in particular, a law student at the University of Fort Hare and member of the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) was a well-known figure in the Vaal.⁹ During the June 16 commemoration, Dabi addressed the audience. Thami ka Plaatjie, remembered: 'Fezile Dabi took the platform. And he had us eating from his hands. He spoke with eloquence. He spoke with magisterial authority.'¹⁰ Political intolerance, reflected in the escalating conflict between AZAPO and members of the United Democratic Front (UDF), had not yet reached its bloody climax.¹¹ The annual commemoration in

⁶ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010; interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 23 July 2010. The records of the Delmas Treason Trial cover the events in Tumahole, see University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers (WHP) AK2117 (State v Baleka and 21 Others), Case No.482/85, I.230, Vol.347, Testimony Thekiso; also see WHP AK2117, L9.22, Judgement; interview, Kevin Harris, Johannesburg, 15 May 2006; J. Seekings, 'Political Mobilisation in Tumahole, 1984-85', *Africa Perspective*, 1/7,8 (1989), 105-44.

⁷ Interview, Mandla Mazibuko, Vanderbijlpark, 22 June 2010.

⁸ Interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010.

⁹ Interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010; interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

¹⁰ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010.

¹¹ Interview, Oupa Hlomoka, Vanderbijlpark, 9 July 2010.

Sebokeng was disrupted by the police leading to a number of violent confrontations between township youth and the security forces.¹²

One of the protesters arrested in Tumahole, Johannes Ngalo, died in police detention as a result of serious internal injuries.¹³ His death received media coverage around the world and led the Detainee's Parents' Committee (DPSC), the Detainee's Support Committee (DESCOM) and the UDF to issue a joint statement.¹⁴ Some of activists from the Vaal subsequently attended his funeral in Tumahole – according to Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, the funeral was in fact organised by activists from the Vaal - where they spread the word about the planned protests on 3 September.¹⁵

Other activists in the townships of the East Rand and Soweto received similar notifications and were asked to show support and solidarity for the day to come.¹⁶ Tumahole later formed part of the 31 areas in which the state argued that unrest had broken out in a conspiracy to overthrow the South African government.¹⁷ And it was his presence in Tumahole, among other reasons, that got Monsiuoa Patrick 'Terror' Lekota into prison as one of the Delmas trialists as the authorities claimed that Lekota has been involved in teaching local youth how to make petrol bombs.¹⁸ This evidence rested on coerced testimony and was refuted. Lekota was one of a number of prominent UDF leaders who was detained on 21 August 1984.

Some of the youth leadership within COSAS in the Vaal had been getting increasingly impatient as they 'wanted action now' and did not want to wait until September. A song, composed by COSAS

¹² WHP AK2117, S8.11, Statement by Valantine Matseletsele.

¹³ *New York Times*, 19 July 1984; also see WHP A2675 (Karis-Gerhart Collection of South African Political Materials), III (863), Statement by Monsiuoa Patrick 'Terror' Lekota regarding the imprisonment of Johannes Ngalo; WHP A2675, III (864), Statement on the death of Johannes Ngalo, issued by the Detainee's Parents Support Committee, the UDF, no date.

¹⁴ WHP AK2117, J3.9, AJ24, UDF and DPSC press statement.

¹⁵ Interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010; interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

¹⁶ Interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010; interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

¹⁷ WHP AK2117, L9.22, Judgement.

¹⁸ WHP AK2117, L9.22, Judgement.

members, ridiculed the civic leadership by calling them 'cowards who had to wait for the sun to come out'.¹⁹ Three factors influenced the choice of date. Activists knew that in order to mobilise a broad spectrum of residents a warmer day was potentially more attractive for people to spend long hours marching in the streets.²⁰ Secondly, the rent and service levy increases of R5.90 were due to come into effect on 1 September and thirdly and most importantly, the tricameral parliament would be sitting for the first time.²¹ As South Africans and world media were watching the Coloured and Indian leaders Allan Hendrickse and Amichand Rajbansi walking into parliament, activists wished to divert attention to the townships of the Vaal so as to embarrass the South African government, to express the dissatisfaction of black South Africans with the Botha regime and to emphasise the exclusion of the black majority from the new constitutional framework.²² The UDF, in a press release issued on 1 September, had called for a national day of protest on 3 September to express opposition to the institution of the tricameral parliament.²³

Socio-economic problems were intensifying for a majority of township residents. As Gcina Malindi, former chairman of COSAS and member of the Vaal Civic Association who later went on trial for his political involvement remembered

It made black people very angry, even at a political level. So there was for political mobilisation a very nice combination of the political objection to what apartheid was doing with this tricameral parliament and the hardships of the people in the townships and that combination then led to what the Vaal became.²⁴

The revolt was essentially home-grown though its leaders had been inspired by the messages and ideologies of the UDF, the ANC as well as AZAPO, Black Theology and an eclectic mix of influences of anti-colonial and nationalist struggles elsewhere.

¹⁹ Interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 23 July 2010.

²⁰ Interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 23 July 2010.

²¹ See page 48.

²² Interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 23 July 2010.

²³ WHP A2675, III (867), UDF Press Release on the National Day of Protest, September 1 1984.

²⁴ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

The spark that lit the flame

The spark that eventually lit the flame and stirred the broader population in the townships into action was an announcement by the Mayor of the Lekoa Town Council, Esau Mahlatsi, and the Mayor of Evaton Town Council, Sam Rapotabi, in early August to increase the rent, service levies and municipal tariffs by R5.90 from an average of R62 to R67.90 per month. Rent for privately owned houses was raised by R5.50 and residential permits for standholders in Evaton by R6. The basic levy for electricity was increased from R10 to R12 a month while the unit price for electricity went up from 52 Cents to 62 Cents.²⁵ A breakdown of costs highlights that service charges formed the largest percentage of costs that were included in what was called 'rent'.²⁶ Meetings held by councillors on 5 August to announce the increase led to increasing tension. One eye-witness alleged that the deputy Mayor of the Lekoa Town Council Jacob Kuzwayo Dlamini was seen drawing his gun and pointing it at a local resident.²⁷ Further archival evidence suggests councillors ridiculing and laughing at residents who confronted them about the increases at a meeting on 25 August.²⁸ Matthysen, the town treasurer later argued in court that the increase was meant to cover current and capital cost increases.²⁹ According to a memorandum issued by the Lekoa Town Council on 2 August 1984, an increase of R11.27 was initially discussed but dropped due to the socio-economic situation of a majority of township residents. Instead, the Lekoa Town Council accepted that the gap between the initial increase and the increment of R5.90 would be covered by accumulated funds.³⁰

The decision to increase rents, tariffs and levies had been taken during a council meeting on 29 June 1984 – during a time when leaders of the VCA as well as student activists were already

²⁵ C.Cooper, J.Shindler, C.McCaul et.al. *Race Relations Survey: 1984* (Johannesburg, 1985), 389.

²⁶ Vaal Teknorama (VT) Collection Patrick Noonan (CPN), Payment of house rental, service charges and tariffs applicable in the various townships of the Town Council of Lekoa, no reference number.

²⁷ WHP AK2117, I2.28 Vol.331, Testimony Mbatyzwa, 18,903.

²⁸ WHP AK2117, I2.25, Vol.312, Testimony Myeza, 17,918.

²⁹ WHP AK2117, I1.8, Vol.55, Testimony Matthysen, 2,821.

³⁰ WHP AK2117, Memorandum. Increased tariffs and house rental applicable in the area of jurisdiction of the town council of Lekoa, issued by the Lekoa Town Council. Reference number unknown.

discussing the initiation of widespread protests in September.³¹ It thus remains unclear whether the information on rent increases leaked to the leadership of the VCA and gave them an incentive to go ahead with the planned protest march or whether the latest rent increases, officially announced in August, were indeed the straw that broke the camels back. By April 1984, 35,000 out of 60,000 households in the townships of the Vaal Triangle were in rent arrears and thus the announcement of yet another rent increase exacerbated an already volatile socio-economic situation.³² The highest accumulation of arrears was in Zone 12 in Sebokeng where 70% of rentals were outstanding by August 1984.³³

The timing however confirms that the protest march, at least in the eyes of its organisers, was indeed not only about local socio-economic grievances but broader issues. Two of the key members of the VCA and the Vaal Organisation of Women (VOW), Esau and Dorcas Ralitsela, were ANC underground activists who had been given the task by the ANC in exile to steer the civic structures in accordance with the goals of the ANC. For Esau Ralitsela, the ultimate aim for mass mobilisation was to 'render the country ungovernable'.³⁴ The majority of VCA's members were unaware of their involvement with the ANC. But, as Dorcas Ralitsela pointed out, 'clearly, that September 3 incident was not a spontaneous reaction. And also, it was not just about rents. People knew what they were doing.'³⁵

³¹ WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ19, Increased service charges and rentals: dwellings in black townships in the Vaal Triangle area, 2 August 1984.

³² *Sunday Tribune*, 9 September 1984.

³³ WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ24-5, Meeting of the Lekoa Town Council on 18 September 1984, Annexure 21, House rentals, monthly debit and outstanding.

³⁴ Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010.

³⁵ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010.

‘Pushed by a momentum’

From early August onwards, a number of house meetings took place to discuss strategies of mass mobilisation. During the two weeks prior to 3 September, house meetings took place almost on a daily basis. The houses of Bamuvile Vilakazi in Zone 3 and Esau and Dorcas Ralitsela in Zone 7 in Sebokeng were popular rallying points where activists spent long days and nights organising for the events to come.³⁶ The Vaal Civic Association had established zonal committees in most residential zones in Sebokeng by then, although the strength of the various committees varied greatly. Zonal committees not only existed in Sebokeng but in other townships as well – although Sharpeville, according to the majority of activists had in fact not been mobilised.

During a public meeting on 25 August at St. Michaels Anglican Church in Zone 13 in Sebokeng – where Father Peter Lenkoe had been active in supporting the community in their demands - the VCA called for a boycott of the rent increase and a stay-away from work and school on 3 September.³⁷ However, according to Gcina Malindi, the meeting finally resolved to boycott rent completely so as to undermine the fiscal basis of local government.³⁸ Speakers at the meeting represented a broad front such as the Release Mandela Committee (RMC), the UDF, the VCA and COSAS.³⁹ State witnesses later claimed, speakers had called for councillors to be killed during one of the meetings – evidence that rested precariously on disputed or coerced testimonies. At the next meeting at the Roman Catholic Church in Evaton Small Farms on 1 September, the VCA took up the plea of the residents and called for a total boycott of rent and a protest march on the 3rd.

³⁶ The evidence on this is extensive; see for example WHP AK2117, I2.2, Vol.167, Testimony Vilakazi, 8,514ff.; WHP AK2117, I2.2, Vol.169, Testimony Nkopane, 8,740ff.

³⁷ For a discussion about the role of churches, see pages 132-35.

³⁸ WHP AK2117, I2.2, Vol.168, Testimony Vilakazi, 8,586ff.; WHP AK2117, I2.2, Vol.170, Testimony Nkopane, 8,767ff.; WHP AK2117, I2.7, Vol.206, Testimony Malindi, 10,787ff.; interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

³⁹ WHP AK2117, I12.3, Judgement, 786.

Gcina Malindi, chairman of COSAS between 1980 and 1982 and a key activist in Zone 13, argued during an interview that it had in fact been the audience attending those meetings that had called for a complete boycott of rents and a protest march to the offices of the Development Board in Houtkop on the 3rd to demand the resignation of councillors and to hand over a memorandum with grievances. Malindi thus suggested that the broader population in the townships had in fact become more radicalised than the leaders of the VCA had realised – despite their attempts to gauge the general mood by engaging residents in busses, trains and other public places.⁴⁰ Other evidence, including the intent to publicly embarrass the South African government on the 3rd however contests this assumption. The leadership seems to have introduced the broad aims of a large-scale protest march to the offices of the Development Board.

Similar meetings took place in Boipatong and Bophelong – the two small townships outside Vanderbijlpark. Esau Mahlatsi and Nicholas Louw, the town clerk of the Lekoa Town Council had attempted in vain to convince the local magistrates to ban the meetings; the magistrates responded that reasons were insufficient to impose bans.⁴¹ As discussed earlier, the dynamics in Sharpeville were different. During August 1984, Moselane organised a number of meetings at St.Cyprian's Anglican Church in Sharpeville. On 10 August he met with Phillip Masia and Nosipho Myeza from the Orange Vaal General Workers Union (OVGWU) to discuss the rent increase, the council system and other local grievances. The delegation resolved to call for a meeting on 12 August to address residents.⁴²

The next meeting in Sharpeville took place after Sunday mass on 19 August 1984. Thomas Manthata, a leading activist, member of AZAPO, the Soweto Committee of Ten, fieldworker for the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and personal assistant to Desmond Tutu was invited as a

⁴⁰ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010; interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 15 April 2010; interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010.

⁴¹ *Sowetan*, 16 April 1986.

⁴² WHP AK2117, I2.10, Vol.229, Testimony Moselane, 12,175.

guest speaker.⁴³ He compared the situation in the Vaal Triangle with other townships and hence placed the socio-economic struggles within a broader context. His presence in Sharpeville on that day resulted in Manthata being included in the group of 22 men who stood trial in Delmas. The meeting resolved not to pay the increments and boycott the businesses of councillors to enforce their resignation.

Another meeting on 26 August is well recorded as it formed part of a documentary by Kevin Harris.⁴⁴ A transcript of the speeches made during this meeting is particularly valuable in reflecting the general mood of the audience at that time. Peter Hlubi, one of the speakers engaged with the audience about the resolutions that had been taken during the previous meeting:

P.Hlubi: First Sunday we agreed that the rent we would pay. What we don't pay is the R5.90 increase. Are we still there all of us?

Audience: Yes! Yes! Yes!

P.Hlubi: The second thing. We agreed that we no longer want councillors all together [sic]. Are we still there all of us?

Audience: We don't want them anymore. Yes! Yes! Yes!

P.Hlubi: The third thing. The question arose as to where the money for the bottle stores and the money for other things which could be of value to the community was and how it is spent. The fourth: it was agreed that their garages and shops must not be used. Is it still happening the way it was planned?

Audience: It is not happening. [...] If they are telling the truth... it is happening.⁴⁵

There was some clear confusion as to whether the shops and garages should be boycotted or not – Hlubi, in his address, urged the audience to go ahead with the boycott and to act in unity. Oupa Hlomoka, chairman of AZAPO from Sebokeng, reminded the crowd not to let emotions influence their behaviour:

⁴³ Moselane and Manthata knew each other from Soweto, see WHP AK2117, I2.18, Vol.275, Testimony Manthata, 15,020.

⁴⁴ Interview, Kevin Harris, Johannesburg, 15 May 2006.

⁴⁵ WHP A2675, III (952), Translation of Speeches of Sunday, 26 August 1984, 3-4.

So I was requesting that this thing must not move our feelings, or we must think that we are fighting them. We are not fighting them. We are not fighting them. We just want them to resign as councillors because we do not want councillors anymore.⁴⁶

Hlomoka further argued that it was not their aim to replace the councillors. During the same meeting, an anonymous woman in the audience raised her concerns about the possibility of young people engaging in acts of public violence on the 3rd, urging them to refrain from stoning vehicles: 'My children do not fight, the Government is not fighting and the law is not fighting. Leave the busses alone [...] . My children do not destroy busses, there is nothing wrong with them. The fault is with us mothers and fathers (*audience murmurs*).'⁴⁷ As the speeches further make clear, the audience strongly agreed that opposition to the rent increases and the council system should be carried by the generation that was actually paying rent – and not the youth. Another speaker reminded the audience not to be cowardly but to become involved:

Are you afraid to fall? We have fallen, how can we fall again? We can rather rise and go. [...] It is true, we do not need our children. This is a minor fight. This is nothing man. It is a thing the parents can do. Those are boys, young boys. [...] Let the children be educated at school. They can join us in the struggle, but not now.⁴⁸

Yet during numerous interviews, former youth activists emphasised that in their opinion, the struggle was not a struggle by the older generation alone.

No suggestions were made at this meeting that there should be a protest march on the 3rd. Instead, speakers wanted to take the Lekoa Town Council to court for failing to fulfil the legal requirements of announcing the rent increases within appropriate time and widely enough. The final meeting took place on Sunday, 2 September 1984. It was at this meeting that, according to Malindi, the AZAPO leadership was shouted down by the audience who argued that they were sick and tired of the situation and that they wanted to join the protest march.⁴⁹ Malindi pointed out in an interview

⁴⁶ WHP A2675, III (962), Translation of Speeches, 5.

⁴⁷ WHP A2675, III (962), Translation of Speeches, 8.

⁴⁸ WHP A2675, III (962), Translation of Speeches, 12.

⁴⁹ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

that this was the first time the VCA had made inroads into Sharpeville. Relations between Moselane and leaders of the VCA had not been smooth as Moselane did not subscribe to charterist understandings of the political situation.⁵⁰ According to other eye-witnesses, a man from the audience informed the crowd about the resolution taken in Sebokeng to march to the offices of the Development Board in Houtkop on 3 September.⁵¹

Due to this uncertainty and the fact that Reverend Moselane, the most popular leader in Sharpeville, had to attend a Synod in Johannesburg on the 3rd, Sharpeville was by no means well organised with regards to the protest march.⁵² Was it a coincidence that the townships with weak or absent civic structures were the ones to explode first? The answer is likely to be more complex than that. The contingency of confrontations between police and protestors as well as the diverse agendas of protesting groups shaped the spatial dynamics of the uprising. It is nevertheless clear that Sebokeng – in contrast to Sharpeville, Boipatong and Bophelong – was quiet until the early morning of the 3rd.

Tensions had been rising long before the uprising started but began to escalate towards the end of August. In Bophelong, a meeting held on 29 August ended in violent confrontation between councillors and the audience and the police subsequently shot three people.⁵³ According to Nicolas Louw, the town clerk of the Orange Vaal Development Board, this was the beginning of the 'unrest'.⁵⁴ Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele recalls the confrontation as follows:

It was all the elderly people inside. They started posing questions. [...] These people [the councillors] are just not answering anything. And the whole place was surrounded by the police. Now on the outside we started mobilising [...] We need to make sure we beat these people up when they come out of this place. That they never come to our township ever

⁵⁰ Interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

⁵¹ WHP AK2117, S8.11, Interview with Talita and Helena.

⁵² Interview, Oupa Hlomoka, Vanderbijlpark, 9 July 2010.

⁵³ Various evidence from councillors, see WHP AK2117, I1.7, Vol.44, Testimony Mokoena, 2,1477ff.; interview, Kedibone Mogotsi, Vereeniging, 26 July 2010; WHP AK2243 (State v Sefatsa and 7 Others), Case No. 698/85, A, Vol.1, Testimony Louw, 17.

⁵⁴ WHP AK2243, A, Vol.1, Testimony Louw, 18.

again! Now I don't know whether by design or by default electricity went of in the hall. And they were up there. Man! They were clapped and beaten up I don't know what else.⁵⁵

It took the combined effort of the leadership of the Vaal Civic Association to convince the groups in Bophelong to wait for the 3rd. Local leaders feared that the protests could not be sustained for long periods and therefore all energy and efforts should be concentrated on one day throughout the entire region.⁵⁶ The air was redolent with tension and trepidation.

'Discerning the signs of the times'

Moselane was by no means the only priest who had become increasingly involved in community politics. While the clergy had initially mainly engaged in welfare projects and counselling, their role began to change during the period prior to the uprising. As community halls were mostly unavailable for political gatherings, churches became the only public venues for people to meet and discuss their grievances. The Nyolohelo Roman Catholic Church in Zone 12, the Roman Catholic Church in Evaton Small Farms as well as St.Cyprians Anglican Church in Sharpeville – Moselane's parish – and a number of other churches opened their doors for political activists to hold their meetings. This did not go down well with officials of the Development Board, the councillors and the security branch. The continuous harassment by the police divided the clergy: it conscientised and radicalised many, while it reinforced the belief of others that any involvement in community politics would have dire consequences. According to Father Patrick Noonan, an Irish Catholic Priest who had come to South Africa in the 1970s, it was the duty of the clergy to 'discern the signs of the times and

⁵⁵ Interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

⁵⁶ Although Shaka Radebe was not there that day, he nevertheless remembers the debates; interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 23 July 2010.

to act accordingly' and thus to assume a prophetic voice in the struggle against oppression.⁵⁷ Preaching the gospel, for these ministers, was not enough. And although they were – at least most of them – by no means politically militant, they contributed towards the struggle against apartheid more broadly and the addressing of local grievances in particular.

The conflict between the clergy and representatives of the Development Board, the councillors and the police had been growing since the launch of the VCA on 9 October 1983 at the Nyolohelo Catholic Church in Zone 12 in Sebokeng. In September 1983, prior to the launch of the VCA, Father Edward Lennon, its Irish Catholic priest received a letter from the chief director of the then Orange Vaal Administration Board, D.C. Ganz telling him that church premises should be used for 'bona fide' purposes only.⁵⁸ To the authorities' great irritation, Lennon defied the instructions of the OVAB and continued to open the doors of his church for community meetings. Four months later, in January 1984, he received another letter threatening to cancel the leasehold of his church. Other ministers received similar threats.⁵⁹

Ganz went a step further when he informed the Catholic Diocese in Johannesburg about the use of Nyolohelo Church for political purposes, arguing that these meetings 'tend to encourage the deterioration in the relationship between Blacks and the Government instituted organisations'.⁶⁰ A meeting including a group of inter-denominational clergy at St. Michael's Anglican Church in Zone 13, Sebokeng, however resolved that community and church affairs could not be separated. Instead churches should allow local communities to use them for meetings.⁶¹ Meanwhile, the security branch was engaged in a smear campaign to discredit the 'communist priests' – with varying success. The

⁵⁷ Interview, Patrick Noonan, Sebokeng, 24 March 2010. The role of Irish priests warrants greater research. Arguably, due to their perceptions of the Irish struggle for independence from Britain, they sympathised with the plight of the oppressed majority in South Africa.

⁵⁸ WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ30C, Letter to Father Edward Lennon, Roman Catholic Church Zone 12, Sebokeng, issued by the chief director of the Orange Vaal Administration Board, D.C. Ganz, (13 September 1983); also see Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 126-8.

⁵⁹ Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 126.

⁶⁰ WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ30A, Letter to the chancellor of the Catholic Diocese in Johannesburg, issued by the director of the OVAB, D.C. Ganz (13 February 1984).

⁶¹ Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 127.

two white Irish priests in particular were accused of being after the local (black) women – in the words of Noonan ‘a charming thought [...] but not too inventive’.⁶²

In order to gain control over the situation, representatives of ten different churches were invited by the Mayor of the Lekoa Town Council to attend meetings on 16 August 1984 at the Sharpeville nightclub and on 17 August at the Mphatlalatsane Hall in Sebokeng to improve the relations between the clergy and members of the Town Council.⁶³ The clergy had not been informed about the agenda and instead of fruitful discussions, they were threatened by members of the Lekoa Town Council, who urged them again not to host community meetings.⁶⁴ Mahlatsi claimed that he told local clergy to collaborate to ensure the ‘welfare’ of communities.⁶⁵ After the meetings, the priests sent a letter to Mahlatsi, accusing him of heresy and urging him to resign in order to be ‘saved’.⁶⁶ This letter not only offers priceless insights into the conflict between local ministers and councillors at that time but also reflects broader debates around heresy, morality and duty to the community. It stated that ‘We were dismayed by your call to the Church leaders in the Vaal, by the issues raised and by the aftermath press reports describing the meeting as having been “cordial”.’ It further continued:

The issues raised in the meeting were that Churches should not avail their premises for local political meetings and political meetings in general and that Church leaders should not be involved in politics. [...] Whose word is this that you brought to us? Defunct OVAB’s or Town Council’s? For us this connivance smacks of hypocrisy and heresy and should be declared anathema. [...] To put the matter in perspective, your worship, the Churches have been called together with their leaders especially, to be more obedient to God than to secular authorities; and, in this case particularly, our allegiance with God has been tampered with. [...] The church cannot dichotomize life into material and spiritual or run away from the material. [...] Non-involvement on the part of Church leaders in the affairs that affect people amounts to silence and withdrawal which is not only perilous to our credibility and that of the Gospel of Jesus

⁶² Noonan, *They’re Burning the Churches*, 179; interview, Richard ‘Bricks’ Mokolo, Orange Farm, 11 and 18 May 2006.

⁶³ WHP AK2117, J4.18, AAT14 and 15, Letter by N.Louw, Town Clerk re Discussion between church leaders in the Vaal Triangle and the Town council of Lekoa, August 14 1984.

⁶⁴ WHP AK2117, S8.10.3, Diary of Events – Vaal Triangle, by Father Patrick Noonan.

⁶⁵ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.59, Testimony Mahlatsi, 3,107.

⁶⁶ WHP AK2117, S8.2.5, Memorandum by Church Leaders in the Vaal Triangle to the Mayor of Lekoa Town Council.

Christ, but also leads us to support injustices. [...] We appeal to you therefore, your excellency, to repent and desist from this wanton order and system that continuously breeds hatred, injustice and violence and be saved.⁶⁷

The importance of such statements should not be underestimated: the language used reflected to some extent the increasingly radical discourse within certain church circles. It also attempted to discredit local councillors on a level that went beyond secular politics by using theological moral language.

Due to their networks of informers, the security branch had a good knowledge about the planned protest march on 3 September, as two former policemen confirmed in an interview.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the townships had been flooded by pamphlets for days, calling on 'residents, parents, workers and children' to observe the planned action.⁶⁹ Members of COSAS in particular played a role in distributing pamphlets.⁷⁰ Fake pamphlets calling the protest march and stay-away off were found in the townships as well.⁷¹ By the time the pamphlets were distributed, the information had already been circulated by word of mouth. Matime Moshele Papane recalled that 'People were beginning to talk, they had enough of this, they must get rid of this.'⁷² Word of mouth, which could take the form of rumour or gossip was one of the most powerful tools to spread information. Joshua Raboroko, journalist for the *Sowetan* and local resident of Sebokeng stated that no report was published of the planned stay-away and march prior to 3 September.⁷³ Patrick Noonan remembered that nobody knew what was going to happen. He recalled that the air was 'electric'.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ WHP AK2117, S8.2.5, Memorandum by Church Leaders in the Vaal Triangle. To the Mayor of Lekoa Town Council.

⁶⁸ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011 (names have been changed).

⁶⁹ WHP AK2117, J3.13, AN15, untitled pamphlet.

⁷⁰ Interview, Tebogo 'Exec.' Moepadira, Vanderbijlpark, 23 June 2010.

⁷¹ WHP AE862 (Records of the Black Sash), G37.8, United Democratic Front, Black Sash, et al., 'Repression in a time of reform. A look at events in the Transvaal since August 1984' (Johannesburg, 1984), 10.

⁷² Interview, Matime Moshele Papane, Johannesburg, 28 April 2010.

⁷³ WHP AK2117, I2.32, Vols.361-2, Testimony Raboroko.

⁷⁴ WHP AK2117, S8.11.1, Notes of meeting with Father Patrick of Sharpeville.

And yet despite their insights into the dynamics of political developments, the police did not arrest the political and civic leadership prior to the uprising. Instead, councillors and policemen resorted to intimidation and threats in an attempt to curb political mobilisation and to prevent the protest march from taking place. Moselane was physically assaulted and his property was damaged twice within two weeks: on 31 August, a group of people led by a local councillor threatened to kill him and expel his family from the mission house unless he abstained from his political involvement.⁷⁵ After the beginning of the uprising, Moselane's house was attacked again.

Shortly afterwards Moselane was summoned to come to the offices of the security branch in Vereeniging where Captain Steyn told Moselane to stop the meeting that was scheduled for Sunday the 2nd at his church or else he would be held accountable for any acts of violence that might occur in the aftermath.⁷⁶ Father Lenkoe, an Anglican Priest from Sebokeng who had been involved in organising meetings at his church, was told by Steyn that 'I know that they're going to burn. I know that people will not go to work. On this day, blood will be shed and this blood will be on your hands.'⁷⁷ Esau Ralitsela was threatened with a charge of treason and sabotage if he didn't call off the protest march.⁷⁸ Ralitsela suggested that if the Mayor of the Lekoa Town Council Esau Mahlatsi publicly stated on TV that he was prepared to resign and to scrap rent increases, he would do his part in trying to convince the local population not to march on the 3rd. This could not be arranged and thus the councillors and the police failed to grasp the last chance to resolve the conflict peacefully. For Ralitsela, the scrapping of the rent increase would have been insufficient.

Although the security branch had been questioning the Ralitselas about their alleged involvement with the ANC, they were not arrested. Either the hands of the police were bound as they had no proof or alternatively police preferred to monitor the couple to gain information on ANC

⁷⁵ *Sowetan*, 7 September 1984.

⁷⁶ WHP AK2117, I2.11, Vol.232, Testimony Moselane, 12,313ff.

⁷⁷ WHP AK2117, S8.11, Statement obtained by Rev. Peter Lenkoe.

⁷⁸ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011; interview, Esau Ralitsela, 5 April 2010.

networks.⁸⁰ It was only once violence had erupted in the Vaal that the police arrested the core leadership.

(II) When all hell broke loose: Narratives of 3 September

‘Siyaya ePitoli’: The protest march revisited

On Sunday 2 September activists from all townships and representatives of the zonal committees met in the morning to prepare for the day to come. The plan was clear: residents from Evaton and Sebokeng were to meet in the morning of the 3rd at the Roman Catholic Church in Small Farms, Evaton and the Nyolohelo Catholic Church in Zone 12 in Sebokeng. Residents from other townships would march to the offices of the Development Board in Houtkop from their townships respectively.⁸¹ As police testimonies demonstrate, that day violence erupted in Bophelong after yet another meeting by local residents was disrupted by the police and a young man by the name of Ruben Twala was shot.⁸² Rumours about Twala’s death spread creating a sense of trepidation and foreboding. It was yet another sign that police showed little restraint.

The morning of the 3rd was windy and cool and light smoke was hanging over the roofs of the houses.⁸³ At around 8am inside the Roman Catholic Church in Evaton Small Farms, Esau Ralitsela addressed a group of several hundred people. He reminded them that this was going to be a peaceful march and explained the purpose of the event.⁸⁴ Once the group left the hall they saw thousands of people coming from all directions to join the march: the elderly and the youth, women, men and

⁸⁰ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

⁸¹ Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010; WHP AK2117, I2.3, Vol.171, Testimony Nkopane, 8,790ff.

⁸² WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.68, Testimony Coetzee, 3,571-73.

⁸³ WHP AK2117, I2.8, Vol.212, Testimony Malindi, 11,208.

⁸⁴ Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010.

children.⁸⁵ Dorcas Ralitsela, one of the organisers of the march remembered 'It was unbelievable. It was unbelievable. [...]. But you see, the turnout of people I'm still also amazed. We were not in control of the whole situation.'⁸⁶ Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, member of COSAS recalls his emotions when he saw how many people had joined: 'And we're happy. Mmmm. We wanted to die for freedom. We're really happy.'⁸⁷

The march finally set off at about 9am, leaving in the direction of Sebokeng along Selbourne Road. At the Masenkeng bus terminus it turned into Vilakazi Street bordering Zone 7 in Sebokeng. From there the march continued along Wessels Mota past the BP garage in Zone 12 extension and Fowler bus stop towards the post office, where Moshoeshoe Street converged with Houtkop Road leading towards the offices of the Development Board. 'Siyaya, siyaya ePitoli' ['we're marching to Pretoria'] was sung, fists were clenched and the youth was jogging in front of the march. One student activist recalled that youth were toyi-toying in separate locations.⁸⁸ Dorcas and Esau Ralitsela however don't recall toyi-toying to be part of the march. The mood, according to eye-witnesses, was one of defiance, anger but also expectation.⁸⁹ Toy Manqa, a COSAS activist stated that 'Sjoe the mood. The mood, jirre! I've never seen such a mood, you know. It's like people having been enclosed suddenly exploding.'⁹⁰ There was a feeling that finally things were happening. It was clear that the march not only reflected dissatisfaction with local socio-economic and political conditions but expressed a deep-seated anger against the government in Pretoria. In an area that had experienced the trauma of the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, it took the older generation great courage and anger to risk a confrontation with the police.⁹¹

⁸⁵ There are no reliable figures of the size of the protest march.

⁸⁶ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010.

⁸⁷ Interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010.

⁸⁸ Interview, Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Boipatong, 16 September 2011.

⁸⁹ Interview, Lennard Kumalo, Rust-ter-Vaal, 9 May 2011.

⁹⁰ Interview, Toy Manqa, Vereeniging, 26 May 2011. *Sjoe* and *jirre* are Afrikaans terms to express surprise, shock or admiration.

⁹¹ WHP AK2117, S8.10.17, Memorandum concerning rent grievances in the Vaal.

COSAS members acted as marshalls to control the march and to keep it in line.⁹² In his judgement at the Delmas Treason Trial van Dijkhorst concluded that it had not been an orderly march but ‘a group of people of varying ages jogging to the tune of their song with raised fists and taking up the width of the tarmac road. The march was approximately 500 meters long and the first third thereof mainly consisted of youths.’⁹³ However, the march never reached its destination.

As the marchers passed the house of Caesar Motjeane, one of the black local councillors in Sebokeng, shortly before 11am, shots were heard and rumours spread amongst the marchers that he had been killed. Motjeane’s house had come under attack in the early morning and by the time the marchers passed near his house he was most likely already dead. The main organisers of the march understood the murder to have been committed by either small groups that broke away from the march or had arrived at the scene independently.⁹⁴ Gcina Malindi later argued in court that by the time the march was stopped by the police, he had not been aware of the killing of councillors. However, in an interview Malindi explained to me that he personally felt that the march should continue so as to distance themselves from the murder: ‘The decision was if we stop here we’ll be accused of having led the march to this point, to achieve this, we’re going to march, we are going to reach our destination.’ He continued:

If we’re going to be arrested, we’ll be arrested at the destination so that it’s clear we achieved what we wanted to do and we had nothing to do with the attacks on the councillors all over the place, including Sharpeville.⁹⁵

Oupa Hlomoka of AZAPO in Sebokeng, who like Gcina Malindi became one of the Delmas Treason trialists, also remembers the impact Motjeane’s death had on the march:

Something happened at the front. People diverted into some passage. Later on we were told

⁹² Interview, Tebogo ‘Exec.’ Moepadira, Vanderbijlpark, 23 June 2010; WHP AK2117, I2.7, Vol.206, Testimony Malindi, 10,850; WHP AK2117, I2.8, Vol.213, Testimony Mokoena, 11,274.

⁹³ WHP AK2117, L12, Judgement, 852-3.

⁹⁴ Various interviews.

⁹⁵ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010; WHP AK2117, I2.7, Vol.206, Testimony Malindi, 10,855.

that there's a councillor who stayed near the road where we were going to pass. And he was attacked [...]. We started getting worried. Approached these guys 'hey man, guys, look, mmm. It will be better if this thing is controlled'. And we were all concerned. As we were discussing, we came near the front of the march. People started guiding the marchers not to go somewhere else.⁹⁶

Shortly afterwards, near Hunters garage the marchers encountered a contingent of riot policemen who had blocked the road with Casspirs and other police vehicles.⁹⁷ Some of the marchers however continued to walk towards the police in order to negotiate and to convince them to let the marchers pass.⁹⁸ Naphtali Nkopane, one of the members of the Vaal Civic Association, argued that 'The agreement was that we are going to plead with them to let us pass, let the march proceed to its destination and should they refuse us permission to proceed then ours [sic] will be to talk to the marchers, that is the community in the march, to disperse.'⁹⁹ He also stated that should this be the case, a small delegation would nevertheless hand over the memorandum to the officials at the Development Board in Houtkop. By that time, expectations of police violence had become entrenched in organised protest and it is questionable whether the civic leadership ever believed that the riot squad would let them pass. When the first marchers were about 40 metres away the police began to shoot without warning.¹⁰⁰ And this was when, as participants of the protest march later recalled, 'all hell broke loose': 'It was chaos. It was chaos. We don't know where to go now. What to do now.'¹⁰¹ The distance between the church and Hunter's Garage where the marchers encountered the riot squad was 5.8 kilometres.¹⁰² It is somehow surprising that the marchers were only stopped two hours after the march had left the Roman Catholic Church in Evaton Small Farms.

According to the Internal Security Act of 1982, police had to give one warning - as compared to three warnings that the Riotous Assembly Act of 1956 had prescribed - and to allow the marchers

⁹⁶ Interview, Oupa Hlomoka, Vanderbijlpark, 9 July 2010.

⁹⁷ A Casspir is an armoured vehicle. It offers protection against landmines. Casspirs were frequently used by the police to quell uprisings in the townships.

⁹⁸ WHP AK2117, I2.7, Vol.206, Testimony Malindi, 19,858ff.

⁹⁹ WHP AK2117, I2.3, Vol.171, Testimony Nkopane, 8,801.

¹⁰⁰ WHP AK2117, I2.7, Vol.206, Testimony Malindi, 10,848ff.; WHP AK2117, I2.30, Vol.347, Testimony Vilakazi, 19,858ff.

¹⁰¹ Interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010.

¹⁰² WHP AK2117, S8.7.6.

sufficient time to disperse before they were authorised to use maximum force.¹⁰³ It seems unlikely though that even if the police had given any warning, that the majority of the marchers would have heard, given the magnitude of the crowd. When the police started shooting, people ran in all directions, away from the main road and into the side streets. The police climbed into their vehicles and began chasing after protestors, sjambokking and beating those unlucky enough to be within their reach.¹⁰⁴ Once the march was broken up, pandemonium broke out. During various interviews, civic leaders stated that their main concern was to locate and aid those who had been wounded. Others had run into houses and were hiding under beds, in washing baskets and other places as the police were looking for them.¹⁰⁵ Skirmishes between youth and police continued, as Peter Nhlapo recalled: 'We retaliated by throwing stones at police. By burning any government building we may come across.'¹⁰⁶

Judge van Dijkhorst later found that it had been 'inevitable from the start' that the march would be stopped by police. In his judgement during the Delmas Treason Trial he argued that 'the march was unlawful and in any event no police officer worth his salt could allow a chanting fist waving crowd to proceed to the main administrative offices of Lekoa at a time when many other administrative offices, beer halls and houses of councillors had been or were under attack.'¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ See N.Haysom, 'Licence to Kill, Part I: The South African Police and the Use of Deadly Force', *South African Journal of Human Rights* 3/1 (1987), 22.

¹⁰⁴ WHP AK2117, I2.7, Vol.206, Testimony Malindi, 10,862.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010; interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010; interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010; interview, Lennard Kumalo, Rust-ter-Vaal, 9 May 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Peter Nhlapo, Vereeniging, 8 July 2010.

¹⁰⁷ WHP AK2117, L12.8, Judgement, 853.

Van Dijkhorst's political allegiance was rather clear. Openair gatherings had been prohibited by Government Notice of 30 March 1984; the notice was however declared invalid in 1985.¹⁰⁸

'We wanted action'! Students and mobilisation

Like a great number of student activists, Bongani Mhlobo had not slept all night on 2 September. Together with a small group of eight other youth activists, he had spent the night at his friend's house in Sebokeng, where they were busy writing placards and preparing for the day to come.¹⁰⁹ Like other young people he became politicised at school, which is also where he met his future comrades. As discussed in the previous chapter, a number of secondary schools became particularly politicised, including Moqhaka Secondary School in Zone 11, Sizanani in Zone 13 and Thsepo-Themba and Jordan High School in Evaton. These were the schools that produced the majority of the COSAS leadership in the region.

At around 2.30am in the morning of the 3rd, the group left the house. Starting with a local bakery, they chased the employees away and forced the bakery to close. From there the group moved to the bus stop in Zone 11 to ensure that nobody would catch an early bus to go to work. However, one of the buses they stopped was not a normal 'ticket bus' but a Nyala, full of policemen, as the tallest member of the group who peeped through the window noticed:¹¹⁰ 'Eh, things are bad. These are police!' It appears that the police were as surprised as the young activists who dispersed only to regroup again at the Fowler Bus station in Zone 12. Within the next half hour they broke up to go to the various train stations, taxi ranks and bus stations to prevent people from going to work. In his book Patrick Noonan phrased it very carefully when he noted that the youth 'hoped to

¹⁰⁸ WHP AK2117, L12.8, Judgement, 870; *Government Gazette*, 30 March 1984.

¹⁰⁹ Interview, Bongani Mhlobo, Vereeniging, 12 July 2010 (name has been changed).

¹¹⁰ A Nyala is an armoured police vehicle.

persuade commuters not to go to work'.¹¹¹ It was, however, clear that the youth demanded to be obeyed, if necessary by force.¹¹²

As they started pushing rocks into the roads to block them, police came back and began to throw teargas. According to Mhlobo, this was when the uprising began in earnest. At about 4am, he states, 'people were now woken up by teargas, by the shouts, by the singing and people joined.' He continued:

Four o'clock it was smelling of teargas in Sebokeng, especially the post office area. Smelling teargas. Then I had, around five o'clock, I had to run home.[...] And I went home, go change, came back immediately. I was very strong.¹¹³

What followed was an exercise in hide-and-seek between the students and the police, as Mhlobo remembers: 'Now as we were moving police would come and then we disappear. Then we come again. Now that took a lot of our time.'¹¹⁴ White policemen in particular often had very little knowledge of local conditions and did not know how to navigate or read township space. It was thus fairly easy for the students to jump fences and hide in some of the houses when the police were looking for them. Physical prowess and being streetwise was part and parcel of being a young male comrade.

The majority of COSAS activists were male, between the age of 16 and 19, shared a similar social background and had often met each other at school. Although there were young women who occupied positions within COSAS, they were a minority. According to Sakhiwe Khumalo, women were more 'reserved'.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, political activism was regarded as dangerous and women were perceived not to be tough enough. As Clive Glaser points out in his book on youth gangs in Soweto, youth, or what he calls the initiation period is 'seen as a time of boisterous rebellion, mobility,

¹¹¹ Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 58.

¹¹² Interview, Oupa Masankane, Vereeniging, 29 June 2010.

¹¹³ Interview, Bongani Mhlobo, Vereeniging, 12 July 2010

¹¹⁴ Interview, Bongani Mhlobo, Vereeniging, 12 July 2010.

¹¹⁵ Interview, Sakhiwe Khumalo, Vereeniging, 23 June 2010.

fighting, assertion of independence, and sexual experimentation.¹¹⁶ Young women however were often introduced into adulthood at an earlier stage in life and given responsibilities young men did not yet have.

The plan of the students was to assemble at the post office at the intersection between Zone 11 and 12, opposite the Roman Catholic Church. The post office, as outlined earlier, was a nodal point in the heart of Sebokeng where different zones came together and where people met. Furthermore it was opposite the Nyolohelo Roman Catholic Church of Father Edward Lennon, one of the churches that occasionally offered space for activists to convene their meetings. The idea was to then to walk towards the Roman Catholic Church in Evaton Small Farms, where they would join the main protest march. Apparently the youth had however lost too much time, the marchers had already left. Mhlobo recalled that as it had been the official plan to invite the councillors to join the march, youth leaders felt that since they were close to a councillor's house, they would demand that he joined. Caesar Motjeane's house was more or less in between Evaton where the march had begun and the Development Board offices in Houtkop. It is not clear how they knew that the marchers had already left the Roman Catholic Church or why they wouldn't have been able to join along the way.

According to Mhlobo the youth had not really expected him to accompany them to Houtkop. When asked whether he thought Motjeane would join Mhlobo replied 'no, of course not. And given the mood, we knew he was going to going to a panic mode. Which is what he did. He went into the panic mode.'¹¹⁷ One of Motjeane's neighbours recalls the crowd chanting 'Caesar our fathers' money, our fathers' houses!'¹¹⁸ During first incidents of stone throwing, another neighbour observed, the crowd included the elderly and women.¹¹⁹ When Motjeane's bodyguard came out of the house, he intended to give a warning shot to disperse the crowd but instead shot a young boy, which angered

¹¹⁶ C. Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976* (Oxford, 2000), 3.

¹¹⁷ Interview, Bongani Mhlobo, Vereeniging, 12 July 2010.

¹¹⁸ WHP AK2117, S8.11.1, Statement Alinah Mogkatla.

¹¹⁹ WHP AK2117, S8.11.1, Statement Mrs Dimena.

the crowd. Motjeane, obviously realising that his bodyguard had just been killed, barricaded himself in the house and began shooting out of the window. Mhlobo remembers the situation:

At that time people are counting bullets. The shots. They were counting the shots. One, and after six people stormed that house. They stormed the house. We tried to stop them. Cause they wanted to burn the house. We tried to stop them. But unfortunately the crowd was too much.¹²⁰

Mhlobo witnessed Motjeane being dragged out of the house, stoned and finally stabbed. One of the policemen who appeared on the scene described that Motjeane's face was beaten to a pulp and his body, found a few blocks away, was covered in stab wounds.¹²¹ Both police evidence and statements by neighbours suggest that Motjeane attempted to run for his life. According to newspaper reports at that time, Motjeane was in fact killed first and after groups of people stormed the house his 'manager' was the one who was killed inside.¹²² As the police arrived at Motjeane's house, the group dispersed.

Next the group moved to the house of the Mayor of the Lekoa Town Council, Esau Mahlatsi. Instead of walking to Mahlatsi's house along Moshoeshoe Street – the main road in Sebokeng – a small group of youth decided to take short cuts through the smaller streets to go unnoticed.¹²³ Their mistake, according to Mhlobo, was that they were singing as they approached his house thus warning Mahlatsi: 'But as he reversed he saw us coming towards his gate. He went out of the car, he jumped the fence, he ran.'¹²⁴ Mahlatsi was finally picked up by a police vehicle.¹²⁵ A more detailed description of the confrontation will be discussed in the next section. Next on the list was councillor Chakane who was staying in Zone 14.

¹²⁰ Interview, Bongani Mhlobo, Vereeniging, 12 July 2010.

¹²¹ WHP AK2117, S8.11.1, Statement Lt-Col. Simon Sauer.

¹²² *Weekly Mail*, 6 June 1986.

¹²³ Interview, Bongani Mhlobo, Vereeniging, 12 July 2010.

¹²⁴ Interview, Bongani Mhlobo, Vereeniging, 12 July 2010.

¹²⁵ Interview, Bongani Mhlobo, Vereeniging, 12 July 2010.

Mhlobo remembers: 'From the post office, at the robots we turned right. Because we wanted to go get Chakane.' He continues:

But at that time, police had an information that two people were killed. A councillor and his bodyguard. Now they had an information that we were going to go to Chakane's place. After I think it's about [...] 550 metres away the helicopter scattered us. They start shooting with live bullets. To stop us because we were about to go to councillor Chakane's house. And they started shooting randomly. And that's where people were angered. That was between Zone 12 and Zone 13 and Zone 14. And then people they went for shops now. Burnt down shops, burnt down garages and that was the start of the whole thing.¹²⁶

According to the student activists I interviewed, they acted spontaneously when they decided to go to the councillors' houses. Although calls had been made to take the councillors along, there was apparently no clear communication between civic leaders and youth activists. Chakane was attacked as well and later died in hospital.¹²⁷ The post-mortem report states that his body was found with several 'injuries' and possibly asphyxia in his blood, suggesting potential suffocation.¹²⁸ The helicopter, it seems, appeared at around the same time that the riot police stopped the march near Hunters garage at about 11am.

Although Mhlobo argues that his was the only group of students that mobilised that day, other groups pursued their own agenda, independent from his group. Furthermore, even within the COSAS leadership, there seems to have been different perceptions about what was supposed to happen on that day: while some more or less freely admit that petrol bombs had been prepared prior to the day and that they wanted to 'see some action', others argue that arson and stonings had not been planned.¹²⁹ The Black Sash, in a document drafted several months after the uprising in the Vaal Triangle, argued that 'the use of petrol bombs can not be regarded as spontaneous. The materials

¹²⁶ Interview, Bongani Mhlobo, Vereeniging, 12 July 2010.

¹²⁷ *The Star*, 12 September 1984.

¹²⁸ WHP AK2117, S8.11.1, Report on a medico-legal post-mortem examination, death register no. 594/84, Jacob Chakane.

¹²⁹ Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

have to be obtained, the “bomb” constructed and conveyed to the target.¹³⁰ All the student activists I interviewed argued that the killing of the councillors had neither been part of a strategy nor encouraged. ‘Action’ thus did not relate to physical violence but to arson and public violence. Siphso Johnson, who became a member of COSAS in the 1980s remembers:

Well the plan was that we’re going to march! To join the bigger force and converge and go register. But some of us had already said ‘no, let’s develop another agenda’. We can’t just go there and leave the sell-outs here. So we went to the houses, burnt them down [*claps hands*]. [...] We torched few shops [...] went to the Indian shops.¹³¹

The use of violence including arson was not only an expression of their anger and their impatience but also an assertion against the more moderate groups in the townships. The use of political violence drew the boundaries very clearly.

‘Now you’re left with one bullet’: Councillors’ descriptions

Jacob Kuzwayo Dlamini was not very popular amongst residents in Sharpeville, and neither was the Mayor of the Lekoa Town Council, Esau Mahlatsi. Allegations of corruption were rife and councillors were generally viewed as ‘sell-outs’, ‘stooges’, ‘puppets of the regime’ or ‘dogs’, epithets that placed them beyond the bounds of the community. Councillors had been blamed for the misfortune of residents since the early 1980s. Through rumours and gossip they were assigned a collective social identity as scapegoats and were, to some extent, dehumanised through the use of particular language and discourse. Furthermore, at least some of the councillors had the reputation of readily resorting to violence themselves. Stories circulated about gun-toting councillors who called themselves Tsotsis, who knew how to fight and were not scared of confrontation by community

¹³⁰ WHP A862, G37.8, Summary of events and developments which have taken place since the document ‘Repression in a Time of Reform was printed’, 2.

¹³¹ Interview, Siphso Johnson, Vanderbijlpark, 7 June 2010 (name has been changed).

members. The attack on Moselane's house in late August is one such example when councillors were acting in aggressive ways to threaten and intimidate those who opposed them.¹³² Caesar Motjeane – one of those who called himself a tsotsi - told Moselane that if he wanted to fight, this could be arranged.¹³³ Councillors thus displayed a roughness and aggressiveness in defending their interests.

Rumours about attacks on councillors circulated at least a couple of days before the Vaal Uprising started. Evidence given in Diphoko's murder trial claims that there had been threats of violence against Diphoko as early as 1982.¹³⁴ Philemon Leburu 'Dutch' Diphoko was the fourth councillor to be killed, when he was attacked at his house in Evaton during the late morning of the 3rd. According to some of the councillors, violence had been advocated against them during some of the meetings in late August 1984.¹³⁵ Physical confrontations, as discussed previously, were also nothing new. Councillors had been stoned at a number of meetings before, including the meeting in Bophelong on 29 August 1984.¹³⁶ From 1 September onwards, Esau Mahlatsi was warning fellow councillors that they would be attacked on the 3rd. In court he later recalled that 'We had heard rumours that councillors are going to be killed.'¹³⁷ To defend themselves, councillors were given guns by the Orange Vaal Development Board and it seems clear, that there was a general perception that their lives were under threat. One councillor later stated that only those belonging to the mayor's party, the Lekoa People's Party received guns.¹³⁸ Many councillors were however already privately owning guns. How far councillors had training in the use of firearms remains unclear. Theresa Ramashamole suggests that Dlamini was rather clumsy in his use of the firearm.¹³⁹ All those councillors that were killed were in the possession of guns, which perhaps convinced them not to flee but to defend their properties – with fatal consequences. Furthermore, the OVDB handed out

¹³² WHP AK2117, I2.11, Vol.232, Testimony Moselane, 12,310ff.

¹³³ WHP AK2117, I2.11, Vol.232, Testimony Moselane, 12,311.

¹³⁴ WHP AK2305 (State v Nhlapo and 5 Others), Case No.344/86, Vol.6, Testimony D (in camera hearing), 145-46.

¹³⁵ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.60, Testimony Mahlatsi, 3,117.

¹³⁶ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.60, Testimony Mahlatsi, 3,118.

¹³⁷ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.60, Testimony Mahlatsi, 3,124.

¹³⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Submissions: Stefane Meshack Ntsoereng, Case no. 1046 (7 August 1996), accessed 11 January 2013 at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/sebokeng/seb1046.htm>.

¹³⁹ Interview, Theresa Ramashamole, Vanderbijlpark, 15 June 2010.

two-way radios on 2 September as well as fire extinguishers in cases of emergency.¹⁴⁰ It appears that only six councillors were given two-way radios that would allow them to contact the OVDB and the police – namely those the OVDB deemed to be ‘well-known’ and ‘important’.¹⁴¹ By the time the protest march started on 3 September, councillors were up in arms expecting to be attacked.

On the evening of 2 September at around 7pm, Alice Dlamini, the wife of the deputy Mayor of Lekoa Jacob Kuzwayo Dlamini, was terrified when people started stoning their house, breaking the windows.¹⁴² Late at night Dlamini phoned Nicolas Louw, the town clerk and told him that ‘it is bad, send in security.’ All personnel of the OVDB appeared to be busy, however, and nobody was sent to Dlamini’s house.¹⁴³ He also phoned the police in Sebokeng but they did not respond. Despite efforts by his wife to convince him to sleep at a neighbour’s house, he insisted on staying. Early next morning, a crowd approached the house and began stoning it anew. They called on Dlamini to come out, which he subsequently did. Panicking as he saw the large group of people outside his home, he fired shots into the crowd and wounded a young man, Motsiri Gideon Mokone, who was later charged with his murder. Theresa Ramashamole, one of his co-accused in the Sharpeville Six Trial, recalled that Dlamini was warning people over loudspeakers that he was going to ‘shoot the dogs’.¹⁴⁴ Subsequently Dlamini’s car was set alight, he was overpowered and dragged onto the car where he burnt to death. His wife managed to flee to their neighbour’s house. Dlamini’s murder led to the infamous Sharpeville Six Trial, where eight young people in their twenties and thirties were tried under the principle of common purpose.¹⁴⁵ Six were sentenced to death by hanging and only

¹⁴⁰ WHP AK2243, A, Vol.1, Testimony Louw, 19.

¹⁴¹ WHP AK2243, A, Vol.1, Testimony Louw, 19.

¹⁴² WHP AK2243, A, Vol.4, Testimony Dlamini, 156ff.

¹⁴³ WHP AK2243, A, Vol.1, Testimony Louw, 19.

¹⁴⁴ Interview, Theresa Ramashamole, Vanderbijlpark, 15 June 2010.

¹⁴⁵ See pages 244-49.

reprieved in 1991. The six who were sentenced to death spent three years on death row for a murder even the police knew they had not committed.¹⁴⁶

Samuel Kolisang, one of the councillors in Sharpeville who had heard about the rumours of Dlamini being killed, was hiding in his bathroom, scared that the same might happen to him. His car was set alight but he was not physically harmed.¹⁴⁷ Kolisang claimed that he was well-liked and therefore not personally attacked. In Sebokeng, Esau Mahlatsi was attacked in Zone 11. According to his own estimates, at approximately 7.35am on 3 September, he was standing in the street when he saw a group of more than 300 unarmed people approaching his house. One amongst the group shouted 'that's him', as Mahlatsi recalled.¹⁴⁸ He further explained that 'Some of the crowd started throwing stones at me.' As the crowd advanced, Mahlatsi fired shots with his firearm into the air, but apparently, so Mahlatsi says, they could not be frightened. They were counting the shots and after five told him that 'Now you're left with one bullet.'¹⁴⁹ After six shots, the crowd closed in on him. The magazine of his firearm however contained seven bullets and after firing the seventh, the crowd drew back once more, which gave him time to put in a new magazine. Meanwhile, Mahlatsi noticed that the lids of garbage bins were being used as shields and that's 'when I realised that my life was in danger'.¹⁵⁰

According to an eye-witness, Mahlatsi had shot a child, and as a result 'If they had caught him, they would have killed him or injured him seriously. [...] We, the older ones had to retreat, the young ones chased Mahlatsi.'¹⁵¹ Mahlatsi continued to fire shots but did not see whether anyone was hit. Finally he managed to jump the fences and run away. Looking back he saw smoke coming from his house. Around the same time several houses of councillors and their vehicles came under attack. The

¹⁴⁶ Interview, Mojalefa Reginald 'Jaja' Sefatsa, Vereeniging, 3 July 2010; interview, Theresa Ramashamole, Vanderbijlpark, 15 June 2010.

¹⁴⁷ Interview, T.S. Kolisang, Sharpeville, 15 July 2010.

¹⁴⁸ *Sowetan*, 11 April 1986; WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.60, Testimony Mahlatsi, 3,121.

¹⁴⁹ WHP AK2117, I1.9., Vol.60, Testimony Mahlatsi, 3,121.

¹⁵⁰ WHP AK2117, I1.9., Vol.60, Testimony Mahlatsi, 3,122.

¹⁵¹ WHP AK2117, S8.11, Statement by David Maloka.

timeframe seems contradictory though – according to Bongani Mhlobo’s testimony Mahlatsi’s house was attacked three hours later than Mahlatsi himself remembered.

A number of councillors later testified at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) about their experiences and the difficulties they went through as a result of the conflict with the communities in the Vaal. Stefane Meshack Ntsoereng for example stated that ‘These people who destroyed my house they also destroyed me morally. I put the blame to the regime, that is apartheid.’¹⁵² Councillor Sonny Mofokeng from Zone 3 in Sebokeng, described the attacks on him as follows: ‘I was at home in Zone 3 and I was in the house when I heard some noise outside.’¹⁵³ He continued:

And the distance was about 500 metres. I went outside to investigate as to what was happening. I saw a group of people coming towards my direction and they were shouting. I listened to them and they were saying they wanted Sonny Mofekeng and I tried to get a look at those people. They were armed with pangas as well as knopkieries [sic] heading towards my direction. And I went into the house. I told my wife what was happening outside. I also told my three children that I had seen people armed and coming towards my direction singing that they wanted Sonny Mofekeng and I warned them that we should escape for our lives. I opened the car, I put my children as well as my wife in the car because at that time my wife was expectant. I opened the car for her and we drove out and we took the direction towards Everton [sic].

As mentioned before, four councillors were killed during the uprising but almost all councillors suffered some kind of attack. At a meeting on 23 October 1984, the Town Council of Lekoa presented a list that included the damage to private houses, shops and vehicles of councillors as well as buildings belonging to the Development Board. According to this list, claims included R166,398 for houses; R944,924 for contents; R146,918 for vehicles; R133,369 for buildings belonging to the Development Board; R440,278 for shops of councillors; R1,312,340 for the content of shops; and R64,581 for shops belonging to the Development Board. The councillors further noted with concern that almost none of them had been insured against damage caused by riots and they proposed to

¹⁵² Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Submissions: Stefane Meshack Ntsoereng, Case no. 1046 (7 August 1996), accessed 11 January 2013 at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/sebokeng/seb1046.htm>.

¹⁵³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Submissions: Sonny Mofokeng, Case no. 1048 (7 August 1996), accessed 11 January 2013 at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/sebokeng/seb1048.htm>.

seek financial assistance from the Department of Co-operation and Development.¹⁵⁴ The evidence of councillors and some of the youth suggests that arson and stonings were not contingent and defensive but appeared to be planned.

‘The most violent riots’: The riot squad

Colonel Gerrit Johannes Viljoen was no newcomer to situations of political protest and public disorder. By the time violence began in the townships of the Vaal Triangle, he had served in the South African Police force for 25 years. Furthermore, he was stationed as a Major at Jabulani police station in Soweto during the uprising in 1976 and had become the head of the West Rand riot police, based in Krugersdorp, in 1980.¹⁵⁵ Colonel Viljoen was to play a crucial role during the events that ravaged the Vaal and later gained notoriety for his encouragement and use of violence against protestors and during funerals. While Viljoen was called ‘a remarkable peace maker’ in an article in the *Sunday Times*, extensive evidence shows the opposite.¹⁵⁶ The approach taken by the riot police could have been influenced not only by the threat they perceived but by his personality as well.

While the security branch was based in Vereeniging, the riot police was under the command of Major Johan Louw in Vanderbijlpark, a town approximately 12 kilometres from Vereeniging.¹⁵⁷ Due to the intensity of conflict, riot squad from the West Rand under Viljoen’s command were called in to support the local riot police on the evening of 2 September. During the next day, more reinforcements were brought in from Pretoria.

¹⁵⁴ WHP AK2117, S8.2.6, Damage caused to private belongings of councillors of the Town Council of Lekoa, Supplement Report: Town Council of Lekoa, 23 October 1984.

¹⁵⁵ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.67, Testimony Viljoen, 3,526; WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.68, Testimony Viljoen, 3,565.

¹⁵⁶ Noonan, *They’re Burning the Churches*, 84.

¹⁵⁷ *Vaal Weekblad*, 12 January 1982.

The evidence of the riot policemen corresponds with statements made by civic leaders in so far as it affirms that violence began prior to the protest march. In contrast to the evidence provided by youth activists who had a much narrower experience, police testimonies give a broader overview and highlight the diversity of incidents of violence. However, their descriptions vary greatly with regard to the extent of violence. The evidence of the police is so extensive that it is impossible to include every incident. As chapter five will discuss, court testimonies are heavily biased; some of their claims were proven to be fabricated. The following descriptions thus serve to give an insight into their perceptions and experiences. It follows the narrative structure of their testimonies in court.

On 2 September 1984 at around 7.30pm, Warrant Officer Bruyns of the riot squad in Vanderbijlpark received complaints from a number of white motorists about stones and broken windscreen glass on the Golden Highway, which separates Bophelong from Vanderbijlpark.¹⁵⁸ Bophelong was near Vanderbijlpark and incidents of violence affected the white community more directly than similar occurrences in Sebokeng, which was far from both white towns. Fear of violence spilling over was likely on the minds of the police. Bruyns left immediately with a number of other policemen. Upon arrival in Bophelong, he found the road obstructed by garbage bins, chopped down trees, branches and large rocks. As the policemen were busy removing the obstacles from the road, they were met by stones, to which they responded by shooting rubber bullets and teargas, fatally wounding one person. Apparently a group of young people, between the age of 14 and 20 were stoning a house while a bottle store belonging to the Development Board was also under attack.¹⁵⁹ At around 10pm, the offices of the Development Board in Bophelong were attacked by a group of about 300 people. Stones and a petrol bomb were thrown at Schlebusch, one of the Board inspectors, and

¹⁵⁸ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.68, Testimony Bruyns, 3,610ff.

¹⁵⁹ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.68, Testimony Coetzee, 3,570; WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.68, Testimony Bruyns, 3,614.

he fired six shots from his pistol.¹⁶⁰ At midnight, the offices of the Development Board had been set on fire and a local beer hall had been stoned and looted.¹⁶¹

At 11.30pm Colonel Viljoen arrived with reinforcements of 116 white and 97 black policemen from Roodeport and Krugersdorp as the local riot police were no longer in control of the situation. It is, however, unclear who had requested the reinforcements. Upon arrival in the Vaal, the contingent was immediately divided and dispatched to the various townships.¹⁶² Major Louw was in charge of Sharpeville, Captain de Beer of Boipatong, Lieutenant du Plessis of Bophelong while Viljoen left for Sebokeng and Evaton, the former being the largest township whilst Evaton was adjacent to Sebokeng.¹⁶³ What seems surprising, however, is Viljoen's claim that he knew nothing about the planned protest march on 3 September to the offices of the Development Board at Houtkop, despite admitting that he had been made aware of the grievances of residents in the Vaal as early as August.¹⁶⁴ It appears unlikely that the communication between the security branch and the riot squad was so severely flawed that information was not passed on; instead it was probably a careful strategy in court to further criminalise political protest.

Sporadic stoning of the police and their vehicles in Bophelong continued until policemen left for Sharpeville at 2am in the morning of 3 September. According to Warrant Officer Niemand and Colonel Viljoen, Sebokeng seemed quiet until about 6am, particularly compared to Bophelong, Boipatong and Sharpeville where road-blocks were seen and occasional incidents of stoning occurred throughout the night.¹⁶⁵ At about 2am, Warrant Officer Bruyns from the riot squad in Vanderbijlpark was attacked by a group of youth, some of whom were allegedly wearing UDF and AZAPO T-shirts.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.69, Testimony Schlebusch, 3,698ff.

¹⁶¹ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.68, Testimony Bruyns, 3,617; WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.69, Testimony Schlebusch, 3,700.

¹⁶² WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.63, Testimony Viljoen, 3,358-9.

¹⁶³ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.63, Testimony Viljoen, 3,358-9.

¹⁶⁴ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.63, Testimony Viljoen, 3,357; WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.65, Testimony Viljoen, 3,413ff.

¹⁶⁵ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.70, Testimony Niemand, 3,726; WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.63, Testimony Viljoen, 3,359; WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.69, Testimony Schlebusch, 3,700ff.

¹⁶⁶ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.68, Testimony Bruyns, 3,620.

In Sharpeville, the house of a member of the security branch was set alight.¹⁶⁷ According to police testimonies, the frequency of incidents of stone-throwing, burning of vehicles and houses began to pick up from 6am on the 3rd.

Colonel Viljoen received reports from Sharpeville that buses and police vehicles were under attack and that the police were no longer able to handle the situation. He decided to deploy some of the policemen stationed in other townships to Sharpeville.¹⁶⁸ Seeiso Street, the main road leading into Sharpeville, was blocked and while Viljoen was trying to drive down the road, his vehicle was stoned. Teargas and rubber bullets were used to disperse the crowds.¹⁶⁹ Viljoen identified various T-shirts being worn, including COSAS, UDF, AZAPO, RMC and AZASO.¹⁷⁰ Still in Sharpeville, at 7.30am, Warrant Officer Niemand was attacked by a group of approximately 350 youth, some wearing COSAS and UDF T-shirts. He described the group being armed with stones, bricks and pipes.¹⁷¹ Around the same time, between 8 and 9am, the house of councillor Mofokeng was attacked by a group of young people with stones. He fled while his wife was later fetched by the police. When returning the next day, his house and 3 vehicles had been burnt down.¹⁷² Major Crons, a pilot who flew over Sharpeville at 7.30am noted that 'the unrest was much heavier than in other black areas'.¹⁷³

Meanwhile, as discussed before, another councillor in Sharpeville had come under attack. At around the same time as Crons was flying over Sharpeville, Viljoen received news that the house of councillor Dlamini was being stoned anew. Upon arrival, he found Dlamini with a 9mm pistol in his hand, telling Viljoen that he had shot into the crowd, which had already left the scene. Viljoen, according to his own testimony tried to convince Dlamini to accompany them arguing that 'a house

¹⁶⁷ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.68, Testimony Coetzee, 3,575; WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.68, Testimony Bruyns, 3,619-21.

¹⁶⁸ WHP AK2243, A, Vol.18, Testimony Viljoen, 890.

¹⁶⁹ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.63, Testimony Viljoen, 3,360ff.

¹⁷⁰ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,364ff.

¹⁷¹ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.70, Testimony Niemand, 3,727.

¹⁷² WHP AK2117, I1.7, Vol.49, Testimony Mofokeng, 2,474-6.

¹⁷³ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.71, Testimony Crons, 3,796.

and furniture are replaceable but a man's life is not.¹⁷⁴ However, Dlamini refused to leave. When Viljoen returned approximately half an hour later, Dlamini was dead.¹⁷⁵ According to Warrant Officer Bruyns, who tried to get to Dlamini's house, a large group of about 1,000 people continuously attacked the police. He claimed that they were being urged on by a young man wearing a UDF T-shirt.¹⁷⁶ Warrant Officer Coetzee confirmed that the police were stoned outside the house of Dlamini.¹⁷⁷

At 08.56am, as Viljoen was outside Dlamini's house, he received news that the house of Constable Radebe, not far from Dlamini's place had become the next target of an 'unruly crowd' and he immediately went there. The attacks were repeated at 9.25am.¹⁷⁸ Upon arrival, Viljoen gave orders to shoot with rubber bullets and teargas to disperse the crowd outside Constable Radebe's house. Shortly after dispersing, the crowd seemed to regroup again. Viljoen noticed that there were two leaders amongst the group who appeared to incite the others. They were challenging the police to come closer, taunting them. Viljoen then gave orders to Lieutenant du Plooy to shoot the two leaders: 'I gave orders to Lieutenant du Plooy to shoot one bullet each with a shotgun at both these people. I noticed that both shots hit [the targets]. The crowd then dispersed.'¹⁷⁹

This seems to have been a standard approach of the riot police during times of unrest. According to Sergeant Riekert it was the policy of the police to shoot the leaders, so that they couldn't 'incite' the crowd any further.¹⁸⁰ Viljoen later also testified that there had been 'a lot of intimidation' and that the crowd appeared to be wanting everybody to join in.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁴ WHP AK2243, A, Vol.18, Testimony Viljoen, 891.

¹⁷⁵ WHP AK2243, A, Vol.18, Testimony Viljoen, 893.

¹⁷⁶ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.68, Testimony Bruyns, 3,622; WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.69, Testimony Bruyns, 3,623ff.

¹⁷⁷ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.68, Testimony Coetzee, 3,577ff.

¹⁷⁸ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,367.

¹⁷⁹ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,368.

¹⁸⁰ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.68, Testimony Riekert, 3,599.

¹⁸¹ WHP AK2243, A, Vol.18, Testimony Viljoen, 895.

In Sebokeng and Evaton there were incidents of stoning of buses and vehicles from 6am onwards but no large crowd formations or road obstructions.¹⁸² Road obstructions were only set up at about 7am near the bus terminal in Zone 12 by a group of 50 to 70 youth who appeared to be local.¹⁸³ Captain Keyter who was patrolling Zone 12 testified that at 8am people came out of their houses and started throwing stones at the police. He argued that the attacks looked as if they had been planned and co-ordinated. A group of about 500 to 700 advanced toward the beer hall, driven on by people wearing yellow T-shirts. When the beer hall and depot were being plundered and the police were attacked once more, they used R1 rifles to shoot with live ammunition.¹⁸⁴ Incidents of stone-throwing and looting of shops continued. The groups in Evaton and Sebokeng were reported as much larger than in other areas. By 7.20am aerial observation over the two townships recorded three houses burning: one in Zone 7, one in Zone 13 and one in Evaton.¹⁸⁵ Just before 10am, the offices of the Development Board in Sebokeng were found burning.¹⁸⁶ Similar incidents happened in all the townships including Bophelong and Boipatong.

Colonel Viljoen gave orders to shoot with live ammunition at 9.46am. He claimed that 'the situation could not be brought under control with the use of less dangerous weapons, and with that I mean teargas and rubber bullets.'¹⁸⁷ Viljoen argued that the use of live ammunition was necessary to avoid further loss of life and damage to property. He also stated that the order to shoot with live ammunition was only to be carried out under the control of officers and without any recklessness. Live ammunition, according to Viljoen, included R1 rifles as well as handguns.¹⁸⁸ As advocate Nicholas Haysom noted in an article published in 1987, the use of weapons such as R1 rifles in crowd control was disturbing 'as these rifles are weapons of war'.¹⁸⁹ Haysom further stated that the reckless use of

¹⁸² WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.63, Testimony Viljoen, 3,359.

¹⁸³ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.69, Testimony Keyter, 3,653ff.

¹⁸⁴ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.69, Testimony Keyter, p.3,661.

¹⁸⁵ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.71, Testimony Crons, 3,803-4.

¹⁸⁶ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.69, Testimony Keyter, 3,662.

¹⁸⁷ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,372ff.

¹⁸⁸ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,372ff.

¹⁸⁹ Haysom, 'Licence to Kill'.

firearms by the police was not the result of 'rogue policemen' but rather a 'widespread systematic use of lethal and violent weapons principally on South Africa's black citizens'.¹⁹⁰ The principles of crowd control were thus based on 'principles of warfare'.¹⁹¹

In 1982, the amended Internal Security Act had further empowered police above the rank of Warrant Officer to use force to disperse gatherings. However, section 49 specifically stated that lethal weapons should only be used if the gathering could not be dispersed otherwise, or if lives and property were being threatened.¹⁹² The Act thus empowered the police to use force but did not prescribe it. This was ultimately the decision of the officer in charge. Viljoen resorted to the standard answer of the police: lives and property had been threatened and it was his job to enforce law and order.¹⁹³ As Deborah Posel has pointed out, police conduct was depicted as 'orderly, purposeful and controlled', in stark contrast to images of collective violence by youth.¹⁹⁴

However, archival evidence suggests otherwise.¹⁹⁵ The death of Wiseman Mnisi paints a particularly harrowing picture. Between 8 and 10am in the morning of the 3rd, two young children were shot by the police: Wiseman Mnisi, age nine and Alinah Mnyanda, age unknown. Wiseman Mnisi had been on his way home from his grandfather's house to his mother when the police opened fire on him in Zone 12, shooting him 11 times in the back.¹⁹⁶ The post-mortem confirmed that Mnisi died as a result of the gunshot wounds.¹⁹⁷ His mother testified that by that time a neighbour brought

¹⁹⁰ Haysom, 'Licence to Kill'.

¹⁹¹ J. Rauch and D.Storey, 'The Policing of Public Gatherings and Demonstrations in South Africa 1960-1994', Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, accessed 15 November 2010 at <http://www.csvr.org.za/wits/papers/papjrd.htm> (seems no longer to work).

¹⁹² Haysom, 'Licence to Kill'.

¹⁹³ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.65, Testimony Viljoen, 3,428.

¹⁹⁴ D. Posel, 'A "battlefield of perceptions": State Discourse on Political Violence, 1985 – 1988', in J.Cock and L.Nathan (eds.), *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (Cape Town, 1989), 269-271.

¹⁹⁵ See Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Submissions: Topi Dominic Tladi, Case no. 829 (5 August 1996), accessed 11 January 2013 at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/sebokeng/seb829.htm>.

¹⁹⁶ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.65, Testimony Viljoen, 3,442; *Los Angeles Times*, 3 September 1986, accessed 11 January at http://articles.latimes.com/1986-09-03/news/mn-13186_1.

¹⁹⁷ WHP AK2117, S8.11.2, Geregtelike Doodsondersoek, No.476/84, Wiseman Mnisi.

him home, he could no longer speak but was sobbing.¹⁹⁸ Any attempt to call an ambulance was in vain due to the volatile situation in Sebokeng. He eventually died on the back of a relative who was carrying him piggy-back to the hospital.¹⁹⁹ In court during his cross-examination of Viljoen, George Bizos, argued that rumours of the death of the two children spread rapidly and created an impression that 'the police were busy shooting young children'.²⁰⁰ Police conduct later came under scrutiny when the Southern African Catholic's Bishop's Conference (SACBC) published a booklet condemning them of wanton and reckless behaviour.

The news of the death of the children and of the youths shot by councillors and policemen undoubtedly exacerbated the conflict and created the impression that a war was being waged against local communities. Within a highly volatile context, the shootings by councillors and police triggered popular anger against government that had been simmering. The attire and attitude of policemen, their use of weapons, vehicles and camouflage uniforms further entrenched this perception. Rumours also circulated that some of the young policemen were laughing as they shot young people to frighten them.²⁰¹ Wanton and reckless behaviour was particularly widespread among the young white policemen.²⁰² Estimates claim that around 70 per cent of the white police force sympathised with the far right.²⁰³

Incidents continued throughout the day. While Sharpeville, Boipatong and Bophelong seemed to become quieter, the unrest seemed to be picking up in Sebokeng.²⁰⁴ Between 2pm in the afternoon and midnight on the 3rd, reinforcements arrived from Pretoria, including 245 white

¹⁹⁸ WHP AK2117, S8.11.2, Sebokeng G.O. 231/84, Betty Mnisi verklaar.

¹⁹⁹ WHP AK2117, S8.11.2, Sebokeng G.O. 231/84, Emily Kunene verklaar.

²⁰⁰ WHP AK2117, 1.9, Vol.65, Testimony Viljoen, 3,444.

²⁰¹ WHP AK2117, 11.9, Vol.65, Testimony Viljoen, 3,449.

²⁰² Presumably black policemen engaged in reckless behaviour as well. However, according to the affidavits collected by the Southern African Catholic Bishop's Conference, the majority of those accused of wanton conduct were young, white policemen. See WHP A2675, III (344), 'Report on Police Conduct During Township Protests. August – November 1984', Compiled and published by Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference S.A.C.B.C', 5.

²⁰³ D. Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Johannesburg, 2009), 248-9.

²⁰⁴ WHP AK2117, 11.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,373.

policemen, 119 black policemen and 16 Casspirs.²⁰⁵ Viljoen later claimed that it was the police from Pretoria that was responsible for the reckless shooting but the shootings noted above were all before the arrival of this contingent.²⁰⁶

In Viljoen's understanding, the violence had been organised and was not spontaneous, as specific targets and people were attacked, including councillors, policemen, their houses, beerhalls and buildings belonging to the Development Board.²⁰⁷ He also stated that groups of people attacked one house more than once and kept returning, as it was the case with the attacks on councillor Dlamini and Constable Radebe. To substantiate his claims that the attacks in the Vaal had been planned, he compared the situation to the Soweto Uprising of 1976, where he had been stationed previously:

I was also involved in the unrest in Soweto in 1976 and if I may draw a comparison, I have handled large groups of people, as many as two- to three thousand in one group. These crowds also destroyed the buildings of Development Boards and so on as well and [attacked] a few people who got in their way. [...] The set-up of the unrest in the Vaal I felt was more organised in the sense that smaller groups, according to my observation, attacked certain targets.²⁰⁸

Viljoen's testimony needs to be analysed within the context of the Delmas Treason Trial in which state prosecution attempted to prove that the Vaal Uprising had been part of a grand plan to overthrow the government by violence. However, two former members of the security police revealed in an interview that they had no knowledge that violence had been planned prior to the uprising.²⁰⁹

Viljoen further stated that 'this was the most violent unrest I have witnessed in my entire career'.²¹⁰ He later claimed that between 5.05 and 9.46 am there were 32 incidents of unrest. He

²⁰⁵ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,373.

²⁰⁶ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.65, Testimony Viljoen, 3,447.

²⁰⁷ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,397.

²⁰⁸ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,397.

²⁰⁹ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2010.

²¹⁰ WHP AK2243, A, Vol.18, Testimony Viljoen, 894.

calculated that every 6.5 minutes there were reports or incidents of violence.²¹¹ During the Sharpeville Six Trial, Viljoen further argued that between 6am and 5pm there was an incident every 11.5 minutes.²¹² Between 9.46 and 11.30 pm, 105 incidents of unrest were reported for all of the townships in the Vaal. This, however, included police action to disperse a crowd as well as allegations of stone-throwing without real evidence.²¹³

(III) The emergence of the crowd

Contrary to areas with a history of political mobilisation, structures promoting mass mobilisation in the Vaal Triangle were rather weak. Many zonal committees of the VCA had only been established weeks prior to the insurrection. Hence in spite of Evaton's long history of resistance and Sharpeville's role in politics in 1960, most political networks were fairly new. Sebokeng's local population, marked by a long history of forced removals and relocations that deeply unsettled the social cohesion could not build upon a memory of resistance. Repertoires of protest were invented on 3 September and new political and social identities were forged on that day.²¹⁴ This lack of sustained networks as well as the context of the uprising provided a testing ground for new strategies of protest including the use of petrol bombs. The success of such strategies – reflected by the departure of councillors from the townships – convinced many young people in particular that increasing force would accelerate the crumbling of apartheid control and power. Contrary to 1960, police brutality no longer deterred local communities from engaging in public protest; instead it radicalised and conscientised the broader population and entrenched the perception that apartheid had to be overthrown for peace to prevail and freedom to be gained. And it spawned anger and

²¹¹ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,372.

²¹² WHP AK2243, A, Vol.18, Testimony Viljoen, 893.

²¹³ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,374.

²¹⁴ I am indebted to Noor Nieftagodien for sharing his thoughts on the issue.

bitterness that would find its outlet in increasing acts of political violence against anyone associated with the apartheid regime.

The heightening of the conflict between councillors and local communities from the early 1980s onwards saw the emergence of small crowds in the Vaal Triangle that were mostly formed spontaneously to confront councillors after meetings and to express dissatisfaction. It was during the uprising of 1984 when crowds as a political force for change emerged on a larger scale, signalling the end of a period of internalised repression that had shaped the collective psyche since 1960.²¹⁵ While crowds had played a great role at various times and places in South Africa's history including the 1950s, they became particularly prominent during the mid-1980s as mass mobilisation and popular protests gained momentum. It was, according to Bozzoli, the period that saw the increasing use of public space in expressing and staging protest.²¹⁶ The street resumed greater importance and profoundly shaped politics in the 1980s.²¹⁷ Crowds coalesced during funerals and protest marches. They symbolised mass dissent and acted as human barriers, hindering police, the military and other government representatives from entering the townships.

Crowds, however, need space for their formation.²¹⁸ It was hence the main roads and open spaces that enabled large gatherings that proved impossible to control. Empirical evidence suggests that the civic and political leadership was indeed caught up in the momentum. Two factors in particular highlight the messy nature of the revolt: namely that the leadership had made no provision

²¹⁵ Crowds are by no means acting as homogenous entities; instead, they normally include a variety of actors with different agendas and tactics. The literature on collective action and the role of crowds is vast. E.P. Thompson's article on the moral economy of English crowd in the 18th century is perhaps one of the most influential analyses. See E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present* 50 (1971), 76-136. For a discussion of the literature see J. Glassman, *Feasts and Riot. Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888* (Portsmouth, NH and London, 1995), 1-25. Dunbar Moodie analyses the moral economy on the mines, see D. Moodie, 'The Moral Economy of the Black Miners' Strike of 1946', *Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS)*, 13/1 (1986), 1-35 and D. Moodie with V. Ndatshe, *Going for Gold: Men, Mines, and Migration* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994).

²¹⁶ B. Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Johannesburg, 2004), 67.

²¹⁷ L. Bank, *Home Spaces, Street Styles: Contesting Power and Identity in a South African City* (Johannesburg 2011).

²¹⁸ Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid*, 14.

to leave for exile and secondly the breakdown of organisational capacities early in the uprising. It was the fear of the crowd and its perceived uncontrollability that typified white fears of black politics and gave rise to highly repressive forms of public policing. As Deborah Posel observed: 'Associations of blackness with the 'primitive' and with violence, and a concomitant fear of the unruly mob, are deeply entrenched in this country's ideological history.'²¹⁹ The relation between crowds and political leadership was at the heart of how the apartheid state viewed political mobilisation in the townships.²²⁰

Looting ensued as a result of the general upheaval. Evidence suggests that a great variety of age and social groups participated either out of opportunism or as a form of punishment of shop owners. Archival evidence further suggests that policemen on duty participated in several incidents of looting.²²¹ It was alleged that policemen in camouflage uniforms - presumably members of the riot squad - were associated with the burning of the Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet in Zone 14, Sebokeng.²²² By the afternoon of 3 September, shop owners were up in arms. In one particularly tragic incident, a shopkeeper in Zone 11 reportedly fired indiscriminately at a crowd that had gathered outside his shop.²²³ A young boy of 14, who had tripped as he attempted to flee, was said to have been shot in the head in way that resembled an execution. Other witnesses claim that the shopkeeper fired three shots after which the young boy fell.

The first days of the uprising were marked by a breakdown of the social order; the townships of the Vaal were plunged into a state of civil war. It was a moment of rupture in its true sense that altered the way in which local residents viewed the state, politics and the social environment around them. The occurrence of violence necessitated new narratives both to explain what had transpired

²¹⁹ Posel, 'A "Battlefield of Perceptions"', 272.

²²⁰ See pages 205-06 and 234-43.

²²¹ WHP A2675, III (344), 'Report on Police Conduct', 18-20.

²²² WHP A2675, III (344), 'Report on Police Conduct', 19.

²²³ WHP AK2117, S8.11.2, Statement re death of Lawrence Pekeer; WHP AK2117, S8.11.2, Gerektelike Doodsondersoek, No.163/85.

and to reconstitute social relations. The killing of the four councillors in particular constituted a transgression of social norms and a break from past confrontations.²²⁴ Patrick Noonan recalled that 'During the first week of the violence in September 1984 many residence [sic] were mystified by the violence and some resentment was focused on the South African Police.'²²⁵

A popular narrative soon emerged that aimed to explain the violent nature of the protests: namely that collective violence reflected deep-seated anger that exploded within a context of contingent confrontations between police, crowds and councillors. A letter to *Speak* stated that 'Resistance was displayed by unity of the entire community. Houses of the drivers of rent increases were attacked. People were expressing their anger by attacking shops and big houses which are owned by those councillors anyway.'²²⁶ The letter thus situated the attacks on buildings and councillors within a context of heightened emotions; violence, to some extent, was narrated as a form of punishment. This view was also reflected in Johannes Rantete's publication *The Third Day of September*. Rantete, a 20 year old man from Sebokeng recorded his experiences that provide insights into the unfolding of the uprising. His poem titled 'Sebokeng You Are Great' stated that 'The wrath you showed was more than/ That of a tempted black mamba/ When you demolished everything to ashes.'²²⁷ It is undoubtedly no coincidence that Rantete chose the black mamba as a symbol of force: one of the most feared animals in Southern Africa, its poison can kill within minutes and it has a reputation of chasing its prey - in contrast to many other snakes in the region.

Media reports - except those in government-friendly and rightwing newspapers - appeared to agree and argued for the emotional character of the uprising, demoting the role of a broader ideological framework. One article published in the *Financial Mail* with the unfortunate title 'Petrol

²²⁴ See R.Thornton, 'The Shooting at Uitenhage, South Africa, 1985: The Context and Interpretation of Violence', *American Ethnologist*, 17/2 (1990), 218; Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid*, 68.

²²⁵ WHP AK2117, S5, Statement Patrick Noonan.

²²⁶ *Speak: The voice of the community*, 2 (1984), 6.

²²⁷ J. Rantete, *The Third Day of September. An Eye-witness Account of the Sebokeng Rebellion of 1984*. (Johannesburg, 1984), 43.

on the flames' argued that 'There seems to have been no over-riding political motive in the bloody riots that swept the black Vaal Triangle townships this week.'²²⁸ Rather the journalist surmised that the violence was a reflection of 'almost incoherent expressions of rage' that had its roots in long-standing socio-economic and political grievances.

In his book on the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, Philip Frankel examines the pathology of the Vaal Uprising. Years of anger and frustration, he argues, led to a 'purgative orgy of fire and destruction'.²²⁹ Frankel further states that 'Many innocent people who were not proven "collaborators" lost their lives and property in a vortex of indiscriminate and liquor-fuelled violence that quickly turned to looting and random arson.'²³⁰ This framework of analysis and the language and imagery used is, however, problematic for it portrays violence as random, erratic and uncontrolled. In fact most deaths resulted from police shootings; there is no evidence that local residents were killed indiscriminately by crowds. Statistics demonstrate that the attacks were neither random nor unorganised. The majority of buildings that were burnt down were either regarded as symbols of apartheid - such as administrative buildings, police stations or beer halls - or they belonged to councillors and members of the Development Board. The only exception was perhaps the widespread burning and looting of Indian shops, houses and a Mosque in Evaton.²³¹ However, even these attacks were not random. Some saw local Indian traders as exploiting the black communities in the townships.²³² Other sources suggest they were collectively regarded as traitors for participating in the tricameral parliament.

As Chabani Manganyi argues, crowd behaviour is a reflection of social and political

²²⁸ *Financial Mail*, 7 September 1984.

²²⁹ P. Frankel, *An Ordinary Atrocity: Sharpeville and its Massacre* (Johannesburg, 2001), 208.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

²³¹ *The Star*, 3 September 1985; *Financial Mail*, 7 September 1984. It is unclear why the Mosque was burnt down.

²³² Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010; *The Star*, 20 September 1984.

antagonisms and struggles.²³³ Crowd behaviour thus brought to the fore underlying social and political conflicts within local communities. It highlighted changing social relations that had been fraught with tension for years. And it reflected understandings of moral codes and acceptable social and political behaviour. Crowd behaviour was shaped by inter-group processes and by contested and multiple understandings of appropriate action.

The public nature of protests, captured in the media, had an effect on international opinion as images of burning townships and military occupation entrenched the perception that South Africa was indeed at war. Meanwhile, as chapter five will explore, new types of confrontation emerged that were marked by their clandestine organisation and their ability to create public spectacles. The period starting with the Vaal Uprising was thus shaped by the interlacing of emerging crowds, the importance of public action and mass mobilisation in the form of strikes, boycotts and marches and the establishment of smaller and clandestine groups that came to challenge the apartheid regime through the increasing use of political violence. Besides political pressure through protest and mobilisation, the economic implications of the rent boycott were severe. It was this eclectic mix of dissent and protest that - in contrast to the student uprisings of 1976 - proved impossible to crush and necessitated new strategies by government to re-establish 'law and order'.

Anonymous letters allegedly written by residents soon appeared in newspapers that condemned the violence and the breakdown of social order; it remains however unclear whether or not these letters were indeed written by local residents or whether they formed part of government's attempt to discredit those promoting political change.²³⁴ Days after the uprising had started, pamphlets were found by a group that called itself 'Concerned Residents', sharply condemning civic, political and student bodies and calling on residents to unite and to 'do away with

²³³ C. Manganyi, 'Crowds and their Vicissitudes: Psychology and Law in the South African Court-Room', in C. Manganyi and A. du Toit (eds.), *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa* (Basingstoke, 1990), 287-303.

²³⁴ *Sowetan*, 6 December 1984.

forces of destruction'.²³⁵ The government aligned newspaper *The Citizen* reported in February 1985 that a group calling itself 'Operation Advance and Upgrade' (OAU) - an 'anti-communist' and 'anti-violence' organisation - had been formed including 56 local residents and led by local businessman John Gogotya - who was later revealed to be a government agent.²³⁶ Gogotya further lashed out against the *Sowetan* for what he perceived to be biased reporting that justified certain acts of violence.²³⁷

(IV) Conclusion

Despite its bias, evidence by the police is valuable as it provides an overview of the uprising and small incidents in particular that were not directly related to the main protest march, hence highlighting the fragmented nature of the revolt. There is considerable coincidence in evidence about the extent of planning of individual attacks on houses and councillors as youth activists confirm that violence started prior to the confrontation between the protesters and the police. Attacks on councillors, buildings and vehicles were therefore not all spontaneous. However, evidence suggests that not all violence was planned. Some incidents of violence arose from aggressive interactions between crowds, the police and councillors and were therefore contingent. While collective action reflected localised processes of conflict and social tensions, certain forms of violence were triggered by the shootings of police and councillors.

Viljoen's argument that the Vaal Uprising seemed more planned compared to the Soweto Uprising of 1976 reflected the perception by the state that the events in the townships of the Vaal

²³⁵ *Sowetan*, 14 September 1984.

²³⁶ *The Citizen*, 6 February 1985.

²³⁷ *Sowetan*, 21 February 1985.

Triangle were part of a larger revolution. But, as discussed earlier, this claim was not confirmed by the two former members of the security branch I interviewed. The Vaal Uprising was neither a centrally planned attempt to overthrow the state by violent means nor was the protest march related to socio-economic grievances only. Instead, protest on 3 September was part of a strategy to mobilise the black population against apartheid oppression; socio-economic grievances provided the spark that lit the fire.

Testimonies by youth activists in particular confirm that the leadership of the Vaal Civic Association had not been involved in the central planning of attacks on councillors. Instead, the general framework of mass protest provided small groups with the opportunity to pursue their own agenda and to employ diverse political strategies. Confrontations between youth activists and councillors occurred within a context of heightened political tensions, leading small groups of activists to employ new tactics, which essentially reflected a re-negotiation of space, the re-drawing of the boundaries of community and a clear shift towards more militant political strategies. The sudden agglomeration of crowds played a vital role in shaping political dynamics and included a great variety of actors with their own grievances, grudges and agendas. The Vaal Uprising was a clear turning point in the history of the region and South Africa in general. In its aftermath, power relations shifted and political violence as a strategy to achieve liberation from oppression became increasingly institutionalised amongst certain groups of activists. Meanwhile the security forces began to use new means to curb protests and mass mobilisation, including an increasing reliance on force and covert operations.

CHAPTER FOUR

The turning of the tide: An uprising and its consequences 1984 - 1987

You begin to push and push harder.¹

Townships are usually very dark at night, so dark that it can be a challenge to see anything but one's own hand. Street lights are scarce and usually only found along the main roads. But when night fell on 3 September, the sky was illuminated by fire. Overturned cars had been turned into smouldering wrecks while private houses, beer halls, shops and buildings belonging to the Orange Vaal Development Board, councillors and other businessmen presented their hollow shells - emptied of goods and reduced to rubble. In some areas, the air was thick with smoke: the smoke of burning buildings merged with the smoke emanating from coal stoves and the vapour of the industrial plants in Vanderbijlpark. Added to the fumes and smoke the stench of teargas made those in the streets cover their faces and reach for the buckets of water and wet cloths placed next to houses. The thundering sounds of armoured vehicles had shaken the earth and its inhabitants. Gun shots added to the eerie atmosphere, the presence of death was almost palpable. It was an apocalyptic scene that witnesses would later remember with great distress. One journalist reporting for *The Star* newspaper described 'the repugnant stench of death that gusted like a gale force through the Vaal

¹ Interview, Kedibone Mogotsi, Vereeniging, 26 July 2010.

townships'.² Death had visited the townships of the Vaal once more and for some, the actions of police conjured up memories of the Sharpeville massacre of 1960.³

Elderly women were lying on the ground, overcome by teargas. Children as young as six were standing outside the burnt shops of the Mayor of the Lekoa Town Council Esau Mahlatsi, giving the black power salute. And people were heard saying that Jacob Kuzwayo Dlamini, the councillor who had been burnt in Sharpeville, had been turned into a 'Kentucky Fried Chicken'.⁴ Another eyewitness, a young man by the name of Johannes Rantete who published his experiences of the Vaal Uprising in late 1984, remembered an elderly woman wearing the mayoral gown of Sam Rabotapi, the Mayor of the Evaton Town Council, who had managed to escape.⁵ Calling herself the first mayor, she was seen dancing in the street. Such glimpses however hardly capture the complexity of experiences, thoughts and emotions. Motivations of those who engaged in protest and crowd action - violent or non-violent - that day are notoriously difficult to bring to paper. Some houses were filled with debates and explanations of what had transpired while others experienced a deafening silence.⁶

While it may be tempting to argue that the insurrectionary moment reflected an inevitable outcome of years of political and socio-economic struggles, neither the time nor the character of insurrections are predictable. As Gyanendra Pandey argues in his book *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*, events such as the partition of India and Pakistan need to be analysed in their eventfulness, as moments of struggle that included great levels of uncertainty, disdain, loss and confusion.⁷ A teleological view inevitably sanitises and normalises the confusion and messiness such events produce in favour of a narrative that emphasises an intended outcome. It would be further alluring to read back into history a culturalist explanation of the 'cleansing' power

² *The Star*, 8 September 1984.

³ Interview, Gift Moerane, Johannesburg, 17 May 2006.

⁴ P. Tom, *My Life Struggle: The Story of Petrus Tom* (Johannesburg, 1985), 64.

⁵ J. Rantete, *The Third Day of September. An Eye-Witness Account of the Sebokeng Rebellion of 1984* (Johannesburg, 1984), 8.

⁶ WHP AK2117, S8.11, Various statements by residents.

⁷ G. Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge, 2001), 4-5.

of fire. While for some the burning of property and people undoubtedly had a cathartic effect and reflected a deep-seated anger towards the government and those who were perceived to be traitors to the community, such a view masks the complexity of experiences on the ground. For many interviewees, the use of petrol bombs was the most efficient way to destroy property.⁸ For others it was a public means to express anger.⁹

One couple that spent a restless night were Esau and Dorcas Ralitsela. Gcina Malindi recalled visiting the couple in the evening to exchange news of what had happened.¹⁰ According to Malindi, Esau Ralitsela was in a sombre mood, playing patience and so severely shaken that he felt unable to discuss anything. Ralitsela himself remembered his emotions that day as follows: 'There was big trouble. Because you know what happened, I think I never had really time because everybody was coming in. Get people "hey... did we hear, somebody, they've burnt down so-and-so's shop". Eish, you know.'¹¹ Ralitsela further remembers a sense of sadness that day: 'You become sad if you hear stories that [...] so-and-so has been killed, some shops have been burnt down.'¹² Other interviewees recounted a sense of trepidation. Roy Matube, a member of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) remembered that 'I felt that now it's bad. Police are going to kill us as well.'¹³ Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi recalled that 'People were bowing their head. To say ey ey ey we are going to account for what happened today.'¹⁴

The extent of violence and the scale of protests surprised many. Neither the civic and political leadership nor the police or other authorities had anticipated an uprising that would change the social and political landscape of the region. The impact of 3 September was far-reaching. While mass mobilisation prior to the uprising had been stirred by parochial issues, the nature of state response

⁸ Interview, Bongani Mhlobo, Vereeniging, 12 July 2010 (name has been changed).

⁹ Interview, Peter Nhlapo, Vereeniging, 8 July 2010 (name has been changed).

¹⁰ University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers (WHP) AK2117 (State v Baleka and 21 Others), Case No.482/85, S7.6, Statement GP Malindi, 30.

¹¹ Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010.

¹² Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010.

¹³ Interview, Roy Matube, Vanderbijlpark, 17 June 2010.

¹⁴ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 15 April 2010.

as well as increasing political awareness amongst sections of the local population soon transformed popular protest into a more sustained struggle against the political injustice. For the government, a popular uprising in the Vaal Triangle not only posed a political challenge but a serious embarrassment. Like Sharpeville in the 1950s, Sebokeng was viewed as a 'model township' in the 1970s, a testing ground for new policies and shown to foreign visitors to demonstrate the 'success' of segregated development.¹⁵ The advent of mass protest in 1984 did not end the government's myopic dream of partial reform but instead stepped up attempts to win the Hearts and Minds of the broader population while isolating the political leadership. The failure of the government to successfully implement parts of its reform package 'caught the Botha regime with its strategic pants down', as Dan O'Meara has aptly observed.¹⁶ Only months before the rebellion started, State President P.W. Botha was touring Europe in an attempt to appease the international community while the signing of the Nkomati accord had been a major blow for the liberation movements in exile. Hence when the rebellion started, the government believed it was in control. All of that changed drastically in spring 1984. For local activists, the onset of mass protest signalled the crumbling power of the apartheid regime.

Heavy-handed repression such as the deployment of troops and escalating use of violent means to curb protest reflected the inability of the police to maintain power. In his book *Histories of the Hanged*, David Anderson argues that the war against Mau Mau was not only fought by the security forces but by the civil administration.¹⁷ The Kenyan colonial state, he points out, stripped the revolutionaries of their human rights while attempting to maintain an image of transparency, accountability and justice. The South African state followed a similar logic. This schizophrenic marriage between reform and repression came to symbolise the crumbling power of the apartheid regime and an inherent contradiction between the way the state viewed itself and its use of force.

¹⁵ Interview, Patrick Noonan, Sebokeng, 24 March 2010.

¹⁶ D.O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-1994* (Johannesburg and Athens, Ohio, 1996), 326.

¹⁷ D. Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London, 2005), 5-6.

While it increasingly relied on draconian laws, harsh repression and escalating terror the apartheid state imagined itself as transparent, accountable, modern, reasonable and bound by the rule of law. It was anxious to uphold this image towards its white constituency and the international community; the onset of mass mobilisation, however, proved a major blow by proving the futility of such attempts. From the mid-1980s onwards the South African regime waged a propaganda war that aimed to criminalise political protest while portraying itself as the defender of law and order in the face of a communist onslaught.

(I) The aftermath

Coping with the crisis

After September 3 people were conscientised. They knew exactly where they were standing.¹⁸

On 4 September 1984 a small delegation including Esau Ralitsela, Lord McCamel and other members of the Vaal Civic Association (VCA) travelled to Johannesburg to attend a meeting at Khotso House, the headquarters of the South African Council of Churches (SACC).¹⁹ The day before, when violence had started in the region, Thomas Madikwe Manthata, fieldworker for the SACC and Bishop Desmond Tutu's assistant, had visited the Vaal to evaluate the situation.²⁰ The SACC was, Manthata recalled 'desperately in need of information and one found himself driving in and out of the Vaal during that period'.²¹ Manthata had been invited by Reverend Moselane as a guest speaker in August 1984 and was thus no stranger to the Vaal. During the same time meetings took place with members

¹⁸ Interview, Morris More, Sebokeng, 2 December 2011.

¹⁹ WHP AK2117, I1.5, Vol.35, Testimony MacCamel [sic], 1583-85 and WHP AK2117, I1.5, Vol.36, Testimony MacCamel [sic], 1,638-41.

²⁰ WHP AG3298 (Legal Resources Centre Oral History Project), Interview with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 25 August 2008; WHP AK2117, I2.18, Vol.277, Testimony Manthata, 15,062-3.

²¹ WHP AK2117, I2.18, Vol.277, Testimony Manthata, 15,065.

of the VCA and Frank Chikane to discuss the situation.²² McCamel recalled discussions taking place about how to revive the VCA.²³ A series of meetings of civic leaders were held in the aftermath to discuss the organisation of funerals, record a list of those that had been injured, communicate with lawyers regarding detentions and injuries and to establish the Vaal Information Centre.²⁴

Present at the meeting of 4 September were, among other people, Bishop Desmond Tutu who suggested to arrange a meeting with Dr. Koornhof, Minister of Co-operation and Development between 1978 and 1984, to discuss the socio-economic grievances of residents in the Vaal townships. The delegation however declined, feeling that this was not going to resolve the crisis at this point. Another meeting with Reverend Frank Chikane, Murphy Morobe and other leaders of the United Democratic Front followed to discuss emergency assistance for those in need.²⁵ Decisions taken included the organisation of medical and legal assistance, the organisation of a meeting with Indian shopkeepers whose shops had been burnt down in Evaton, as well as the issuing of pamphlets to address the local population. Two pamphlets were printed with the assistance of the UDF in the aftermath of the meetings in Johannesburg. Both blamed the Town Councils for the dire situation, called for a continuation of the struggle against high rents and service tariffs and expressed solidarity and sympathy with those who had lost family and friends. One of them furthermore urged local residents to abstain from looting and provided phone numbers for those who needed medical or legal assistance.²⁶ The other one announced a meeting on 9 September at the Roman Catholic Church in Sebokeng.²⁷ While the tone was sharp, both pamphlets essentially reiterated the demands the VCA had already made prior the uprising.

During another meeting on 7 September at the offices of Chikane, Ernest Sotso, member of

²² Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010; WHP AK2117, I2.4, Vol.180, Testimony Ramagula [sic], 9,305-07.

²³ WHP AK2117, I1.5, Vol.36, Testimony MacCamel [sic], 1,639-40.

²⁴ WHP AK2117, S7.9, Statement by Naphtali Mbuti Nkopane.

²⁵ WHP AK2117, I2.8, Vol.214, Testimony Mokoena, 11,293-94; WHP AK2117, I1.5, Vol.35, Testimony MacCamel [sic], 1,583-85.

²⁶ WHP AK2117, J3.13, AN15, pamphlet Vaal Civic Association Calls - Asinamali!

²⁷ WHP AK2117, J3.13, AN7, pamphlet issued by the Evaton Ratepayer's Association.

the Boipatong area committee and an ANC veteran from the Eastern Cape who was part of the underground network, accused McCamel of running a secret group of priests that was meddling in community affairs.²⁸ This group of priests, who shortly afterwards formed the Vaal Ministers' Solidarity Group (VMSG), indeed became vital in providing leadership and support. It was through the VMSG that the SACC sent R5,600 for a relief fund - which formed part of the dispute between McCamel and Sotso.²⁹ Financial, legal and medical assistance was desperately needed. The gutting of houses had left thousands homeless, delivery trucks no longer entered the townships and the looting of shops was causing a severe food shortage.³⁰ Organisational capacities and infrastructure were in a state of disarray. Soon stories began to circulate that gangs were roaming the streets, demanding donations for families of the injured or dead; many were alleged to use the money to enrich themselves.³¹ Hence the breakdown of civic structures and the social order more broadly provided breeding ground for opportunistic activities.³²

Most businessmen had not been insured. Most of them were only properly back in business in June 1985 when the Orange Vaal Development Board (OVDB) made available R1 million in loans, secured from private investors.³³ In Sebokeng and Sharpeville, a branch of the Vaal Information Service that provided cover for the Detainees' Parents Support Committee (DPSC) opened at churches in late 1984.³⁴ Providing legal advice for those in detention, the branch in Sharpeville operated on Saturdays and Sundays. In Sebokeng, the security branch allegedly harassed volunteers working for the centre.³⁵ Through attorney David Dison, the centres were linked to Amnesty

²⁸ WHP AK2117, I1.5, Vol.35, Testimony MacCamel [sic], 1,591ff.

²⁹ Vaal Teknorama (VT) Collection Patrick Noonan (CPN), Vaal Triangle Minister's Solidarity Group Relief Fund, July 1985, no reference number.

³⁰ *The Star*, 5 September 1984.

³¹ WHP AK2117, S8.10.4, Events in the Vaal Triangle by Lisa Seftel.

³² Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

³³ *The Star*, 11 June 1985.

³⁴ *City Press*, 20 April 1986; interview, Gift Moerane, Vereeniging, 29 March 2010 and 17 May 2006; WHP A2675 (Karis-Gerhart Collection of South African Political Materials), III (869), Secretarial report from the Transvaal, November 1984.

³⁵ *The Star*, 18 February 1985.

International who enabled information on repression to be publicised internationally.³⁶

According to the Minister of Co-operation, Development and Training Dr. Gerrit Viljoen, who succeeded Koornhof, most of the victims of the uprising were outsiders; this claim was however refuted by community leaders and priests who compiled lists of the dead that proved the opposite.³⁷ Official police statistics released on the first day of the uprising alleged that 14 people had died and eight policemen and 32 civilians had been injured.³⁸ Unofficial statistics compiled by community leaders estimated that approximately 250 had been injured on the first day of the uprising. By November the death toll had risen to 72.³⁹ Many of the dozens who had been wounded by the police were too afraid to seek medical assistance at Sebokeng hospital for fear of being identified as participants in the uprising and being arrested. Instead, two local churches served as makeshift clinics and legal advice offices where doctors and lawyers, organised by the UDF, local clergy and the Vaal Civic Association were providing emergency aid. The Azanian People's Organisation in collaboration with the Health Workers Association and the National Alternative Medical and Dental Association (NAMDA) set up a mobile clinic, which according to a report in the *Sowetan* treated 144 people.⁴⁰ AZAPO's presence in most townships besides Sharpeville had been rather weak and its organisational capacities seriously hampered; but it was during this time, Gcina Malindi claimed, that AZAPO made serious inroads into the townships of the Vaal.⁴¹

Besides the general breakdown of services and infrastructure, the rent boycott continued, necessitating negotiations with local authorities. Two days after the protest march and the stay-away, on 5 September 1984, a delegation of Sharpeville residents, led by Reverend Ben Phetole of

³⁶ P. Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches: The Final Dramatic Events that Scuttled Apartheid* (Bellevue, 2003), 145.

³⁷ *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 September 1984.

³⁸ WHP AE862 (Records of the Black Sash), G37.8, United Democratic Front, Black Sash, et al. 'Repression in a Time of Reform. A Look at Events in the Transvaal since August 1984' (Johannesburg, 1984), 25.

³⁹ WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ33, List of the dead - Vaal Triangle, 2 September - 1 November 1984; *City Press*, 7 October 1984.

⁴⁰ *The Star*, 10 September 1984; *Sowetan*, 10 September 1984; WHP AK2117, S5, Statement Patrick Noonan.

⁴¹ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

the Anglican Church in Evaton, went to the offices of the Development Board in Houtkop.⁴² Negotiations were scheduled with Colonel Viljoen, head of the West Rand riot squad and Nicholas Louw, the town clerk of the OVDB. Councillors appeared to be unavailable as they had fled the townships. Viljoen later recalled that the large crowd of people that had accompanied the delegation was not aggressive; according to him members of the crowd were making the peace sign.⁴³

The minutes of the meeting indicate both demands and grievances, including the release of all detainees, the reduction of rents to R30, the replacement of councillors with 'people of their own choice', the withdrawal of the police from Sharpeville, the provision of buses to take people to work, a scrapping of the increase in service charges, visits to detainees in prison, a call for a commission of enquiry into the allocation of businesses and the burial of victims without police interference.⁴⁴ The demand to reduce rent to R30 was not a VCA campaign but specific to Sharpeville.⁴⁵ However councillors refused to resign arguing that they had been elected by their constituency. Another meeting on 8 September between a delegation of residents headed by Father Ben Photolo, Esau Mahlatsi and members of the OVDB reiterated demands.⁴⁶

To inform residents about the outcome of negotiations, two report-back meetings were held at the Anglican Church in Sharpeville and the Nyolohelo Roman Catholic Church in Zone 12, Sebokeng the following day.⁴⁷ Despite banning orders, local clergy decided to proceed. They recall the brutality with which police attempted to disperse the meetings.⁴⁸ Within minutes after the arrival of police, 'all hell broke loose' as they teargassed and opened fire on the crowd inside the church. Battles between police and youth ensued that continued for hours. The breaking up of meetings by

⁴² *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 September 1984; WHP AE862, G37.8, United Democratic Front, Black Sash, et al., 'Repression in a Time of Reform', 27.

⁴³ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,374.

⁴⁴ WHP AK2117, J4.18, AAT12, Meeting between the Town Clerk and a delegation from +/- 500 residents from Sharpeville on Wednesday, 5 September 1984 to discuss the rent issue.

⁴⁵ Interview, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010.

⁴⁶ WHP AK2117, S8.7.8, Handwritten notes.

⁴⁷ WHP AK2117, S8.7.8, Handwritten notes by Father Lennon.

⁴⁸ WHP AK2117, S8.7.8, Handwritten notes by Father Lennon; Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 68-69.

police had become the order of the day; some of the most atrocious assaults, however occurred during funerals when police and mourners frequently clashed. Police conduct during political funerals came to symbolise the evils of apartheid; as the state showed no respect or restraint towards mourners or at places of religious and spiritual significance. It radicalised and conscientised the public at large as well as local priests who came to experience and witness the teargassing, shooting and sjambokking during such events. As an investigation by the Southern African Catholics Bishops Conference (SACBC) stated, 'the police conduct at the funerals in all circumstances can be described as particularly provocative'.⁴⁹

The majority of those who died were between the age of 14 and 35, with the youngest victim - Maud Nzunga being seven months and the oldest one, Martha Ndabambi being 58 years old.⁵⁰ Both had died as a result of being teargassed. Two mass funerals were organised in Sharpeville and Evaton to bury the victims of the uprising. Tebogo Moepadira, a COSAS activist recalled that the mass funerals were meant to be a platform for people to heal and to accept what had happened.⁵¹ The burial of the dead was, Moepadira argued, not a matter concerning families affected only but 'it was a matter of saying that as the Vaal community we are affected and we lost the young ones.'⁵² Newspaper reports suggest that the two funerals were attended by approximately 40,000 to 60,000 people.⁵³ Father Noonan estimated the number of mourners to be around 6,000.⁵⁴ When the name of baby Nzunga was mentioned during the service, mourners broke into tears.⁵⁵

In Sharpeville, police entered the cemetery as the coffins were lowered into the graves. Anger and frustration mounted as mourners told the police 'we have come to bury our heroes and we want

⁴⁹ WHP A2674, III (344), 'Report on Police Conduct During Township Protests. August – November 1984', Compiled and published by Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference S.A.C.B.C, 26.

⁵⁰ WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ33, List of the dead - Vaal Triangle, 2 September - 1 November 1984.

⁵¹ Interview, Tebogo 'Exec.' Moepadira, Vanderbijlpark, 23 June 2010.

⁵² Interview, Tebogo 'Exec.' Moepadira, Vanderbijlpark, 23 June 2010.

⁵³ *Sowetan*, 19 September 1984; *Vereeniging and Meyerton Ster*, 21 September 1984.

⁵⁴ Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 80.

⁵⁵ *Sunday Times*, 16 September 1984.

to do it with respect and dignity. Go away!’⁵⁶ Approximately 200 mourners marching towards the police were alleged to be chanting ‘kills us as well. Kill us.’ At the mass funeral at Evaton Small Farms, mourners were rounded up and told to sit down in a circle where they were sjambokked by police and 204 people were arrested.⁵⁷ Colonel Viljoen later claimed in court that the funeral procession had been violent. According to him, stones were thrown and busses had been hijacked. However, video footage shown by George Bizos proved the Colonel was fabricating evidence.⁵⁸ It would not be the last time that Viljoen showed little restraint and indeed he was seen to be inciting members of the riot squad to use violence against mourners.

The funerals of the four councillors were held separately. Jacob Kuzwayo Dlamini, the councillor who had died in Sharpeville on 3 September, was buried secretly and under heavy police guard. Details of the funerals of other councillors were not released and local clergy conducting the funerals received threats.⁵⁹ Councillors who emerged from their hiding places to attend the funerals launched attacks on oppositional forces, arguing that change would only come through peaceful negotiations.⁶⁰

Another funeral, held to bury ten year old Nicholas Mgudlwa, who had been shot dead by the police while chopping firewood at the end of September, led to further violence when youth began pelting the car of Kay Gordon - who was taken her domestic worker back home - with stones, resulting in the death of Gordon’s three-week old son.⁶¹ Two young men from Sebokeng were convicted of culpable homicide, assault with the intention to do grievous bodily harm and contravention of the Internal Security Act 29, Section 54.⁶² Evidence rested on precarious and

⁵⁶ *Sowetan*, 4 September 1984; WHP AK2117, S8.10.4, Events in the Vaal Triangle by Lisa Seftel.

⁵⁷ WHP AE862, G37.8, United Democratic Front, Black Sash, et al., ‘Repression in a Time of Reform’, 17.

⁵⁸ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.68, Testimony Viljoen, 3,559-65.

⁵⁹ *Vereeniging and Meyerton Ster*, 21 September 1984.

⁶⁰ *The Star*, 13 September 1984.

⁶¹ *City Press*, 14 October 1984; *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 October 1984.

⁶² University of the Western Cape (UWC) Mayibuye Archive (MA), MCH31 (Records of the International Defence and Aid Fund), 5032/ L3F23C4, Supreme Court of South Africa, Appellate Division, Petition in the matter between Themba Alfred Lata and Piet Mntambo and the State.

contested testimonies. The death of baby Gordon, some would later surmise, led to the deployment of troops into the townships some ten days later.⁶³ It is likely that military operations were already planned. The publicity the incident received, however, brought the insurrection into the homes of white South Africans. Shooting of children in the townships had no similar impact and none of the policemen were convicted.

The funeral of Joseph Sithole

The funeral of Joseph Sithole, local activists later recalled, was a major turning point in the region's political landscape for without it, a number of members of the Vaal Civic Association and COSAS would not have been arrested and the Delmas Treason Trial, one of the longest running trials in South African legal history, would perhaps not have been held. This claim is certainly to a large extent unfounded as the majority of those who ended up in court were arrested before or after Sithole's funeral. However, it reflects local perceptions of the importance of the event that has been etched in popular memory.

Joseph Sithole, a student and civic activist with a reputation for militancy, had been killed in mid-September. Interviewees suggest that wearing a UDF T-shirt a few days after the beginning of mass protest, he was beaten and killed by a crowd said to be close to be sympathetic to towards local shop owners for his alleged involvement in the burning of shops on 3 September.⁶⁴ Due to his status as a political activist, COSAS wanted to bury him separately. Newspaper reports initially announced that the funeral was to be held at the Roman Catholic Church.⁶⁵ Subsequently the magistrate of Vanderbijlpark, Ernest Arndt, issued an order restricting the number of people who

⁶³ Interview, Nick Miller, East Rand, 9 May 2006 (name has been changed).

⁶⁴ Interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010; interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 26 July 2010.

⁶⁵ Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 82.

were allowed to attend the funeral and defining the route and proceeding of the service.⁶⁶ According to witnesses, mourners knew nothing about the orders as the venue had changed to the Baptist Church in Zone 13. As thousands of people assembled at the Baptist Church in Zone 13 Sebokeng, the riot squad arrived. Reverends Lethale and McCamel were approached by Colonel Viljoen who demanded that no freedom songs should be sung, that the coffin was not to be carried in the street, that no banners must be carried and that mourners were not allowed to walk or march to the graveyard.⁶⁷ Only those at the church would be allowed to attend the burial at the graveyard. Restrictive measures were nothing new in relation to funerals - particularly if the person to be buried had either been killed in custody, during public protest or was a known to be a political activist. Knowing that political funerals were used as platforms to express opposition to the regime, the police often restricted these events and attended in force.

Speakers in the church included members of COSAS, the Azanian Student Movement (AZASM) and the Evaton Ratepayers Association.⁶⁸ After the church service, the coffin was placed in a hearse and mourners got into busses to drive to the Evaton cemetery.⁶⁹ The procession was flanked by police driving in Casspirs, landrovers and cars.⁷⁰ The menacing presence of police further raised tempers.⁷¹ The last prayers had barely been said at the graveside when police surrounded the cemetery and started shooting and sjambokking those present. Morake Petrus Mokoena recalled seeing a policeman with a bloodied butcher's knife who allegedly told his colleague in Afrikaans that

⁶⁶ VT CPN, Prohibition of gathering in terms of section 46 of the Internal Security Act (Act 74/1982), no reference number; for a analysis of the legal framework see M.Coleman, *A Crime against Humanity. Analysing the Repression of the Apartheid State* (Johannesburg, 1998), 34ff.

⁶⁷ WHP AK2117, I1.5, Vol.36, Testimony MacCamel [sic], 1,643-44; interview, Lord McCamel, Evaton, 2 May 2006; WHP AK2117, S8.7.8, 'Handwritten notes by accused No.13 regarding the funeral on 23 September 1984.

⁶⁸ WHP AK2117, S8.7.8, Handwritten statement by accused no. 1, 5, 6, 12 & 13 concerning funeral of 23 September.

⁶⁹ Interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 26 July 2010.

⁷⁰ WHP AK2117, S8.7.8, Handwritten statement by accused concerning funeral of 23 September.

⁷¹ Interview, Roy Matube, Vereeniging, 20 April 2010; interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 26 July 2010; interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010; interview, Tsietse 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010; interview, Mandla Mazibuko, Vanderbijlpark, 22 June 2010; interview, Tshepo Sebusi, Vereeniging, 5 July 2010.

he had just stabbed someone.⁷² Witnesses recalled Colonel Viljoen egging the police on as he was heard shouting racist abuse 'slaan [beat] die kaffir! Donder [lay into] die kaffir!'⁷³ Viljoen disputed this evidence in court and claimed that only necessary violence had been used.⁷⁴ He argued that 'I decided that these riotous, clearly violent people acting in illegal ways should not be let loose on the community after the funeral and I decided that arrests should be made immediately following the funeral.'⁷⁵ One woman testified seeing policemen cutting people's hair, presumably to humiliate them.⁷⁶ According to Gcina Malindi, no one was spared - even priests who were usually protected by their status were, Malindi recalled, 'beaten to a pulp'.⁷⁷ A stampede and panic broke out as thousands of people attempted to escape the pandemonium, some of them falling into, others trying to hide in, open graves. While some local activists managed to evade arrest, others were not so fortunate. At the house of Sithole's family, pots with food and drinks were wasted because of teargas while others were spilt.⁷⁸

After the funeral, 598 people were arrested for attending an 'illegal gathering', including children under the age of 12.⁷⁹ Including arrests in other townships, the numbers were estimated to be as high as 900. Among the few hundred people arrested that day were Gcina Malindi, former chairman of COSAS who was shot during his arrest, Patrick Baleka - an Azanian Youth League activist from Soweto and Simon Nkoli. Baleka later recounted having been assaulted by a number of policemen as he was handcuffed and kneeling on the ground. Colonel Viljoen kicked Baleka in the chest.⁸⁰ All three became Delmas trialists and were separated from other detainees. Malindi had made plans to leave the next day with student activist and close friend Tsietsi 'Speech'

⁷² WHP AK2117, S7.7, Statement Morake Petrus Mokoena.

⁷³ Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 84; interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010; WHP AK2117, I2.7, Vol.206, Testimony Malindi, 10,838.

⁷⁴ WHP AK2117, I1.10, Vol.67, Testimony Viljoen, 3,501.

⁷⁵ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,395.

⁷⁶ WHP A2674, III (344), 'Report on Police Conduct During Township Protests', 23.

⁷⁷ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

⁷⁸ Interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 26 July 2010.

⁷⁹ *Sowetan*, 24 September 1984; *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 September 1984.

⁸⁰ WHP AK2117, S8.7.8, Handwritten notes by Accused No.1 regarding the funeral on 23 September; interview George Bizos, Oxford, 23 February 2011.

Mokatsanyane to join MK in exile; while Mokatsanyane evaded arrest and indeed became an MK soldier, Malindi ended up in prison.⁸¹

After being arrested, the ordeal was not over. One of those arrested recalled dozens of people having to run a gauntlet between two rows of policemen who were lashing out on them.⁸² Malindi remembered the scene:

Hundreds of people crammed into one space, and police just beating them. Getting exhausted, sit down, take a break and then lay into people again, it was horrific. [...] There was such incredible defiance by the people. [...] People were kicking back, fighting back and it was not a scream of pain 'let me be', it was screams of agitation against what was happening.⁸³

The experience of those who were assaulted that day politicised many. Toy Manqa, aged 15 at that time who emerged as a key youth activist from the mid 1980s onwards, recalled: 'Then you see, when you go out [of prison], you go out determined that you must fight this thing.'⁸⁴ The exposure of local communities to police assault and brutality hence further conscientised and radicalised many. The funeral of Sithole led to renewed confrontations between youth and police. Vehicles were set alight and stonings ensued.⁸⁵ In Sharpeville the houses belonging to a businessman, an employee of the OVDB and a police constable were set alight while skirmishes between police and local youth occurred near the post office at the intersection between Zone 11, 12 and 13 in Sebokeng. Due to the tense situation, busses left those coming from town at the outskirts of the townships.

⁸¹ Interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010; interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

⁸² WHP A2674, III (344), 'Report on Police Conduct During Township Protests', 26-7.

⁸³ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

⁸⁴ Interview, Toy Manqa, Vereeniging, 26 May 2011.

⁸⁵ *Sowetan*, 25 September 1984.

The collapse of the Vaal Civic Association

And at that point I see the unity of the people of the Vaal there's something I had never seen. And it made me more confident that we *are* going to be liberated.⁸⁶

In the aftermath of the protest march, open political mobilisation was severely curtailed due to heavy repression and detentions. The context of the uprising provided a platform for militant youth as well as clergy to occupy the political space. Political networks in the Vaal had been suffering from lack of a sustained leadership that carried the struggle from one generation to the next while most organisations struggled to attract committed members up until 1984. This hampered the establishment of mature structures that were able to cope in a time of crisis and allowed younger generations to take over.

The security branch, according to their own statements, had difficulty in arresting all the local leadership as many had gone into hiding and the police did not yet know the majority of those who had been involved.⁸⁷ Pressure from Pretoria was mounting and Captain P.E.J. Kruger from the security branch in Krugersdorp was tasked with heading the investigations. The majority of those who later stood trial for their alleged involvement in conspiring to overthrow the state were arrested between late September and December 1984.⁸⁸ A second wave of arrests occurred between February and April 1985. The initial inability of the police to control the situation provided the Ralitsela's enough time and space to leave the country.

Being part of the ANC underground, their arrest could have had dire consequences for ANC networks.⁸⁹ After hearing that police had allegedly fired a number of bullets inside their house - presumably thinking that the couple was hiding - they knew that they were no longer safe in South Africa. Hence to protect the identities of those they had been working with and to report back to the

⁸⁶ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011.

⁸⁷ Interview, Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 29 September 2011 (name has been changed).

⁸⁸ WHP AK2117, G1(a), Bail applications 1985, summary of the individual circumstances of the accused.

⁸⁹ Interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010; interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010.

ANC in exile, they decided to leave the country. By that time, crossing the border had become difficult as they had no passports and had lost touch with both the ANC and the UDF - a clear indication that they had not planned going into exile. It took the couple two months to walk across the border into Botswana.

With two of the key civic leaders gone and others being in hiding or detention, the structures of the Vaal Civic Association virtually collapsed after 3 September and were only properly revived in 1985. Matime Moshele Papane, born in Sharpeville in 1958 and deeply influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement, recalled that they had to 'begin from scratch'.⁹⁰ From 1985, Papane became a key figure in establishing UDF structures in the region. Around the same time another organisation emerged in Sharpeville, known for its distinct politics that often diverged from those of the other townships. Until that time, the VCA had made little inroads into Sharpeville.⁹¹ The Sharpeville Civic Association (SCA) featured in media reports from early 1985 as one of the key players to oppose the council's attempts to break the rent boycott.⁹²

New activists that emerged largely had to operate underground for fear of being harassed and arrested while most meetings were banned. On 11 September 1984, Minister of Law and Order Louis le Grange announced the banning of all indoor meetings with a political content of more than two people.⁹³ The ban applied to 22 magisterial districts until 30 September. The organisation of mass meetings became increasingly difficult.⁹⁴ The VCA was one out of four organisations worst affected by state repression.⁹⁵ Smear campaigns, a popular tool to discredit oppositional leaders, had been a popular tool used by the security branch prior to the uprising; in its aftermath, rumours were spread vilifying certain activists by accusing them of being informers. One pamphlet directly blamed the VCA

⁹⁰ Interview, Matime Moshele Papane, Johannesburg, 28 April 2010.

⁹¹ Interview, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010.

⁹² *Sowetan*, 28 January 1985.

⁹³ WHP AE862, G37.8, United Democratic Front, Black Sash, et al., 'Repression in a Time of Reform', 11. Also see Coleman, *A Crime against Humanity*, 34ff.

⁹⁴ Interview, Matime Moshele Papane, Johannesburg, 28 April 2010; interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011.

⁹⁵ WHP A2675, III (408), Targets of state repression.

and priests for job losses, death and destruction of property.⁹⁶ Fake pamphlets were distributed countering information provided by civic bodies while police surveillance increased.⁹⁷ Besides detention and police harassment, vigilante and hit squad assaults increasingly affected civic leaders.⁹⁸

Reverend Moselane, who had been assaulted and threatened in late August, was under attack again when a number of tear gas canisters were thrown into his house in Sharpeville and seven rubber bullets were fired through the window on the evening of 3 September.⁹⁹ The method of attacks as well as the police vehicle seen near the scene raised suspicions that the police were actively involved in the assault¹⁰⁰. The Synod of the Anglican Diocese in Johannesburg sent a cable to P.W.Botha, demanding an explanation. Moselane himself laid charges of assault and malicious damage and demanded to have his property repaired or be compensated by the SAP.¹⁰¹ The house of Esau and Dorcas Ralitsela in Zone 7, Sebokeng was burnt down on 19 September. Neighbours testified that they saw what appeared to be police climbing through the roof. A few minutes later a fire gutted the house.¹⁰²

Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi was detained for two weeks under Section 30 of the Internal Security Act.¹⁰³ Two days after his release, he was re-arrested and accused of having been involved in the killing of councillor Caesar Motjeane. Charges were later dropped but due to serious assault and torture, the ANC in exile advised Motubatsi to leave the country - which he refused for private

⁹⁶ WHP AE862, G37.8, United Democratic Front, Black Sash, et al., 'Repression in a Time of Reform', 10.

⁹⁷ WHP AE862, G37.8, 'Repression in a Time of Reform'.

⁹⁸ WHP AE862, G37.8, 'Repression in a Time of Reform'.

⁹⁹ *City Press*, 9 September 1984.

¹⁰⁰ WHP AK2117, J7, DA12, Letter to SAP, Vanderbijlpark from Rev. T. Moselane re police action against him, 15 October 1984.

¹⁰¹ WHP AK2117, J7, DA12.

¹⁰² Interview, Dorcas Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 1 April 2010; interview, Esau Ralitsela, Vereeniging, 5 April 2010; *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 September 1984.

¹⁰³ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 15 April 2010; WHP AK2117, S5, Statement Edward Motubatse [sic].

reasons.¹⁰⁴ Others went into hiding in various parts of the country. Hlabeng Sam Matlole had gone to Lebowa. Written correspondence between him and Glenda Webster of the Black Sash in February 1985 included a warning by Webster not to return to the Vaal.¹⁰⁵ On 12 February 1985, a few days after Webster's warning, Matlole was detained.¹⁰⁶ Lord McCamel, the chairman of the VCA and founding member of the Vaal Minister's Solidarity Group (VMSG), was arrested on 8 November 1984 under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act of 1982 and later held under section 31 for 16 months.¹⁰⁷ McCamel eventually turned state witness for the Delmas Treason Trial.¹⁰⁸

On 22 December 1984, civic structures organised several meetings in local churches to campaign for local support of 'Black Christmas' – a campaign by the UDF to commemorate the dead of the uprisings and to express protest against state repression.¹⁰⁹ In Sharpeville, thousands of local residents participated in cleaning the graves of those who had died during the Vaal Uprising. In other areas including Sebokeng, the meeting of 22 December led to renewed violence and confrontations between police and protestors.

In early 1985 the VCA was relaunched.¹¹⁰ Most members of the relaunched VCA had not been involved in civic leadership positions before thus creating a gap in experience, networks and leadership. Their organisational capacity was hampered once more when a partial state of emergency was declared on 20 July 1985, leading to a renewed wave of arrests and banning of meetings. By that time the centre of revolt and protest had shifted to the Eastern and the Western Cape.¹¹¹ Most meetings had to occur in secret as any public gatherings other than bona fide sports

¹⁰⁴ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 15 April 2010 and 22 November 2011.

¹⁰⁵ WHP AK2117, J3.24, AY1 and AY2, Letter from Glenda Webster to Sam Matlole re Vaal detentions; Letter from Sam Matlole to Glenda Webster.

¹⁰⁶ WHP AK2117, G1(a), Bail applications 1985, Summary of the individual circumstances of the accused.

¹⁰⁷ WHP AK2117, S8.10.20, The Vaal Triangle during the Unrest, 1984 – 1985 (September to January) by Rev-Patrick Noonan; *City Press*, 11 November 1984.

¹⁰⁸ *Sowetan*, 4 March 1986.

¹⁰⁹ WHP AG2918 (Kairos Collection), 3.9.1.2.1, An account of the ongoing activities in the Vaal and Parys townships.

¹¹⁰ Interview, Matime Moshele Papane, Johannesburg, 28 April 2010.

¹¹¹ Security Branch reports top secret/ confidential, 1985, Confidential source.

events were prohibited from 27 September 1985 until 31 March 1986. Furthermore any gathering organised to promote or discuss stay-aways or boycotts were prohibited as well.¹¹² This effectively outlawed any public engagement with civic issues; open mobilisation became increasingly difficult and most of those involved were in hiding. And yet despite these organisational difficulties, a newspaper report quoted a VCA spokesman as saying 'there is no going back now'.¹¹³ Although campaigns were hampered and effective mobilisation was hamstrung, the VCA had gained widespread support by the mid-1980s.

A confidential field study conducted by Philip Frankel in 1987 examined attitudes of residents towards the VCA.¹¹⁴ The broader aim of the study was to investigate attitudes of local residents in the townships of the Vaal Triangle towards local government and the rent boycotts. It further focussed on determining support for anti-government structures in the region: 63.6 per cent belonged to a trade union, civic structures or community organisation.¹¹⁵ The VCA was widely known as 84.9 per cent had heard about it by 1987 although only 36.9 per cent 'strongly supported' it and 19 per cent 'supported' it.¹¹⁶ What is further interesting is the response that 57.4 per cent of respondents associated the VCA with the broader struggle against apartheid.¹¹⁷ Thus from its initial focus on bread-and-butter issues, it had acquired a distinct political reputation. The VCA was eventually banned on 24 February 1988 together with a number of other organisations including the UDF, the Detainees' Parents Support Committee (DPSC), the Detainees' Support Committee (DESCOM), the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO) and the Release Mandela Committee (RMC).¹¹⁸

¹¹² *Government Gazette*, 27 September 1985.

¹¹³ *The Star*, 3 September 1985.

¹¹⁴ WHP AK2117, S8.10.12, P.Frankel, 'Socio-economic Conditions, Rent Boycotts and the Local Government Crisis: A Vaal Triangle Field Study', Unpublished report (1987), 1.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37. While it is difficult to establish with certainty the accuracy of these numbers, they certainly highlight trends including the growing support for the Vaal Civic Association.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 39-43.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹¹⁸ *Government Gazette*, 24 February 1988.

Few pamphlets have survived from the period between 1984 and the late 1980s. Those that found their way into archives highlight the focus of campaigns during that period.¹¹⁹ Making reference to the Freedom Charter, the tone had become more openly political. Most demands the VCA had been making since its inception remained the same, namely the abolishment of the Black Local Authorities system and the lowering of rents.¹²⁰ In addition the VCA called for a withdrawal of troops from the townships, the release of the Sharpeville Six and the Delmas trialists and an end to evictions of rent defaulters. In response to evictions and the continued struggle over the payment of rent and levies, the Vaal Civic Association and trade unions called for a work stay-away on 24 and 25 March 1985. Demands during the stay-away, besides the above, further included an 'end to all political trials', a release of rent defaulters, an end to the issuing of summons, the unbanning of COSAS, recognition of Worker's Day as a paid holiday and a living wage for all workers.¹²¹ One pamphlet called on the local population to organise in street committees 'so that we do not go back to Mahlatsi's rule with high rents'.¹²²

As a result of the fiscal crisis the Lekoa Town Council stopped providing services including waste removal. Electricity and water were temporarily cut off, plunging the townships into darkness and creating sanitary problems. In late 1985, electricity cables of rent defaulters were 'physically dug out and removed'.¹²³ Hence from early 1985 onwards, one of the key aims of the Vaal Civic Association was to provide services. Streets were cleaned, often by youth who volunteered to become involved while electricity and water meters were hacked and reconnected. To avoid

¹¹⁹ WHP AK2117, G3.9, Statement by Captain JF Conradie.

¹²⁰ WHP AK2117, G3.9.1.3-6 and G3.9.1.17, Pamphlets issued by the Vaal Civic Association.

¹²¹ *Sowetan*, 21 March 1986 and 24 March 1986.

¹²² WHP AK2117, G3.9.1.3, Pamphlet issued by the Vaal Civic Association.

¹²³ *The Star*, 12 August 1986.

detection, electricity was only used for heating and cooking but not for lighting.¹²⁴ During one such 'operation clean-up' on the 24 November 1984, hundreds of youth and children removed the waste that had been accumulating since the OVDB had suspended waste collection.¹²⁵

The breakdown of administrative and policing capacities of the state gave rise and provided space for the establishment of street and block committees. Occasionally referred to as the 'G-Plan' or 'Goniwe's Plan', street committees were first established in the township of Lingelihle in the Eastern Cape under the leadership of Matthew Goniwe in 1984, the popular community leader and teacher who was abducted and assassinated by the police in collaboration with members of Vlakplaas, in 1985.¹²⁶ Civic leaders stated that street committees came into being from late 1984 and 1985 onwards, shortly after the uprising.¹²⁷ In contrast to case studies from the Eastern Cape or Alexandra, archival evidence on street committees in the Vaal Triangle remains scant.¹²⁸

In some ways, structures to organise local communities had been laid previously through the establishment of zonal committees of the VCA between 1983 and 1984. Different areas in townships had also been organised in cultural networks or clubs including burial societies and stokvels or savings groups.¹²⁹ The function and role of street committees however differed radically from groups that had existed previously. They began to fulfil the role of the police and the municipality and their aim was to organise every street, thus ensuring efficient communication with the VCA and the running of daily affairs. As civic and student leaders were frequently detained, an additional reason was to ensure the continuation of struggle politics by broadening the structures.¹³⁰ Tsietsi 'Stompi'

¹²⁴ WHP AK2117, S8.10.20, The Vaal Triangle during the Unrest, 1984 – 1985 (September to January) by Rev. Patrick Noonan, 9.

¹²⁵ WHP AK2117, S8.10.20.

¹²⁶ Truth and Reconciliation, Human Rights Violations. Submission Nyameka Goniwe, Case No. EC0080/96 (17 April 1996), accessed 20 January 2013 at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/hrvel1/goniwe.htm>. See footnote 156, page 107.

¹²⁷ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011.

¹²⁸ C. Carter, 'Community and Conflict: The Alexandra Rebellion of 1986', *Journal of Southern African Studies* (JSAS), 18/1 (1992, Special Issue: Social History of Resistance in South Africa), 115-142.

¹²⁹ Interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011. See footnote 83, page 89.

¹³⁰ Interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

Mokhele remembered that 'Every layer we created they went and arrested that whole layer. [...] Until finally we decided you know what [...]. We can't lead this through activists. Let's create street committees and block committees and make sure that the communities run their own lives.'¹³¹

The banning of COSAS and the formation of VASCO and VAYCO

Now they [the children] are singing songs based on their own local experiences, singing about the soldiers and le Grange.¹³²

But look there were a lot of challenges. I don't want to lie. Some of us had to become adults when we were supposed to be still children and playing.¹³³

The Black Local Authorities elections in 1983 not only galvanised township residents into attending meetings to oppose reforms in local government and express dissatisfaction with the socio-economic situation. It also had a major impact on the mobilisation of students who began to join COSAS in greater numbers from 1983 onwards.¹³⁴ As argued previously, the socio-economic grievances of the older generations deeply affected the youth. And yet, underlying structural conditions are inadequate to explain youth mobilisation from 1984 onwards.¹³⁵ The immediate experience of repression such as police conduct and the behaviour of local authorities, the military occupation of the townships as well as a newly found confidence in political action that emerged out of the 'success' of the Vaal Uprising shaped new understandings of appropriate strategies. The petrol bombing of their houses had led to the departure of councillors while the rent boycott led to the scrapping of rent increases, as will be discussed in a latter section. Such perceptions were hence partly contingent and rooted in a localised context of experience while being infused by broader anti-

¹³¹ Interview, Tsietso 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

¹³² Quote by a member of the VCA in *The Star*, 3 September 1985.

¹³³ Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

¹³⁴ Interview, Morris More, Sebokeng, 2 December 2011.

¹³⁵ J. Seekings, *Heroes or Villains: Youth Politics in the 1980s* (Johannesburg, 1993), 16.

apartheid discourse, strategies and ideology. The contingency of such experiences that differed from area to area indeed helps to explain different patterns of political conflict and violence.

Besides demands about the scrapping of age limits, an end to corporal punishment and sexual harassment and introduction of democratically elected Student Representative Council's (SRC's), COSAS called for a withdrawal of troops, the resignation of councillors, the release of detainees and an end to the harassment of student leaders.¹³⁶ Student's demands were channelled into the Education Charter campaign.¹³⁷ In contrast to the period between 1980 and 1984, COSAS' demands became more overtly political from late 1984 onwards. Messages from the ANC in Lusaka such as the call for ungovernability were transmitted via the national COSAS leadership.¹³⁸

In the aftermath of the Vaal Uprising the membership of COSAS increased quickly and various sub-branches were set-up in the different parts of the township coordinated by the Vaal Students Co-ordinating Committee.¹³⁹ This new generation of student leaders were catapulted into the forefront of the struggle in the aftermath of the Vaal Uprising.¹⁴⁰ Politically active youth and their actions differed from those of youth between 1979 and 1984.¹⁴¹ In contrast to the previous generation of COSAS leadership, they had few memories of the student uprisings of 1976 while their ideology was less influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement; furthermore, primary school students increasingly filled the ranks thus introducing very young pupils to student politics. In late 1984 and early 1985, factional fights over political approaches and the focus of COSAS ensued in the Vaal as student leaders struggled to gain control over the future of the local branch.¹⁴²

¹³⁶ WHP A2675, III (397), COSAS NEC statement on DET's response to students' legitimate demands.

¹³⁷ Interview, Roy Matube, Vereeniging, 20 April 2010.

¹³⁸ Interview, Sakhiwe Khumalo, Vereeniging, 23 June 2010.

¹³⁹ Interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 23 July 2010 and 23 May 2011; interview, Morris More, Sebokeng, 2 December 2011.

¹⁴⁰ Interview, Oupa Modikoane, East Rand, 1 July 2010.

¹⁴¹ Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?*, 50.

¹⁴² Interview, Sakhiwe Khumalo, Vereeniging, 23 June 2010; interview Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 26 July 2010.

Relations between organised labour and students became increasingly important. In October 1984, two meetings were held at Khotso House in Johannesburg to discuss the education crisis, civic problems and labour problems.¹⁴³ The variety of organisations supporting the stay-away was broad and included COSAS, the VCA, the Release Mandela Committee and a number of trade unions and civic groups. Under the leadership of the Transvaal Area Committee, a regional stay-away from school and work was called for 5 and 6 November 1984.¹⁴⁴ The committee demanded a withdrawal of army and police from the townships, a halt to rent and bus fare increases, the resignation of all community councillors, the release of all political prisoners and detainees, a reinstatement of dismissed workers and the scrapping of the GST and 'unfair taxes'.¹⁴⁵ COSAS further demanded that the Department of Education and Training (DET) dealt with the education crisis. The November stay-away was one of the most successful of its kind and was supported by approximately 400,000 students from 300 different schools as well as 800,000 workers.¹⁴⁶ According to the Labour Monitoring Group, participation rate was around 80 per cent.¹⁴⁷ Archival evidence as well as interviews suggest that neither the VCA nor COSAS in the Vaal Triangle were central in organising the stay-away.¹⁴⁸ Most small employers allegedly discharged few workers as a result; SASOL however dismissed 6,000 workers on 7 November and bussed them to homelands.¹⁴⁹

School boycotts that had started on 3 September continued until January 1985, with a great number of schools participating in the region. *City Press* reported that by the end of September 1984, around 93,000 local pupils were boycotting class.¹⁵⁰ This amounted to almost a total boycott of

¹⁴³ WHP A2675, III (868), Press statement re regional stay-away.

¹⁴⁴ WHP A2675, III (869), Pamphlet, Stay away!

¹⁴⁵ WHP AK2117, J3.2, AB7, Documents re regional stay-away.

¹⁴⁶ M.Swilling, 'The United Democratic Front and Township Revolt', in W.Cobbett and R. Cohen, *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (London, 1988), 102.

¹⁴⁷ M.Swilling, 'Urban Social Movements under Apartheid', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 99 (1985), 369.

¹⁴⁸ Various interviews; WHP AK2117, I2.3, Vol.178, Testimony Nkopane, 9,181.

¹⁴⁹ WHP A862, G37.8, Summary of events and developments which have taken place since the document 'Repression in a Time of Reform' was printed, 4.

¹⁵⁰ *City Press*, 30 September 1984.

schooling in the region.¹⁵¹ Many parents supported the school boycott either because they sympathised with their children's plight or because they were worried about sending their children back to school where they would encounter police and the military.¹⁵² A meeting on 5 October in Sebokeng, attended by members of the Orange Vaal Chamber of Commerce, the taxi association, the Vaal Minister's Solidarity Group, student bodies including COSAS and businessmen, was told that students would continue the school boycott until community grievances were addressed and detainees released.¹⁵³ Eventually the DET gave local pupils an ultimatum to decide by 26 October whether or not they would be sitting for final exams in November.¹⁵⁴ A series of meetings were held in local churches during December to discuss the future of the school boycotts.¹⁵⁵ According to one report, the meetings were infused by political content as students expressed their support for ANC leaders including Nelson Mandela, Walther Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada and Denis Goldberg, some of the most prominent accused of the famous Rivonia trial of 1964.

The question of whether or not to return to school created divisions amongst the student body; while COSAS was in full support of the school boycott, AZASM as well as the Sharpeville Student's National Resistance Movement promoted a return to the classrooms. A meeting organised by local priests on 3 January 1985 to resolve the issue eventually ended in an uneasy agreement to respect the wishes of those who wanted to return to the classrooms.¹⁵⁶ By mid-January 1985, a large percentage of primary and secondary school pupils, ranging between 54 per cent and 85 per cent in different schools had returned.¹⁵⁷ In a number of instances, classes were disrupted by groups of young activists who ordered pupils out of classrooms and threatened to burn the schools down if

¹⁵¹ The exact number of pupils at local schools remains unclear; the figures are drawn from the investigation conducted by Tjaart van der Walt, see WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ34, T. van der Walt, 'Report on the Investigation into Education for Blacks in the Vaal Triangle Following Upon the Occurrences in September 1984 and Thereafter', Unpublished report (1985), 7.

¹⁵² *The Star*, 24 October 1984.

¹⁵³ *Sowetan Sunday Mirror*, 7 October 1984.

¹⁵⁴ *The Star*, 24 October 1984.

¹⁵⁵ WHP AG2918, 3.9.1.2.1, An account of the ongoing activities in the Vaal and Parys townships.

¹⁵⁶ WHP AK2117, S8.10.20, The Vaal Triangle during the Unrest, 1984 – 1985 (September to January) by Rev. Patrick Noonan.

¹⁵⁷ *Rand Daily Mail*, 16 January 1985.

pupils did not leave.¹⁵⁸ Although the regional school boycott was eventually called off, schools were boycotted during commemorations such as June 16 for two or three days. Stay-aways, boycotts and protests were widespread to commemorate student uprisings of June 16 1976 all over South Africa. The slogan 'liberation before education' had become a rallying call for students to boycott Bantu Education since 1976 but gained new importance from the mid-1980s onwards. Children were however discouraged from boycotting school by civic, political and church leaders who stressed the importance of education and learning.

Young men in particular had been socialised partly by spending time in the street and the absence of schooling provided young people with even more time to become politically involved. Many of the young generation of COSAS leaders, albeit already in hiding, had ample time to hold discussion groups and debate political theory, history or read poetry.¹⁵⁹ While public gatherings became scarce for fear of arrest, house meetings, meetings in churches and street battles with police became a defining feature of youth protest in the mid-1980s. While some youth used the opportunity to further their knowledge and to engage in political activities, others became involved in petty crime. Rising unemployment produced generations of young people with high levels of frustration, time at hand and experiences of violence and repression. Groups of tsotsis were fighting with student leaders over control and access to territory and generated an element of instability that was difficult to control. In some instances the boundary between politics and crime was blurred – giving rise to the phenomenon of the 'comtsotsis'. Looting for example was perceived by some to fall within acceptable codes of social behaviour if shops belonged to councillors. To politicise, educate and organise unemployed as well as working youth became increasingly important in order to control their actions and behaviour within the townships. At the national conference of COSAS in

¹⁵⁸ *Sowetan*, 15 and 16 January 1985; *The Star*, 15 January 1985.

¹⁵⁹ Interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 26 July 2010.

Durban in January 1985, the need for the establishment of a national youth organisation was stressed.¹⁶⁰

Since 1982, various youth leaders and members of the Vaal Civic Association had been trying to set up above ground structures that would accommodate the non-school going youth. However, by 3 September 1984, no such functioning structures existed in contrast to townships such as Alexandra, Soweto or the area around Port Elizabeth.¹⁶¹ With the banning of COSAS on 28 August 1985 and the detention of its regional leadership the establishment of new structures gained even greater importance to channel political activism amongst the youth and to ensure that new groups would be guided by charterist principles.¹⁶² Eventually two organisations were launched: the Vaal Student Congress (VASCO) and the Vaal Youth Congress (VAYCO). Both not only represented charterist tendencies but also actively undermined the co-existence of youth structures of the Pan African Congress (PAC) and its youth wing the Pan Africanist Student Organisation (PASO). While there had been tolerance towards differing political ideologies in the Vaal prior to 1984, the situation changed from the mid-1980s onwards. Differing in ideology, both groups were fighting for control and influence over the political landscape.

Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, civic activist and member of MK and the political ANC underground had received renewed instructions from the ANC in exile to work towards the establishment of youth structures in the townships of the Vaal Triangle in late 1984.¹⁶³ Themba Goba recalled that efforts had been made since 1985 to organise a Vaal Youth Congress but it was only

¹⁶⁰ WHP A2675, III (397), Report of the National Conference held in Durban on the 12th and 13th Jan.; Seekings, *Heroes or Villains?*, 37.

¹⁶¹ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011; WHP AK2117, J3.13, AN4, Letter by Sebokeng working group re establishment of youth structures; also see C.Carter, "'We are the Progressives': Alexandra Youth Congress Activists and the Freedom Charter, 1983-85', *JSAS* 17/2 (1991), 197-220.

¹⁶² COSAS was banned under section 4(1) of the Internal Security Act (ISA) (Act 74/1982). Section 4(1) of the Internal Security Act stated that an organisation may be declared 'unlawful' if it endangered national security or the maintenance of law and order (4(1a)), the promotion or furthering of communism (4(1b)), if it was deemed to be controlled by an organisation under section (a) or (b) or if it was furthering the aims of a banned organisation. The vague definition of each section gave the government sweeping powers to declare organisations unlawful. See *Government Gazette*, 9 June 1982.

¹⁶³ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011.

launched in early 1987.¹⁶⁴ Its key aim was to organise unemployed, religious and working youth and to politically conscientise them.¹⁶⁵ Goba explains that one of the reasons for this delay was the inability of the local leadership to allocate sufficient time to organise the formation of VAYCO. Motubatsi added that the process of establishing structures was hampered due to frequent detentions.¹⁶⁶ VAYCO suffered from a weak presence in other townships than Sebokeng.¹⁶⁷

The Vaal Student Congress (VASCO), was established a year before VAYCO in January 1986.¹⁶⁸ VASCO essentially pursued the same aims as COSAS, was aligned to the charterist movement and was established to keep the student's struggle alive.¹⁶⁹ Many of the founding members of VASCO had been leading members of COSAS.¹⁷⁰ Besides this transition in formal above ground leadership, there was also a confluence with the leadership of two clandestine and militant youth groups: Ace Mates and the Vaal Liberation Movement (VALIMO).¹⁷¹ While the ANC in exile debated the need to ensure that ANC underground cadres were not active in above ground political mobilisation, this awareness was not really entrenched among members of local youth groups.¹⁷² Being in a leadership position of VASCO attracted the attention of the security branch and hence made it much more difficult to successfully conduct covert operations without being detected. Many of VASCO's and VAYCO's members were already in hiding by the time the two organisations were launched, further hampering open political mobilisation and the effective conducting of campaigns.

¹⁶⁴ Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

¹⁶⁵ Interview, Tebogo 'Exec.' Moepadira, Vanderbijlpark, 23 June 2010.

¹⁶⁶ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011.

¹⁶⁷ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011.

¹⁶⁸ UWC MA MCH31, 5032/ L3F23C4, Memorandum: Daniel Tsepo Nhlapo; Themba Goba recalls that VASCO was formed around January 1986, see interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

¹⁶⁹ Interview, Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Boipatong, 16 September 2011.

¹⁷⁰ Interview, Toy Manqa, Vereeniging, 26 May 2011; interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010; interview, Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Boipatong, 16 September 2011.

¹⁷¹ Interview, Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Boipatong, 16 September 2011.

¹⁷² On the ANC debates, see UWC MA MCH01 (Collection of the African National Congress), 47.3, Internal mobilisation, 2.

'Shepherds of change':¹⁷³ The changing role of churches

On 6 September 1984, the SACC and its affiliates held a meeting to discuss the situation in the Vaal Triangle and the East Rand.¹⁷⁴ Bishop Desmond Tutu, General Secretary of the SACC, had organised a series of meetings that included local priests and activists as well as prominent figures of the UDF and the SACC such as Frank Chikane, Allan Boesak and Smangalis Mkhatswa to discuss possible strategies to provide assistance.¹⁷⁵ Briefed by local clergy and community leaders, the SACC harshly condemned police conduct and the insensitivity of local authorities during a press conference in the aftermath of the meeting. It stated that the SACC

1. Records its shock and anger at the irresponsible and uncontrolled action of some members of the South African police, and the manner in which some unruly elements in the areas concerned hijacked a legitimate protest
2. Expresses its distress and concern regarding the manner in which the Government refuses to admit publicly the root causes of the unrest, which can only increase unless genuine grievances are heard and dealt with in a manner, which recognises the human dignity and rights of all South Africans.
3. Calls on all members elected to the House of Representatives and the House of Delegates to resign forthwith, and on those involved in the Government agencies, which are responsible for the unrest to withdraw their participation forthwith.
4. Calls on its member Churches, and all ministers and congregations, to offer the support and the facilities of the Churches to those affected by the unrest.
5. Expresses its solidarity with the tenants, workers, students and parents in their struggle for justice and participatory society.
6. Calls on the Government
 - a) to consult with the acknowledged leaders of the communities and the students concerned;
 - b) to release all people arrested or detained during the recent elections for the House of Representatives and the House of Delegates
7. Pledges itself to pray and strive for society in which the rights and responsibilities of all South Africans are recognised, which this Council believes to be the only permanent answer to the recurring unrest which has become endemic in South Africa ever since June 16th, 1976.¹⁷⁶

A telex sent to Kairos - the Dutch anti-apartheid organisation - by the Transvaal branch of the UDF

¹⁷³ Interview, Patrick Noonan, Sebokeng, 24 March 2010.

¹⁷⁴ WHP AE862, G37.8, Handwritten notes re emergency meeting.

¹⁷⁵ WHP AK2117, S8.10.3, Diary of Events.

¹⁷⁶ WHP AE862, G37.8, Handwritten notes, no title.

highlighted the situation of the local black population in the Vaal and stressed the 'need for transport and assistance to help hungry people in the areas'.¹⁷⁷ Concerned about the escalation of violence in the townships of the Vaal Triangle, the SACC sent telexes to P.W. Botha and cabinet ministers, pleading with them to adopt a sensitive approach towards political protest in the region.¹⁷⁸ The Dependent's Conference and the Justice and Reconciliation Division were of particular importance for monitoring the situation in the townships and for providing financial and moral assistance. During the state of emergency in particular, the SACC became vital in providing help to those who were in detention or in hiding and their families.¹⁷⁹ It provided grants to activists who had to go underground, bursaries to students and financial aid to organise lawyers.¹⁸⁰ On an informal level, churches offered sanctuary and hiding places for those evading the police.¹⁸¹ During the Delmas Treason Trial and the Sharpeville Six Trial, the SACC and its member churches were vital in organising assistance in organising transport to visit the trials, in counselling the defendants and in aiding their families. Furthermore they lobbied for their release and maintained relations to international media, pressure groups and governments.

The other religious body that came to play an increasing role - albeit perhaps more in its function to monitor and provide moral support - was the Catholic Bishop's Conference (SACBC). On the same day as the SACC on 6 September 1984 the administrative board of the SACBC issued a press release, condemning the violence and calling for restraint on all sides.¹⁸² It urged the government to establish a Commission of Inquiry that would look into the causes of the uprising and warned that should grievances not be addressed, similar risings were bound to occur. Both institutions became targets of hit squad activities when their buildings Khotso House in Johannesburg and Khanya House

¹⁷⁷ WHP AK2117, J3.12, AM62, Message to Kairos Holland by UDF Tvl.

¹⁷⁸ WHP AK2117, S8.10.4, Events in the Vaal Triangle.

¹⁷⁹ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011.

¹⁸⁰ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011.

¹⁸¹ Interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 26 July 2010; interview, Dineo 'Mapikoko' Mokoena, Nthabiseng Christina Mofolo and Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Sebokeng, 22 October 2011; interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Johannesburg, 26 May 2011.

¹⁸² VT CPN, Press release, SACBC Administrative Board, 6 September 1984, no reference number.

in Pretoria were blown up by members of the security branch in collaboration with members of Vlakplaas in 1988.¹⁸³

Progressive clergy across South Africa had long played a role in voicing their dissent. The Roman Catholic Churches in Evaton Small Farms and Zone 12 Sebokeng as well as the Anglican Church in Sharpeville had been offering space for political gatherings and had provided assistance in opposing rent increases and negotiating with local authorities from the early 1980s onwards. It was however during the course of the uprising that the local clergy began to play an increasingly important role. Guided by their belief that as clergy they had to be in solidarity with the oppressed, they took a more open political stand. As father Patrick Noonan recalled, they believed that they had to work against an 'evil system', a form of 'social satanism' as he called it during an interview.¹⁸⁴ Discourse on the immorality of apartheid had become particularly prominent with the drafting of a 'status confessionis' by the World Council of Churches in 1982 that declared apartheid to be a sin and its theological justifications heretical. The SACC adopted the statement in its National Conference during the same year.¹⁸⁵

With the collapse of civic structures, a new group of 17 local priests formed the Vaal Ministers Solidarity Group (VMSG) in mid-September 1984.¹⁸⁶ Although the Vaal Triangle Council of Churches had been formed in 1975, the VMSG was perhaps the largest inter-denominational formation of priests that the Vaal had ever seen. Lord McCamel, the former chairman of the VCA, was elected chairman, Edward Lennon became treasurer while Peter Lenkoe acted as secretary. Its tasks included negotiations with local authorities, the organisation of funerals, establishing food relief centres in collaboration with the Red Cross, the organisation of legal aid, monitoring the death toll, supporting

¹⁸³ Interview, Gerrit Erasmus, Johannesburg, 22 May 2006; Truth and Reconciliation, Amnesty Hearings, Khotso and Cosatu House bombings (20 – 31 July 1998), accessed 10 January 2013 at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/am1998.htm>.

¹⁸⁴ Interview, Patrick Noonan, Sebokeng, 24 March 2010.

¹⁸⁵ T.A.Borer, *Challenging the State: Churches as Political Actors in South Africa* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1998) 105.

¹⁸⁶ WHP AG2613 (Records of the SACBC, Justice and Peace Division), F11, A report from the Vaal Triangle; *City Press*, 21 October 1984; *Inter Nos*, December 1984; Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 71-2.

those who were appearing in court, co-ordinating medical aid centres, establishing a relief fund for those who had lost family members during the uprising, monitoring police conduct as well as providing information to the media.¹⁸⁷ By July 1985, the VMSG had collected R17,203 for a relief fund that provided financial assistance to 68 families who lost someone during the uprising.¹⁸⁸

Although most of them were not politically radical, their leadership and presence was vital in providing assistance and sanctuary and to keep the communication with the outside world going. At a time when the security forces were clamping down on political dissent, the clergy's relations with the South African Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches (WCC) proved vital in ensuring that information would reach the media, international pressure groups and foreign governments. On 17 October 1984, British Labour party MP Donald Anderson visited the Vaal on his tour through South Africa.¹⁸⁹ He held discussions with local clergy, community leaders, lawyer Zac Yacoob as well as officials of the UDF including Murphy Morobe at Emmanuel Roman Catholic Church in Zone 14, Sebokeng. Anderson, describing the South African government as 'evil', appeared to be shocked by the occurrences in the Vaal and the high degree of violence that was ravaging the townships.

During the height of the insurrection, the SACBC launched an investigation into police conduct in the townships of the Vaal Triangle and the East Rand. Rumours and allegation of police brutality including rape had been circulating for weeks, creating a deep distrust and apprehension.¹⁹⁰ Allegations of wanton violence by police had emerged in September already when the Health Worker's Association reported cases of people's backs, butts and legs being 'riddled' by buckshot - demonstrating that they had not been facing the police whilst being shot.¹⁹¹ For weeks, the SACBC's

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.; WHP AG2613, F11, A report from the Vaal Triangle; AK2117, S8.10.3, Diary of events.

¹⁸⁸ VT CPN, Vaal Triangle Minister's Solidarity Group Relief Fund, July 1985, no reference number.

¹⁸⁹ Interview, Patrick Noonan, Sebokeng, 24 March 2010; WHP AK2117, S8.10.20, The Vaal Triangle during the Unrest, 1984 – 1985 (September to January) by Rev. Patrick Noonan, 4; *City Press*, 21 October 1984; *The Star*, 18 October 1984.

¹⁹⁰ WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ34, Van der Walt', 41.

¹⁹¹ *Sunday Mirror*, 16 September 1984.

public relations officer Sarah Crowe together with Irish Catholic priests Patrick Noonan and Edward Lennon travelled in and out of the townships at night to identify victims.¹⁹² Eventually around 45 affidavits, verified by advocate Nicholas Haysom, were collected. The result of the investigation was damning: dozens of affidavits attested to violent police conduct, including random sjambokkings and beatings, humiliating behaviour, reckless and at times punitive use of teargas, indiscriminate shootings, participation in looting as well as rape. While the security forces justified their conduct as a necessary way to re-establish public order, allegations of rape undermined such claims.¹⁹³

Other evidence suggests that policemen were laughing, hurling racist abuse and in some instances drinking brandy and coca cola and other liquor as they were assaulting people.¹⁹⁴ Indeed individual stories confirmed the perception that violence was by no means merely used to restore tranquility. Dr. Yosuf Veriava, who treated people in Sebokeng and other areas, pointed out that 'I do not believe that the behaviour of the police is preventative at all. It is punitive in the extreme.'¹⁹⁵ One such incident that demonstrated the punitive nature of police conduct occurred when Jacob Moleleki, a youngster was shot dead at point blank range in a police van after being accused of having stolen a policeman's jacket.¹⁹⁶

By December 1984, enough evidence had been collected to publish the report. It sharply criticised police conduct and concluded that 'the police appeared to believe they were at war'.¹⁹⁷ Patrick Noonan recalls that the booklet was in fact 'a not-so-veiled condemnation of the policing of Brigadier Gerrit Viljoen'.¹⁹⁸ The booklet was launched at a press conference at Khanya House in Pretoria on 6 December 1984 with the support of the body of Catholic bishops. Not surprisingly, the

¹⁹² Interview, Sarah Crowe, Johannesburg, 11 May 2006; interview, Patrick Noonan, Sebokeng, 24 March 2010.

¹⁹³ Interview, Sarah Crowe, Johannesburg, 11 May 2006; An eye-witness account of police conduct can also be found in the *Rand Daily Mail*, 29 November 1984.

¹⁹⁴ WHP A2674, III (344), 'Report on Police Conduct during Township Protests', 23.

¹⁹⁵ WHP A2674, III (344), 'Report on Police Conduct during Township Protests', 29.

¹⁹⁶ WHP AE862, G37.8, 'Repression in a Time of Reform', 20.

¹⁹⁷ WHP A2674, III (344), 'Report on Police Conduct during Township Protests', 28.

¹⁹⁸ Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 114. Colonel Viljoen was promoted to the rank of a Brigadier shortly after the Vaal Uprising.

police denied the allegations, complained that they had not been consulted and accused the bishops of conducting the investigation for 'ulterior purposes'.¹⁹⁹ It was the second time the SACBC published a report criticising the government and its security forces; the first report had challenged the conduct of the South African Defence Force (SADF) in Namibia published in 1982.²⁰⁰ After the release of the report the Methodist Church under the presidency of Peter Storey called for a judicial Commission of Inquiry into police action; however no official inquiry was ever conducted.²⁰¹

A few weeks after the launch of the booklet, on 17 January 1985, the SACBC demonstrated its solidarity and support once more when 28 bishops and cardinals visited Sebokeng to attend mass at Emmanuel Church in Zone 14.²⁰² In what was dubbed 'the mass of the rubber bullet' by a reporter from the *Sunday Times*, symbols of the crisis were displayed including a rent invoice, the booklet on police conduct, school books, a rubber bullet, a teargas canister, a change of clothes (to remember those in detention) and a list of those who had died.²⁰³ Archbishop Denis Hurley in his prayer stated that 'peace had been so severely broken that he stood before God asking for reconciliation'.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 and 8 December 1984.

²⁰⁰ O'Malley Collection, Interview Archbishop Dennis Hurley, conducted by Pdraig O'Malley (6 July 1985), accessed 17 January 2013 at <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv00017/04lv00344/05lv00345/06lv00347.htm>.

²⁰¹ *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 December 1984.

²⁰² Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 129; VT CPN, pamphlet 'Vaal Mass', no reference number.

²⁰³ *Sunday Times*, 27 January 1985; VT CPN, pamphlet outlining the purpose of the Mass, no reference number.

²⁰⁴ *Sowetan*, 29 January 1985.

(II) State response

‘Instigators’, ‘agitators’ and crowds: State explanations of the uprising

On 6 September 1984, the dust had not yet settled and the townships were in a state of chaos, the Minister of Law and Order Louis le Grange spoke at a press conference to comment on the recent upheavals in the Vaal. Le Grange expressed that ‘I’m not convinced that the rent increase is the real reason for the problems we have here. There are individuals and other forces and organisations that are very clearly behind what is happening in the Vaal Triangle.’²⁰⁵ Earlier le Grange had visited the townships of the Vaal in the company of three other ministers - General Magnus Malan, Minister of Defence, F.W. de Klerk, Minister of Internal Affairs and MP for Vereeniging, as well as Dr. Gerrit Viljoen, Minister for Co-operation, Development and Training and MP for Vanderbijlpark. In Sebokeng the group of ministers accompanied by councillors and travelling in an armoured vehicle had to turn around as they were confronted by several hundred local residents who had blocked the road.²⁰⁶

Le Grange was not entirely wrong in thinking that the upsurge of popular protest and mass mobilisation in the Vaal was not merely resulting from the latest rent increases but reflected increasing opposition to the apartheid regime. What le Grange however neither realised nor understood was the severity of socio-economic grievances that that plagued the residents of the townships and the deep implications an increase in rent of R5.90 had on the already tight funds of the black population. A cartoon, published in the *Sowetan* a few days after le Grange’s statement depicted him searching a garbage bin with a magnifying glass to discover ‘the causes of the

²⁰⁵ *The Star*, 7 September 1984; *Sowetan*, 7 September 1984.

²⁰⁶ *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 September 1984.

rioting'.²⁰⁷ Le Grange further alleged that the uprising had been timed to coincide with the introduction of the new constitution.²⁰⁸

Government was thus quick to claim that the United Democratic Front - under the guidance of the ANC and the South African Community Party and in conspiracy with AZAPO and others - had orchestrated the uprising that soon spread to other parts of the country. This claim, as the following chapter will examine, was at the heart of the Delmas Treason Trial and the Pietermaritzburg Treason Trial. Internal minutes of UDF meetings however demonstrate the invalid nature of such claims.²⁰⁹ Three weeks after the beginning of the Vaal Uprising, the UDF stated in an emergency working document that area committees including one in the Vaal Triangle should be set up to strengthen the organisation and provide direction.²¹⁰ In a meeting of the Regional Executive the situation in the Vaal Triangle was referred to as a 'crisis' - highlighting the UDF's attitude that the situation was out of their control.²¹¹ The meeting affirmed the necessity to provide medical and legal assistance as well as 'social work'. During the National Executive Committee Meeting in Johannesburg on 10 and 11 November 1984, the UDF acknowledged its failure to respond to the crisis in the townships and to provide guidance.²¹²

At the core of government discourse was the perception that political, community and student organisations were lacking a broad political constituency - a conviction that informed much of its strategy including the campaign of winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM) in the aftermath of the uprising.²¹³ As Charles Carter describes in his analysis of the Alexandra rebellion of 1986, government

²⁰⁷ *Sowetan*, 19 September 1984.

²⁰⁸ *City Press*, 9 September 1984.

²⁰⁹ J. Seekings, 'Quiescence and the Transition to Confrontation: South African Townships, 1978-1984', (University of Oxford DPhil Thesis, 1990), 243.

²¹⁰ WHP AK2117, J2.3, C118, Emergency UDF working document, 25 September 1984.

²¹¹ WHP AK2117, J2.18, S11, The meeting of the Regional Executive of UDF, held on 4 October 1984.

²¹² WHP A2675, III (869), Minutes of National Executive Committee Meeting, Johannesburg 10 & 11 November 1984.

²¹³ The South African government was by no means the only regime that believed in this multi-pronged approach to pacify insurrectionary areas. Antonius Robben describes similar counter-insurgency strategies employed by the Argentinian military during the insurrectionary period between 1969 and the early 1970s. See

propaganda linked the revolutionary situation to ANC strategies.²¹⁴ To isolate 'agitators' from society, while appeasing the broader population would eventually introduce peace and stability.²¹⁵ This belief was endorsed by local authorities. Esau Mahlatsi, mayor of the Lekoa Town Council was quoted saying that 'troubles' had been caused by 'agitators and instigators'.²¹⁶ At a press conference Mahlatsi claimed that only 3 per cent of the local population participated in protests.²¹⁷ How Mahlatsi arrived at this number remains unknown. He further stated that had there been more police presence, the insurrection could have been averted. The town clerk of the Lekoa Town Council Nicholas Louw supported this view when he stated that only a small group of people in the Vaal Triangle had actively participated in the protests that were 'inspired by subversive elements from outside'.²¹⁸

Patrick Noonan collected the various explanations given by the authorities. Blame was put on local priests when a judge stated in court that 'I have reasons to believe that priests are behind the unrest in the Vaal Triangle', referring to Moselane's role in particular.²¹⁹ Others argued that 'outside instigators' or youth were responsible for the uprising. Quite unexpectedly the Mayor of the Evaton Town Council Sam Rabotapi found another explanation for the recent occurrence. At the funeral of Philemon 'Dutch' Diphoko, Rabotapi allegedly blamed apartheid.²²⁰ From September 1984 onwards, the government thus adopted a three-pronged approach to hamstringing political mobilisation: the use

A.Robben, *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina* (Philadelphia, Pa., 2005), 59-60. The phrase 'winning hearts and minds' was coined during the war between guerrillas and Commonwealth forces in Malaya from 1948 - 1960. The counterinsurgency strategies developed by the British seem to have informed subsequent strategies to a large extent. See S.Miller, 'Malaya: The Myth of Hearts and Minds', *Small Wars Journal* (2012), accessed 10 January 2013 at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/malaya-the-myth-of-hearts-and-minds>. While Miller downplays the role of 'winning hearts and minds', Karl Hack argues for analysis that combines the use of persuasion and force, see K.Hack, 'Everyone Lived in Fear: Malaya and the British Way of Counter-Insurgency', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 23/4-5 (2012), 671-99.

²¹⁴ Carter, 'Community and Conflict', 116.

²¹⁵ Interview, Johan van der Merwe, Pretoria, 18 May 2011; D.Foster, P. Haupt and M. de Beer, *The Theatre of Violence: Narratives of Protagonists in the South African Conflict* (Cape Town and Oxford, 2005), 105 - 125.

²¹⁶ SASPU *National*, 5/7 (September 1984), 4.

²¹⁷ WHP AK2117, S8.10.20, The Vaal Triangle during the Unrest in 1984 - 1985' by Rev. Patrick Noonan.

²¹⁸ WHP AK2243 (State vs Sefatsa and 7 Others), Case No.698/85, A, Vol.1, Testimony Louw, 39.

²¹⁹ WHP AK2117, S8.10.20, The Vaal Triangle during the Unrest in 1984 - 1985' by Rev. Patrick Noonan.

²²⁰ WHP AK2117, S8.10.20.

of heavy-handed repression, limited reforms and concessions on a local level and the stepping up of propaganda to win the Hearts and Minds of the public.

‘A friend does not carry a gun’:²²¹ Operation Palmiet

The thundering sounds of armoured vehicles rudely awakened the local population of Sebokeng. It was 23 October 1984 at around 4.00am in the morning when 7,000 troops of policemen and military conscripts entered Sebokeng in Buffels, a type of armoured vehicle, and immediately began to cordon it off.²²² Operation Palmiet [bullrush] had begun, launched to effectively ‘rid the area of criminal and revolutionary elements’ and to ‘restore law and order’, as le Grange stated.²²³ Bewilderment and anger prevailed as houses were searched and local residents questioned.

According to Nick Miller, a conscript who participated in Operation Palmiet, they were told that their involvement in the townships was resulting from the bad reputation the police had gained and that they were sent in to improve relations between security forces and the local population.²²⁴ The main reason for the deployment of the South African Defence Force (SADF) was, however, to assist the police.²²⁵ They were given leaflets outlining the proper way of addressing the local population and instructing the conscripts how to behave and not to shoot unless their life was under threat.²²⁶

²²¹ Local resident quoted in *SASPU National*, 5/7 (December 1984), 3.

²²² *City Press*, 26 October 1984; *Ecunews*, December 1984, pp.23-24; *Sowetan*, 24 October 1984.

²²³ C.Cooper, J.Shindler, McCaul et.al. *Race Relations Survey: 1984* (Johannesburg, 1985), 751-2.

²²⁴ Interview, Nick Miller, East Rand, 9 May 2006 (name has been changed).

²²⁵ Interview, Magnus Malan, Johannesburg, 10 May 2006. On the structure and role of the SADF see M.Phillips, ‘The Nuts and Bolts of Military Power: The Structure of the SADF’, in J. Cock and L. Nathan (eds.), *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (Cape Town, 1989), 16-27; also see L.Nathan, ‘Troops in the Townships, 1984-1987’, in Cock and Nathan, *War and Society*, 67-78.

²²⁶ SAHA (South African Historical Archive) AL2457 (Original SAHA Collection), E2.4, Background knowledge on insurgency.

Miller remembers the beginning of the army invasion as follows: 'And we were gonna leave at about ten o'clock. We all had our full kit and we were given live ammunition.'²²⁷ At that point, the conscripts did not yet know that their destination was the Vaal Triangle, as Miller recalls:

And we were told we were going into township but we didn't know where. We got up to a freeway, I mean it was dark then, we were on the back of these buffels and it was damn cold as well. [...] And we were also given distinct instructions. To be very friendly to the population. After we started moving, we actually saw, we took a turnoff and it said 'Sebokeng'. And inside the townships [...] for every few meters there would now be a soldier. On every street in Sebokeng.

Police assisted by the soldiers embarked on a house-to-house search. Every ten metres, a soldier was placed to reinforce and support police roadblocks and local residents were only allowed to pass through once they had received red ink on their thumb - signalling that the police were satisfied. An army helicopter, a local resident recalls, was flying over the townships announcing that the army had come to protect the local population.²²⁸ To further the claim that the army was there to assist communities a pamphlet was distributed outlining the different roles that SADF was playing in the townships. In an attempt to portray the military occupation as assistance to local communities, the pamphlet declared 'We are here to promote normal social life, continued education, safe travel, stability, a healthy community, the delivery of food. Trust us.'²²⁹ The pamphlet was also published in the newsletter of the Orange Vaal Development Board, *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, in October 1984 in Sesotho and English.²³⁰ It remains puzzling how white conscripts in combat uniform and armed with rifles could possibly be regarded as anything else but an occupying force by the local population. One woman for example expressed her thoughts: 'A friend does not carry a gun in your house and later detain your son.'²³¹

²²⁷ Interview, Nick Miller, East Rand, 9 May 2006.

²²⁸ Interview, Richard 'Bricks' Mokolo, Orange Farm, 11 May 2006.

²²⁹ *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, October 1984, 6-7.

²³⁰ *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, October 1984, 6-7.

²³¹ *SASPU National*, 5/7 (December 1984), 3.

A letter to le Grange, written by a resident of Evaton, highlight the anger experienced by many. The author demanded that the SADF and the police should leave the townships, described several incidents of excessive and wanton violence by policemen and eventually warned le Grange that 'the frustration caused to blacks is irreparable. I would not like the Minister to be here when blacks obtain their freedom.'²³² As interviewees recalled, they made little differentiation between conscripts in combat uniform and the riot squad - equally in combat uniform. For them, the deployment of the SADF was a declaration of war by the state. One man sarcastically asked whether the military did not understand the difference between fighting a war against the South West Africa People's Organisation in Northern Namibia and raiding the homes of ordinary residents.²³³ Furthermore, rumours began to spread that policemen participating in the raid were helping themselves to food in the houses they searched.²³⁴

By 8.30am, 348 people had been arrested for the possession of drugs, banned literature, unlicensed arms and ammunition and for pass law offences.²³⁵ No evidence could be found of 'terrorist' activities. 'Banned literature' included pornographic material and no copy of Marx' *Das Kapital* could be found, as the British newspaper *The Guardian* sarcastically stated.²³⁶ The report further called Operation Palmiet both 'sinister' and 'silly', stating that the government was 'short on using the airforce against pickpockets' and blaming the 'brutal system of race discrimination' by the South African government for the upheavals in the townships.²³⁷ As Noonan concluded, for the local population, Operation Palmiet would come to symbolise the day 'the army came to catch a thief'.²³⁸ Shortly afterwards, the operation was repeated in Boipatong and Sharpeville.²³⁹ In the afternoon, several senior SAP officers including the Commissioner of Police, General Johan Coetzee flew into

²³² *Rand Daily Mail*, 29 November 1984.

²³³ *City Press*, 26 October 1984.

²³⁴ *The Sunday Star*, 28 October 1984.

²³⁵ *The Star*, 23 October 1984; *Sowetan*, 24 October 1984.

²³⁶ *The Guardian*, 24 October 1984.

²³⁷ *The Guardian*, 24 October 1984.

²³⁸ Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 92.

²³⁹ *The Star*, 24 October 1984.

Sebokeng to evaluate the situation and members of parliament were briefed on the use of troops.²⁴⁰

The onset of heavy rains in the evening of the 24th - typical for this time of the year - finally washed away some the physical marks armoured vehicles had imprinted on the streets. On 13 November, Tembisa and on 22 November Thokoza in the East Rand were sealed off.²⁴¹

Two days after Operation Palmiet, the Regional Executive of the UDF held an emergency meeting to discuss the situation in the Vaal townships.²⁴² Churches were asked to ring their bells in solidarity with Sebokeng's population, a protest meeting was scheduled and a pamphlet drawn up to counter the one distributed by the SADF. During a UDF rally in Cape Town on 26 November Frank Chikane called the deployment of troops 'armed to the teeth against our defenceless people in the Vaal' a reaction to the state's inability to curb protest and further stressed the necessity of armed units in the townships to protect the population.²⁴³ This statement in many ways corresponds with the ANC's call to establish armed units within the country from 1985 onwards.

The presence of troops in the townships became a widespread phenomenon from the mid-1980s onwards and reflected the reality that the SADF was involved in warfare on two fronts: abroad and inside the country. It was a clear indication that the police had lost their coercive power in the townships and were incapable of re-establishing 'law and order'. And it was a show of strength by the state to discourage other areas from joining in the protests. Media reports - besides those with a particularly strong leaning towards government such as the *Citizen* accused the government of using repressive force to quell popular protest. According to the *Financial Mail*, Operation Palmiet was the largest peace-time mobilisation of troops inside South Africa since the miners strike in 1922.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰ *The Star*, 24 October 1984.

²⁴¹ WHP AE862, G37.8, Summary of events and developments which have taken place since the document 'repression in a time of reform' was printed.

²⁴² WHP A2675, III (868), Emergency Regional Executive Meeting of the United Democratic Front held 25/10/1984.

²⁴³ WHP A2675, III (870), Police recording of UDF meeting, Claremont, Cape Town, 26 November 1984.

²⁴⁴ C.Cooper, J.Shindler, McCaul et.al. *Race Relations Survey: 1984* (Johannesburg, 1985), 753.

The US government, increasingly shifting towards a more critical stance towards the apartheid regime, argued that the military occupation put into question the government's willingness to engage with internal problems through reforms and consensus.²⁴⁵ Within South Africa, various progressive institutions and organisations condemned the operation. The South African Council of Churches stated that 'The Government has regrettably, and predictably, responded to the present township unrest with its customary methods' and the Black Sash called it a 'massive pass raid'.²⁴⁶

The Van der Walt report

As mass protests, rent and school boycotts as well as political violence continued, the necessity to determine the roots of local grievances became clear. On 30 November 1984, Sam de Beer, deputy Minister of Education and Development Aid released a press statement to announce that Prof. Tjaart van der Walt, the rector of the University of Potchefstroom had been appointed to head the investigation.²⁴⁷ A few weeks later, on 21 December 1984 van der Walt submitted his original report and an edited version on 18 January 1985.²⁴⁸ It was based on interviews with 137 people and organisations as well as submissions made by various political, educational, religious, community and social organisations. Methodological and ideological constraints however suggest that the report was heavily biased.²⁴⁹

At the heart of the investigation were the causes of the school boycott that had led to the closing down of many of local schools since 3 September 1984. In the governments view, absence from school provided a fertile ground for political activism or 'misguided agitation', as van der Walt

²⁴⁵ *The Star*, 24 October 1984.

²⁴⁶ *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 October 1984; *The Star*, 27 October 1984.

²⁴⁷ WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ34, T. van der Walt, *Report*.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, iii; xiii - xiv.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, iii; *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 December 1984.

phrased it.²⁵⁰ According to van der Walt's findings, schools would resume their normal activities once the broader grievances and the rent question in particular had been resolved.²⁵¹ The report, despite his criticism of local authorities and the conditions in schools and his partially sympathetic stand towards local grievances, reflected government attitude towards popular protest by arguing that pupils had been manipulated and that organisations such as COSAS had no mass support.²⁵² He concluded that early warning signs of discontent had been ignored by local authorities and school officials. This, he pointed out, provided 'ample opportunity for those who wanted to stir up unrest'.²⁵³ In his view, the uprising could have been averted if local authorities had reacted with more sensitivity to local grievances and had communicated with the public at large in a more transparent and open way.²⁵⁴ The most apt summary of his analysis was captured when he stated:

The danger of revolution is not at its greatest when the oppressed have no prospects whatsoever; on the contrary, the danger is greatest when they begin to have hope, when prospects open up to them, when their aspirations and expectations begin to develop, as has been the case over the past year in the Black communities of the Vaal Triangle.²⁵⁵

His analysis of local conditions and grievances confirmed that falling living standards, generally poor living conditions such as low quality housing and a lack of facilities and infrastructures as well as high unemployment and low salaries had created a volatile situation. While dismissing the increases in rent, tariffs and levies as the sole cause leading to the uprising, he acknowledged that the 'over-hastily, unwisely, clumsily and insensitively' handling of the issue by local authorities had caused grievances that eventually ignited the spark.²⁵⁶

Van der Walt's report produced six main findings: the need for better communication and training between the public, town councils and the OVDB, a recommendation to launch an official

²⁵⁰ WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ34, T. van der Walt, *Report*, 1.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

investigation into the composition of municipal rates and levies in comparison with other areas, the need for additional sources of revenue in black townships, the suggestion to allow residents to spread their arrear payments over several months, a recommendation to establish an official enquiry into allegations of corruption and nepotism of local councillors and a call to allow greater political participation of black constituencies in national political decision processes that affected 'their own interests'.²⁵⁷

One of the key issues raised by van der Walt was what he perceived to be a misunderstanding about the role the Orange Vaal Development Board played as well as problems regarding communication between the Lekoa Town Council and the OVDB, their relation to local residents and their inability to take seriously signs of popular discontent. He further alleged that members of the Development Board seemed to conduct their work still in a manner that reflected approaches of the old Administration Boards - with too much emphasis on everyday administrative matters and less focus on development and policy.²⁵⁸ This perception, namely that part of popular protest was caused by lack of knowledge was later reflected in a series on local government in the newsletter of the OVDB, *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*.

With regard to broader political transformation, van der Walt recommended to rethink section 16 of the Immorality Act, a shift from the 99-year leasehold to real homeownership and a change in influx control to tie the legal status of so-called 'immigrants' to their economic status and not race and to develop new urbanisation strategies.²⁵⁹ Thus in van der Walt's analysis, school boycotts, socio-economic grievances and political protest were all linked and could not be disentangled. Key to the pacification of the townships, he believed, was therefore to improve structural conditions and allow the local population a greater say in what was referred to as 'own affairs' so as to diffuse discontent that was a breeding ground for political 'agitators' to stir up protest.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., ix.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 34-6.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 38.

In the aftermath of the report on 2 January 1985, de Beer issued a statement concluding that van der Walt's recommendations were being implemented and applied: the establishment of democratically elected school committees and teacher-parents associations, management training to improve skills of school principals and heads of departments, an abolishment of age restrictions at schools and measures to prevent excessive corporal punishment and unprofessional conduct of teachers (corporal punishment as such was not abolished). De Beer further stressed that means to improve communication and education regarding the workings of local government were being evaluated.²⁶⁰ On 4 January Dr. Gerrit Viljoen stressed the role black local government and municipal service rate increases had played in creating a climate of popular discontent.²⁶¹

The findings of the report were widely rejected by AZAPO and the UDF who argued that 'it was no more than an attempt to justify the failure of the National Party policies'.²⁶² In a statement endorsing the findings of the van der Walt report, Steve Kgame, president of the Urban Bantu Council Association of South Africa (UCASA) argued that not only were residents in the Vaal Triangle uninformed about the workings of local government but that this ignorance was exploited by the UDF and AZAPO. In response, Popo Molefe, public secretary of the UDF called Kgame's statement a 'pinnacle of myopia and ignorance'.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*, vi.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, viii; *The Star*, 4 January 1985.

²⁶² *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 January 1985; *The Star*, 4 January 1985.

²⁶³ *Sowetan*, 11 January 1985; WHP AK2117, J3.12, AM66, UDF press release re UCASA-BLA, 9 January 1985.

Local government

For the time being, progress is out of question and the Municipality will be obliged to borrow money.²⁶⁴

In the aftermath of the uprising with a majority of their houses burnt down and their safety endangered, councillors were relocated to a complex in Zone 10 in Sebokeng and placed under 24-hour guard.²⁶⁵ Many of them remained in what some residents called 'Mahlatsi's Village' for years.²⁶⁶ Councillors in other areas including the East Rand and Alexandra went into hiding as well.²⁶⁷ The Lekoa Town Council and the Evaton Town Council were not the only councils in the country facing heavy opposition. While calls for the resignation of councillors had been circulating prior to the Vaal Uprising, in its aftermath they gained momentum. Eight days after the eruption of mass protest in the townships of the Vaal Triangle, the UDF issued a press statement reaffirming its position that all councillors should resign.²⁶⁸ During the same month, on 11 October 1984 - five weeks after the onset of mass protest - the town clerk of the Lekoa Town Council Nicholas Louw addressed a meeting attended by employers and the press to comment on the crisis of local government. Stating that councillors had no intention of resigning, he confirmed that the conflict had indeed reached a deadlock.²⁶⁹

Despite statements by Esau Mahlatsi and officials of the OVDB that councillors would not resign, by 23 October there were five vacant seats out of 39 in the Lekoa Town Council due to three deaths (Diphoko had been a member of the Evaton Town Council) and two resignations.²⁷⁰ A year later, in September 1985, 11 seats were vacant.²⁷¹ By-elections held in November 1985 produced

²⁶⁴ Esau Mahlatsi quoted in WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ34, T. van der Walt, *Report*, 29.

²⁶⁵ *Rand Daily Mail Extra*, 19 December 1984.

²⁶⁶ *Sowetan*, 4 September 1986.

²⁶⁷ *The Star*, 12 September 1984.

²⁶⁸ WHP A2675, III (867), Press statement, 1984/11/09, Resignation of the Councillors.

²⁶⁹ *Sowetan*, 12 October 1984.

²⁷⁰ WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ25, Minutes of the 9th Ordinary Meeting of the Town Council of Lekoa, 23 October 1984 (the inventory lists the document as missing).

²⁷¹ WHP AK2243, A, Vol.1, Testimony Louw, 23.

only one candidate from Sharpeville.²⁷² Although the Lekoa Town Council never entirely collapsed, elections remained difficult for years to come as candidates feared for their life.²⁷³ A situational report of the security branch from 1988 for example outlined information the police had received of youth in Sharpeville and Sebokeng who allegedly planned to attack candidates with petrol bombs.²⁷⁴ Countrywide 240 councillors had resigned by July 1985 and eight Town Councils had resigned en masse.²⁷⁵ Local authorities across the country were in a state of disarray, demonstrating the impact of mass protests.

Mahlatsi refused to step down, arguing that only his constituency could ask him to resign.²⁷⁶ At the same time he attempted to portray himself as an opponent to apartheid by stating that councillors were also fighting apartheid albeit by different methods.²⁷⁷ Mahlatsi had a reputation for being arrogant and aloof. At the first annual commemoration of the Vaal Uprising, his intransigence was apparent when it was reported that he still failed to understand the causes of the uprising and that he was unwilling to 'move one iota from his position of a year ago'.²⁷⁸

In contrast to him, his two relatives (Paul and Meshack Mahlatsi, who were also councillors) submitted letters of resignation on 10 January 1985. In their letters they cited 'the failure of the Lekoa Town Council to meet the people's grievances' as well as 'lack of decisive powers of the Lekoa Town Council over a.) house rental and b.) land'.²⁷⁹ No mention was made of the corrupt practices that members of the council had been accused of by local residents. According to the *Sowetan*, they argued that they were 'disgusted with the whole set-up. We are not helping the very people we

²⁷² *The Star*, 25 September and 7 November 1985.

²⁷³ *Sowetan*, 14 November 1985; *City Press*, 9 February 1986; *The Star*, 4 April 1986.

²⁷⁴ Police memoranda/ reports 1988, 11, Confidential source.

²⁷⁵ *The Star*, 17 June 1985.

²⁷⁶ *The Sowetan*, 20 September 1984 and 19 June 1985.

²⁷⁷ *The Star*, 26 June 1985.

²⁷⁸ *The Star*, 3 September 1984.

²⁷⁹ WHP AK2117, S8.2, Re: Resignation from Lekoa Town Council; *Sowetan*, 11 January 1985; *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 January 1985; *The Star*, 10 January 1985.

purport to be representing.²⁸⁰ Their resignation was announced during a meeting with representatives at the headquarters of AZAPO in Johannesburg, where Meshack Mahlatsi asked members of the organisation to plead with local communities to accept them back into their fold. George Wauchope, vice president of AZAPO was quoted in the report saying that the two brothers had 'seen the light' and that they should be welcomed back by township residents as 'prodigal sons'.²⁸¹ A press statement released by the UDF called on all remaining councillors to resign and further urged local communities to 'accept the Mahlatsi brothers as sinners who have now repented'.²⁸² The position of councillors who had resigned was not clear-cut to everyone. According to Bongani Mhlobo, the issue of whether or not councillors should be welcomed back into the community led to major disagreements and division within COSAS and the VCA as well as between different townships in 1985. Mhlobo recalled that some of the comrades 'wanted them dead'.²⁸³

Mahlatsi further provoked local dismay when he received P.W. Botha on 4 June 1987 to present him with the Freedom of Lekoa. Local residents were quoted in saying they found it 'absurd' while a spokesperson of the VCA sharply condemned Botha's visit.²⁸⁴ A pamphlet issued by the VCA depicted Mahlatsi presenting Botha with the Freedom of Lekoa in one image and showing him participating in the looting of houses of those who had been evicted.²⁸⁵ Botha, his wife and a group of cabinet ministers were taken on a tour through Sharpeville and Sebokeng, where he addressed an audience at the Mphatlalatsane Hall in Zone 14, Sebokeng.²⁸⁶ One of Sharpeville's pensioners who received a surprise visit by Botha and his entourage summarised his feelings by saying 'I curse the day Botha set his foot on my doorstep - it has made my life a misery'.²⁸⁷ Worried that he might be regarded as a sell-out, he spent restless nights in fear of having his house burnt down.

²⁸⁰ *Sowetan*, 11 January 1985.

²⁸¹ *The Star*, 10 January 1985; *Sowetan*, 11 January 1985.

²⁸² WHP AK2117, J3.12, AM67, Press release on the resignation of Lekoa councillors, 9 January 1985.

²⁸³ Interview, Bongani Mhlobo, Vereeniging, 12 July 2010 (name has been changed).

²⁸⁴ *The Star*, 1 and 3 June 1987.

²⁸⁵ WHP AK2117, G3.9.1.6, Pamphlet by the VCA.

²⁸⁶ *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, June 1987, 6.

²⁸⁷ *Weekly Mail*, 12 – 18 June 1987.

Despite widespread calls for the scrapping of the Town Council system, the apartheid government continued to endorse the devolution of power to the third tier, as Viljoen emphasised in his speech at a function of the OVDB in Sebokeng on 27 October 1984.²⁸⁸ To improve their reputation and combat malpractice, councillors signed a code of conduct and made an oath of allegiance, in July 1985.²⁸⁹ UCASA's deputy president Tom Boya, the Mayor of Daveyton in the East Rand, urged all councillors to refrain from practices that brought local authorities into disrepute.²⁹⁰ In 1985, major reforms were announced in the Regional Service Council Act, which introduced multi-racial councils that aimed to integrate the white municipalities and the black town councils.²⁹¹ It was part of a new series of reforms that had been pursued since late 1984.²⁹² The other key pillars included a restructuring of labour control and influx regulations, and a change in regional development strategies through industrial decentralisation.

Breaking the rent boycott?

Shortly after the beginning of the uprising, Esau Mahlatsi announced that the R5.90 rent increase that had triggered the uprising would not be scrapped but that special provisions were made for those who could not afford it.²⁹³ This statement was revoked when a special meeting of the Lekoa Town Council on 18 September 1984 decided that no increase in services charges, electricity and water tariffs or any other tariffs would be implemented until the end of the financial year on 1 July 1985.²⁹⁴ The budget report of 1984/85 stated that 'it is bad financial policy not to implement the

²⁸⁸ *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, November/ December 1984, 1.

²⁸⁹ *The Star*, 18 July 1985; also see *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, June 1985, 1.

²⁹⁰ *Sowetan*, 18 July 1985.

²⁹¹ *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, May 1986, 6-7.

²⁹² W.Cobbett, D. Glaser, et al. (1988), 'A Critical Analysis of the South African State's Reform Strategies in the 1980s', in P.Frankel, N.Pines et al. (eds.), *State, Resistance and Change in South Africa* (London, 1988), 19-51.

²⁹³ WHP AK2117, S8.10.4, Events in the Vaal Triangle by Lisa Seftel.

²⁹⁴ SAHA AL2457, 6.2, Town Council of Lekoa, revision of the 1984/85 budget; VT CPN, Letter by the Town Clerk of the Lekoa Town Council, N.P. Louw, 23 October 1984, no reference number.

increase of R5.90' yet the councillors had little choice.²⁹⁵ The alternative budget saw major cut backs on development and infrastructure.²⁹⁶ A letter by Nicholas Louw to announce the shelving of increases threatened residents by stating that 'refusal to pay their monthly dues will result in the losing of their houses through legal proceedings, the disconnection of electricity, the ceasing of refuse removal, sewage disposal and the maintenance of houses, roads and water reticulation.'²⁹⁷

By that time, a scrapping of the R5.90 increase was seen as insufficient by many local residents who demanded a reduction to R30 in Sharpeville and R34 in other areas.²⁹⁸ The figure had been calculated by local leaders by taking the basic house rental and adding levies for services that were believed to be justified.²⁹⁹ A majority of the township population had embarked on a total rent boycott from 3 September onwards. Although the scrapping of rent increases followed the initial demands of local residents, cut backs on capital projects in areas that already suffered from poor infrastructure and service delivery did little to enhance the quality of urban life or attitudes towards local government. Widespread debates about the nature of local government, the provision of services and the affordability of rent produced localised understandings of what was considered to be fair, reasonable and affordable. In many ways, the issues and grievances that had inspired mass mobilisation transcended parochiality and informed a mass-based discourse about the socio-economic and political order that local residents were striving for. It was a time when a new order was being imagined and debates around socio-economic rights, freedom, justice and accountability gained new momentum. These debates from 1984 onwards shaped the way that the local population of the Vaal Triangle became a political community. Popular discourses thus demanded a subsidy of

²⁹⁵ SAHA AL2457, 6.2, Budget [of the Lekoa Town Council] 84/85.

²⁹⁶ SAHA AL2457, 6.2, Budget [of the Lekoa Town Council] 84/85.

²⁹⁷ VT CPN, Letter by the Town Clerk of the Lekoa Town Council, N.P. Louw, 23 October 1984, no reference number.

²⁹⁸ Interview, Oupa Mareletse, Johannesburg, 30 June 2010.

²⁹⁹ VT CPN, Pamphlet on costs, no reference number.

urban services for black communities by the central state.³⁰⁰

The total boycott of payment for rents and service levies and tariffs proved to be an enormous fiscal blow for local government, which had been suffering from a lack of revenue prior to the boycott. The town treasurer of the Lekoa Town Council calculated that while the council had been short of R341,932 per month between January and August 1984, by November 1986 the deficit was almost R2 million per month.³⁰¹ To prevent a complete financial collapse of local government, the Lekoa Town Council introduced a stop order system in November 1984 under Proclamation 186 of 1967 that would allow them to deduct rent directly from people's salaries, without the consent of employees.³⁰² By late November, out of 30,500 households under the jurisdiction of the Lekoa Town Council, 18,000 had received notices that money for rent and tariffs would be deducted from their wages.³⁰³ According to a report in the *Financial Mail*, local employers were hesitant to implement the order for fear of shop-floor mobilisation and because the legality of such action was questionable.³⁰⁴ Proclamation 168 was revoked in March 1985 for fear of mass resistance and strikes.³⁰⁵

On 16 January 1985, employers in the commercial and industrial sector met with representatives of the OVDB and the Department of Co-operation and Development to find new ways to recover rental arrears. Eventually in April 1985, 4,000 letters were sent to local employers asking them to deduct rent from wages, this time with the consent of employees.³⁰⁶ The arrears that had accumulated since September 1984 were to be collected over a period of 12 months.³⁰⁷ Eight months into the boycott 16,000 households were in arrears, owing a total of R13,169,927.97.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁰ With the introduction of Community Councils in 1977 and the passing of the Black Local Authorities Act of 1982, councils were required to finance themselves through funds generated in the townships. See pages 48 and 50-51.

³⁰¹ WHP AK2117, G2.1.16, Verklaaring EHK Matthysen.

³⁰² WHP AK2243, A, Vol.1, Testimony Louw, 44; *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 December 1984.

³⁰³ *Rand Daily Mail*, 30 November 1984.

³⁰⁴ *Financial Mail*, 4 January 1985; *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, April 1985, 2.

³⁰⁵ WHP AK2243, A, Vol.1, Testimony Louw, 44-5; Letter by SJ de Beer, published in the *Sowetan*, 10 July 1985.

³⁰⁶ *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, April 1985, 2.

³⁰⁷ *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 March 1985.

³⁰⁸ *Hansard*, 30 April 1985, Col.1340-41.

Monthly loss was calculated at around R2 million, electricity arrears alone amounted to R500,000 per month.³⁰⁹ Such figures suggest that the boycott was supported by around 60 to 70 per cent of the local population.³¹⁰ By 1986, according to Mark Swilling, around 500,000 households in 54 townships across South Africa were participating in the rent boycott, costing the state R40 million a month.³¹¹

Failing to break the boycott, local authorities sent out letters in October 1985 warning residents of pending legal action should they continue to boycott the payment of rent and service tariffs.³¹² Selected residents in stable employment would be served with summons to appear in court.³¹³ However, by that time residents owed several months of rent and service tariffs could not afford to pay off arrears. The Vaal Triangle Trade Union Co-ordinating Committee (VTUCOC) warned that legal action against rent defaulters could lead to renewed violence and shop-floor unrest.³¹⁴ VTUCOC, including six trade unions and representing around 30,000 workers in the region had been involved in negotiations with the Vaal Chamber of Commerce and major industries since June in order to find a solution to stalemate.³¹⁵

A few weeks later, in November 1985 the chief director of the OVDB D.C. Ganz stated that the fiscal crisis had crippled the council to an extent that it could not longer meet its payment to the Rand Water Board and Eskom, creating severe health hazards.³¹⁶ Funds earmarked for development and maintenance had been used to provide basic services. According to Louw, the Town Councils were running out of funds.³¹⁷ The failure to collect night soil on a regular basis in those areas that relied on the bucket system in particular caused not only disgruntlement but proved a hygienic

³⁰⁹ *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 January 1985; *Sowetan*, 20 January 1986.

³¹⁰ WHP AK2243, A, Vol.1, Testimony Louw, 23.

³¹¹ Swilling, 'The United Democratic Front and Township Revolt', 107.

³¹² *Sowetan*, 24 October & 1 November 1985.

³¹³ *The Star*, 1 November 1985.

³¹⁴ *Sowetan*, 25 October 1985.

³¹⁵ *Sowetan*, 21 August 1985.

³¹⁶ *The Star*, 21 November 1985.

³¹⁷ *Sowetan*, 18 June 1986.

disaster.³¹⁸ As a result, government adopted a multi-pronged approach to collect outstanding rents, tariffs and levies.³¹⁹ In December 1985 it presented a document titled 'Strategy for the collection of arrear rental and service charges' to the media. The document - in line with government policy reflecting in the growing importance of Joint Management Centres to bring economic, security, administrative and political bodies together - suggested a combined use of the courts, police and community guards to enforce payments³²⁰.

By August 1986, Louw stated that 1,800 eviction orders had been authorised by Magistrate's Courts in Vereeniging and Vanderbijlpark and residents would be evicted in groups of 13 on a weekly basis by the newly established municipal police force.³²¹ Municipal police had come to play an increasing role in breaking the rent boycott. By September 1986, 315 municipal policemen had been trained at the Vaal Triangle training college, based in Sebokeng.³²² Furniture was either locked inside the house, removed to the yard or in some instances taken away to defray costs, only to be given back if rent arrears were paid off.³²³ Houses were placed under the guard of municipal police to prevent families from moving back in. Insult was added to injury when by March 1986, 42 heads of household were imprisoned for 30 days for not paying rent³²⁴. 2,000 households had been served with summons; other figures suggest that as many as 7,500 households were affected.³²⁵

Local organisations including the Sharpeville Civic Association and the VCA maintained that the payment of rents would only be resumed once their demands were met.³²⁶ To aid those imprisoned, legal action was sought by the Vaal Civic Association whose lawyer argued that the summons were

³¹⁸ *Sowetan*, 11 January 1985.

³¹⁹ WHP AK2117, J4.15, AAQ23, Town Council of Lekoa, Executive Committee, Fifteenth Special Meeting (this document is listed as 'missing' in the inventory).

³²⁰ *The Star*, 20 December 1985; *Business Day*, 20 December 1985; *Sowetan*, 19 December 1985; *The Star*, 19 December 1985.

³²¹ *The Star*, 12 August 1986; *Sowetan*, 11 August 1986.

³²² *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, September 1986, 1.

³²³ *Sowetan*, 19 August 1986; *The Star*, 13 August 1986.

³²⁴ *The Star*, 18 March 1986.

³²⁵ *City Press*, 2 March 1986.

³²⁶ *City Press*, 2 February and 16 March 1986.

legally questionable.³²⁷ On the 21 October 1986, the VCA's application to have the evictions stopped was heard in the Rand Supreme Court.³²⁸ A few days later, in late November 1986, eight out of 35 families that had been evicted had been allowed to move back into their homes after litigation at the Rand Supreme Court.³²⁹

By 1987, when Frankel conducted his field study, 84.9 per cent of the respondents indicated that they had had problems in the past paying rent and rates in the past, with an overwhelming 42.7 per cent explaining it as a result of insufficient funds.³³⁰ A further 84.6 per cent felt that the rent and services charges were 'unfair' while a staggering 97.3 per cent said they were not paying rent at the time of the survey.³³¹ The high number of participants in the rent boycott suggests that indeed the boycott had gained in support and perhaps that a certain percentage of respondents falsely claimed to participate in the boycott. 51.6 per cent of those who supported the rent boycott said they did so due to insufficient funds, 20.2 per cent because they feared to be 'attacked by supporters' if they paid rent, 20.5 per cent cited inadequate housing and services while 4.4 per cent supported the boycott because of police and army presence in the townships.³³² By that stage, 90.9 per cent felt that the Lekoa Town Council did not represent the interests of local residents, with a vast majority associating the council with corruption and misuse of funds - respondents overwhelmingly felt that the fiscal crisis was not the reason why the council failed to provide adequate services.³³³ Frankel concluded that for a majority of respondents political and economic reasons for supporting the boycott were inseparable.³³⁴

³²⁷ *City Press*, 6 April 1986.

³²⁸ *Sowetan*, 2 October 1986.

³²⁹ *Sowetan*, 25 November 1986.

³³⁰ WHP AK2117, S8.10.12, Frankel, 'Socio-economic Conditions, Rent Boycotts and the Local Government Crisis: A Vaal Triangle Field Study', 1, 18-9.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 21-4.

³³² *Ibid.*, 33-44.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 51-5.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 81-5

A report in the *New York Times* a few months prior had alleged that the rent boycott was 'enforced' by youth activists who threatened to burn down the houses of those paying rent.³³⁵ According to the report, activists stated that they had informers at the rent office and would thus know who didn't participate in the rent boycott. Whether or not this claim was true remains difficult to establish; however, rumours of such knowledge certainly discouraged those who considered paying rent. In September 1986, the house of the town clerk Nicholas Louw - who had become particularly unpopular - was petrol bombed, causing damage of around R2,500.³³⁶ In contrast to the spate of petrol bombings in the townships, the attack on Louw's house was a rare exception for it occurred in a white residential area of Vanderbijlpark.

Besides repressive measures to recover rent arrears, local government embarked on a propaganda campaign to enhance the reputation of the Town Councils and to discredit political organisations. Part of the winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM) campaign, this was in line with the findings of van der Walt's investigations who had argued that local communities were misinformed about the function and workings of local government and the OVDB. The propaganda campaign included the 're-education' of youth in special youth camps as well as the use of media to improve the image of local authorities.³³⁷ In 1985 the OVDB launched the Eagle's Clubs, formed to organise youth activities and, as local residents soon found out, secretly engaged in a propaganda campaign that aimed to keep the youth out of politics and influence their opinion about the rent boycotts. Similar attempts to break the rent boycott by 're-educating' the youth were done in other parts of the country.³³⁸

³³⁵ *New York Times*, 25 August 1986.

³³⁶ *The Star*, 29 September 1986.

³³⁷ *The Star*, 19 December 1985.

³³⁸ 'WHP AK2117, S8.2.1, Sukses met betrekking tot huurinvordering van die Wes-Transvaalse Ontwikkelingsraad deur middel van jeugdiges.

Declaring the 'Year of the Youth', the OVDB had been given 37,000 Rand by the Department of Co-operation and Development to organise activities for the youth in 1985.³³⁹ In September 1986, two camps were organised for the Sebokeng Hostel club and the Sharpeville club in Qwa-Qwa and Bultfontein near Rustenburg.³⁴⁰ Besides 're-education', the Evaton Eagle club launched a cleaning campaign and its members were photographed loading garbage onto a wheelbarrow.³⁴¹ In the early 1990s, reports leaked that the Eagle's Clubs had been funded under Strategy 44 of Military Intelligence and channelled through the local Joint Management Centre (JMC).³⁴² Compared to the youth activists and street committees membership of local Eagle's Clubs was small in number.

To improve the reputation of local authorities, monthly features were published in the newsletter of the OVDB on how to improve leadership and administrative skills. Two courses, each running for two weeks, were organised.³⁴³ Monthly articles further explained the history, structures and working of the Lekoa Town Council.³⁴⁴ Reporting mainly in English with occasional features in Afrikaans and Sesotho, the newsletter had a distinct conservative and propagandist undertone. Prior to 1984, it had mostly reported on domestic issues, sports and cultural events and positive activities of the OVDB and the Town Councils. Besides propaganda in publications, the OVDB used Radio Sesotho to broadcast information on local government.³⁴⁵

From 1985 onwards, the publication reflected the broader propaganda war of the government by quoting the bible, denouncing communism and condemning political violence. Three features in particular highlight this shift. Between January and March 1985, Dr. Dawie Marx reported on his travels to communist Hungary and East Germany.³⁴⁶ Marx, a political scientist from Bloemfontein who was in charge of the national scheme of youth 're-education', was perhaps unaware of the irony

³³⁹ *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, May 1985, 9.

³⁴⁰ *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, September 1986, 10.

³⁴¹ *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, October 1986, 8.

³⁴² Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 131-2.

³⁴³ *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, February 1986, 5.

³⁴⁴ *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, January 1985 – February 1986.

³⁴⁵ WHP AK2117, S8.2.1, Letter to Mnr Spangenberg, from AJ Watson, Radio Sesotho.

³⁴⁶ *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, January 1985; *ibid.*, March 1985, 9.

when he emphasised the oppressive and militaristic nature of both states as well as the dire living conditions.³⁴⁷ For the majority of black South Africans, the descriptions must have sounded all too familiar. Another report entitled 'Communism enters its "terminal phase" in Soviet Union', written for the CIA by National Intelligence Council and published in the February issue of the same year, outlined in no uncertain terms that communist regimes were allegedly collapsing.³⁴⁸

(III) Conclusion

The Vaal Uprising and its aftermath demonstrated that popular struggles and mass mobilisation could change the political balance in South Africa and tilt hierarchies of power. The state's dependence on partial co-operation from the broader population to maintain power made it susceptible to being undermined by mass mobilisation. Once the large majority of the local population partially withdrew its co-operation local government was in a severe state of crisis while the central state had to make limited concessions.

When the uprising started the government believed to be in control; however, escalating violent confrontations soon proved otherwise. Local authorities came under attack on several fronts: violent confrontations led to the departure of councillors from the townships while the rent boycott financially crippled the Lekoa Town Council. The rent boycott that had begun on 3 September continued and gained in support. Even prior to the uprising, local government was in a deep fiscal crisis; without the payment of rent – one of the most important sources of revenue in the townships

³⁴⁷ Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 131.

³⁴⁸ *Bula Ditaba tsa Lekoa*, February 1985, 4.

– the fiscal crisis deepened. Soon after the beginning of the uprising, rent increases were scrapped. For local authorities and government in Pretoria, the Vaal Uprising was a major blow and a serious embarrassment as it demonstrated mass-based rejection of the reform strategies.

The heavy-handed repression of the uprising, together with escalating violence soon led to a situation that was marked by a breakdown of the social order. Organisational capacities of the Vaal Civic Association were in a state of disarray as the majority of civic leaders went into hiding, left the country or were detained. In spite of organisational difficulties, the Vaal Uprising heralded the beginning of mass mobilisation that was difficult to crush. On 24 October 1984, several thousand troops cordoned off Sebokeng in an attempt to restore ‘law and order’. However, military occupation – despite a short-term pacification – had an unintended effect: it further conscientised and radicalised local communities who felt that the state had declared war on them. Similarly, escalating police brutality contributed towards an increasing awareness that the regime showed little restraint in stifling popular protests.

The vacuum of leadership provided space for a more militant youth leadership to occupy the political space. Furthermore, clergy came to play an increasing role in providing assistance, leadership and support. The new COSAS leadership that emerged in the aftermath of the uprising was militant and younger than the previous generation. Their political subjectivities were shaped by experiences of harsh repression and violence.

From 1985 onwards, a new series of reforms aimed to appease the black majority; however, by that stage, the capacity of the apartheid regime to govern the townships was profoundly challenged. As of 1 July 1986, the apartheid government finally abolished one of the most hated pieces of legislation that had impacted on the lives of millions of South Africans and had been cause

the breaking up of families, pain and continuous fear of being 'endorsed out': the pass laws.³⁴⁹ The crumbling of this key pillar of apartheid together with the increasing ungovernability of the townships were clear indications that the government's power base was under severe threat.

³⁴⁹ See footnote 3, page 27; W.Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (2nd edn. Oxford, 2001), 268.

CHAPTER FIVE

‘Siyayinyova’:¹

Towards a People’s War

1984 - 1986

And our mother was staying at home crying about us. Even if we are going to school they say ‘you, are you going to come back?’²

It’s a struggle where very little was asked and very little was said.³

The sound of breaking glass interrupted the night. A bottle filled with petrol, sand and Sunlight soap came smashing through the window and exploded with a short bang in the house of Constable Jeremiah Matshola of the security branch in Zone 13, Sebokeng. Within seconds the smell of burning curtains mixed with the pungent odour of petrol filled the air. Flames started to engulf the house and reduced its interior to a charred ruin. Several houses of policemen were burnt down that night. According to an interviewee, it was 26 June 1985, the day of the annual commemoration of the Freedom Charter and less than a month before P.W. Botha was to declare a nationwide state of emergency to

¹ Siyayinyova loosely translated means ‘we are defiantly fighting’ or alternatively ‘we will destroy’. It implies an expectation of confrontation and challenge, see interview, Roy Matube, Vanderbijlpark, 17 June 2010 and telephone conversation with Khulu Malindi, 16 August 2012.

² Quote Dineo ‘Mapikoko’ Mokoena, see interview, Dineo ‘Mapikoko’ Mokoena, Nthabiseng Christina Mofolo and Lekgotla ‘Ace’ Motaung, Sebokeng, 22 October 2011.

³ Interview, Tsietsi ‘Stompi’ Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

curb mass protest and reinstate 'law and order'.⁴ Seven years earlier in 1978, Matshola's house had gone up in flames for the first time. As the house was catching fire, a newspaper report described, a person came out of the house 'screaming and shouting.'⁵ While the attack in 1978 was a rare exception in the Vaal, by 1985 incidents of arson had become widespread.

The petrol bombing of Matshola's house was by no means an isolated incident. From late 1984 onwards youth waged a war of attrition against policemen and informers as well as anyone who was regarded to be collaborating with the regime. Security branch members claim that the targetting of members of the black security branch in particular became a major issue for the police as they could no longer protect their members living in the townships, on whom they depended to access knowledge and information.⁶ Between January and June 1987 for example, the police recorded 38 incidents of petrol bombings and arson, 31 incidents of 'intimidation' and 39 stonings in the region.⁷ In addition, units of the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) admitted to killing ten policemen in Sharpeville in 1986.⁸ On a national level, between March 1984 and November 1985, approximately 500 houses of policemen were allegedly burnt down.⁹ The councillors, as discussed in chapter four, had by that time already been relocated to a guarded complex in Zone 10 in Sebokeng.

While arson and other forms of political violence had occurred prior to 3 September 1984 in the Vaal, it had not been a widespread tactic. The insurrection that started with the protests in Tumahole in July 1984 and the Vaal Uprising in September of the same year reflected the perception of many that the South African government could only be brought to its knees through a combination of older repertoires

⁴ Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010. Police claim that the incident occurred in July 1985.

⁵ *Rand Daily Mail*, 23 June 1979.

⁶ Interview, Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011 (names have been changed); interview, Johan van der Merwe, Pretoria, 18 May 2011.

⁷ University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers (WHP) AK2117 (State v Baleka and 21 Others), Case No.482/85, G2.3.7, Christiaan Lodewyk Prinsloo, Onluste-Eenheid Vanderbijlpark verklaar.

⁸ T. Lodge, *Sharpeville. An Apartheid Massacre and its Consequences*, (Oxford, 2011), 298.

⁹ C.Cooper, J.Shindler, C.McCaul et al. (eds.), *Race Relations Survey: 1985* (Johannesburg, 1986), xxxiii.

of protest such as strikes, boycotts and public protests and more militant forms that included the use of political violence. This perception was shaped by the relative success of the Vaal Uprising, which demonstrated that attacks on councillors resulted in their leaving the townships while the government had to make certain concessions such as the scrapping of rent increases. Furthermore, increasing repression, terror and brutality by the security forces, together with years of deprivation and oppression, contributed towards a state of mind amongst many young people marked by anger, frustration and impatience. Meanwhile the ANC's call to make the country ungovernable and apartheid unworkable coalesced with - albeit limited - infiltration of MK cadres and weapons into the country. However, the relation between local campaigns and strategies of protest and the broader strategies of the ANC in exile were not as clear cut and immediate as Anthea Jeffery argues in her recent book.¹⁰

As pressure on the apartheid regime mounted, the security forces increasingly resorted to covert operations and the use of hit squads. The use of torture, intrinsic to the workings of the security branch, continued while the terror unleashed by the security forces in the townships, political violence against those deemed collaborators, vigilante attacks and clashes between various political groups contributed towards a context in which life for many was heavily shaped by experiences of violence and fear. Within a context of widespread fear and terror, political violence can therefore not be disentangled from the emotional and psychological state of mind that apartheid rule had created. To confront the apartheid regime necessitated the overcoming of fear - fear of death, fear of assault, fear of being 'endorsed out' and fear of detention and torture. Hence besides the strategic use of violence to achieve particular goals, militancy further reflected a state of mind that resulted from subjective experiences of repression and state violence. Hence while state repression was aimed to stifle political protests, it had unintended

¹⁰ A. Jeffery, *People's War: New Light on the Struggle for South Africa* (Johannesburg, 2009). Jeffery has been widely criticised for her heavy bias against the ANC, see M. Maharaj in *The Sunday Times*, 13 September 2009; Jeffery's response was published a week later, see A. Jeffery, 'The Truth will out, Mac Maharaj' in *Sunday Times*, 20 September 2009.

consequences and further radicalised the younger generation in particular.¹¹

By 1985 and 1986, the prisons were full of children and teenagers. In December 1986, 59 per cent of detainees were children under the age of 18.¹² Other statistics estimate that between June 1986 and June 1987, around 40 per cent of the emergency detainees were younger than 18.¹³ Their trials attracted publicity as well as funding through the International Defense and Aid Fund (IDAF). And while many of the detainees had been guided by their political beliefs and their assessment of appropriate strategies, they were not always regarded as political prisoners by the state. Many of the young detainees were arrested for public violence and related offences such as arson, malicious damage to property and intimidation. Public violence, often vaguely defined, fell under common law. It constituted an offence against 'public order' and not the state.¹⁴

As Clive Plasket points out, the doctrine of common purpose was interwoven with the definition of public violence.¹⁵ Any member of a group throwing stones could therefore be held liable for the action of others. Given the increasingly violent nature of collective action – often triggered and exacerbated by police conduct - the law thus allowed for the detention of anyone who had participated in collective action that included violent confrontation. Sentences were harsh and usually ranged from three to seven years of imprisonment.¹⁶

¹¹ It is interesting to note that senior policemen were – to some extent at least – aware of the radicalising effect of repression and the need for political solutions to address political grievances. It further highlights the differences in the way the security forces and politicians viewed the political situation in the country. See for example interview, Johan van der Merwe, Pretoria, 18 May 2011 and D. Foster, P. Haupt and M. de Beer, *The Theatre of Violence: Narratives of Protagonists in the South African Conflict* (Cape Town and Oxford, 2005), 116-7.

¹² WHP A2084 (Helen Suzman Papers), Ad6.1.2.1, DPSC Report on Detentions.

¹³ WHP A2084, Ad6.1.2.1, Review of 1987: DPSC report.

¹⁴ C. Plasket, 'Sentencing in Cases of Public Violence', in C. Manganyi and A. du Toit (eds.), *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa* (Basingstoke, 1990), 326-340.

¹⁵ Ibid., 327.

¹⁶ *The Star*, 10 December 1984.

The boundaries between what the state defined to be political and common law offences were therefore artificial, blurred and erratic.¹⁷ As Natacha Filippi has pointed out, the legal framework of the apartheid state constructed the black population as the criminal other.¹⁸ The question of whether or not violence was contingent or planned was often at the heart of legal battles. While young comrades were detained and charged in Magistrate's Courts, two other dramas were unfolding in the court rooms: the trial 'State vs Baleka and 21 Others', widely known as the Delmas Treason Trial and the trial 'State vs Sefatsa and 7 Others', popularly referred to as the Sharpeville Six Trial. At the heart of both trials was the relation between crowd behaviour and violence and, in the case of the Delmas Treason Trial, the role of leadership in shaping popular protests. The main charge in the Delmas Treason Trial was high treason – an offence that fell under common law as well.¹⁹ As Dennis Davis has argued, the increasing use of the charge of treason criminalised popular resistance and equated it with a 'threat to the law as such'.²⁰ Davis has further pointed out that the emphasis on common law charges allowed the government to depict the UDF and civic structures as 'violent and criminal in terms of the normal framework of the legal system'.²¹ It was part of the government's propaganda war that aimed to discredit political opposition. Alternative charges included sedition, terrorism, subversion and furthering the aims of an unlawful organisation. The eight accused in the Sharpeville Six Trial on the other hand were charged with murder, a common law offence and subversion, a statutory offence, with alternative charges of intentional damage to property and arson.²²

¹⁷ N. Filippi, 'Deviance, Punishment and Logics of Subjectification during Apartheid: Insane, Political and Common-law Prisoners in a South African Gaol', *Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS)*, 37/3 (2011), 630. The refashioning of law during this period warrants further research.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 629-30.

¹⁹ WHP AK2117, L5, Judgement, 83.

²⁰ D. Davis, 'Violence and the Law: the Use of the Censure in Political Trials in South Africa', in Manganyi and du Toit (eds.), *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa*, 313.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 315.

²² WHP AK2243 (State v Sefatsa and 7 Others), Case No.698/85, A, Vol.1, Indictment, 1-4.

(I) Narratives on trial: Courts, violence and the discourse on protest

‘If this is treason...’: Delmas or 437 days in court

We view the present trial as only an interim episode. [...] At some future date black and white South Africans will take a second look at these moments in our history. [...] They will vindicate us.²³

The photograph, taken in 1986, shows 22 smiling men.²⁴ Differing in age, they share a number of commonalities: they are all male, black and mostly residents of the various townships of the Vaal Triangle. Their attire is smart for the men are dressed in suits and ties. Yet despite their apparent joviality, the situation is rather grim. The brick wall that serves as a backdrop to the picture is the court in Delmas, a small town two hours drive north of Johannesburg. Neither the faces nor the postures of the men betray the exhaustion, pain and despair they must have felt at that time. The men were standing trial for high treason, a capital offense for which the death penalty was normally imposed. The state prosecution alleged, in addition to charges of treason, that some of the accused – Patrick Monsiuoa ‘Terror’ Lekota and Gcina Malindi in particular, were directly responsible for the death of councillors in the townships of the Vaal on 3 September 1984. Advocate Fick, the senior assistant to P.P. Jacobs, one of the two assessors of Judge van Dijkhorst, had apparently predicted the death sentence for Lekota and Malindi.²⁵

While both accused and witnesses came from diverse backgrounds, the voices of youth activists are conspicuously absent from the court rooms. Although some of the trialists had been involved in the activities of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), neither prosecution nor defence focussed in great detail on the activities of COSAS. The new crop of leaders and members, some of them barely 16,

²³ WHP AK2117, S7.1, Handwritten letter by Patrick Monsiuoa ‘Terror’ Lekota to the British Ambassador.

²⁴ With many thanks to Sekwati Mokoena, one of the Delmas trialists, for discussing the photograph with me. According to Mokoena, the photograph had been commissioned by Black Sash. It was used for posters in support of the trialists.

²⁵ G. Bizos, *Odyssey to Freedom: A Memoir by the World-Renowned Human Rights Advocate, Friend and Lawyer to Nelson Mandela* (Houghton, 2007), 445-446.

were neither charged nor asked to give testimony thus masking the complexity of the Vaal Uprising by silencing the role of the youth. Advocate George Bizos recalled that to call the many potential witnesses into the witness box would have extended the length of the trial 'beyond reasonable bounds'.²⁶

Of the 22 men who were standing trial, 17 were local leaders from the Vaal Triangle, two of the accused came from Soweto while Popo Molefe, Moss Chikane and Patrick 'Terror' Lekota came to be known at the 'UDF three'. While the majority of the accused broadly subscribed to the charterist principles of organisations such as the Vaal Civic Association, an affiliate of the United Democratic Front (UDF), two of the trialists from the Vaal were members of the Azanian People's Organisation, a movement with a strong leaning towards Black Consciousness. One of them was Reverend Moselane, the Anglican priest who had been at the forefront of community politics in Sharpeville.

Amos Mkhambi Malindi, the youngest of the trialists, was 20 years old at the time of his arrest while Hlabeng Sam Matlole was 40 years his senior. Besides this great range in age, the occupational and educational background of the accused was similarly diverse.²⁷ The 22 trialists were alleged, in conspiracy with the ANC, the South African Communist Party and hundreds of individual co-conspirators and organisations including COSAS, to have fomented a revolutionary climate in order to overthrow the South African government by violence.²⁸ The UDF, the state alleged, served as the internal wing of the ANC. The insurrection in the Vaal Triangle was regarded as being part of a larger revolution that had been staged in 31 districts in the country, including remote places such as Tumahole in the northern Free State or Worcester in the Western Cape.²⁹ Mass protests in the Vaal, prosecution argued, had been inspired by Oliver Tambo's call of 8 January 1984 to render the country ungovernable and apartheid institutions unworkable. The murder of four black local councillors in particular was seen as evidence of

²⁶ Ibid., 462.

²⁷ WHP AK2117, G1(a), First bail application.

²⁸ WHP AK2117, G3.5, Annexure E: Schedule of co-conspirators referred to in supporting affidavits.

²⁹ For a list of the 31 areas, see WHP AK2117, L9, Judgement, 508-721.

the revolutionary onslaught. In order to prove the 'existence of a treasonable conspiracy,' the judge found, 'the prosecution had to prove the violent policy of the Congress Alliance as well as the adherence of each accused thereto'.³⁰

Trial records, by their very nature, are tainted and biased to serve particular (in this case political) purposes.³¹ While state witnesses, including the police, informers and those who had been pressured into giving evidence often blatantly lied to implicate the accused and prove their revolutionary intent, witnesses for the defence went to great lengths to disassociate the events from the broader political imperatives of the struggle against apartheid and the ideologies of the ANC; protests, according to the defence team, had been a spontaneous and peaceful attempt to address bread-and-butter issues while violence, they argued, was a direct result of police aggression. Thus court rooms often resembled theatre stages in which contesting narratives were rehearsed and performed. As George Bizos, senior counsel for the defence remarked, 'the witness box is often the last forum in which the oppressed may speak'.³² The courts were therefore a platform for people to raise their grievances even though they were not always open about other aspects. Due to the necessity to uphold the rule of law, the court rooms became one of the most ambiguous platforms through which contesting notions of liberation, rights, politics, freedom and community were raised and challenged. Courts were by no means completely independent. More often than not, the presiding judge was biased towards the various representatives of the apartheid state. The language spoken in court by state prosecution and judge was usually Afrikaans while defence lawyers frequently led their evidence in English. This necessitated court interpreters in many instances, leading to misinterpretation and power relations that were highly problematic. Power and

³⁰ WHP AK2117, L5, Judgement, 83.

³¹ J. Seekings, 'Whose Voices? Politics and Methodology in the Study of Political Organisation and Protest in the Final Phase of the 'Struggle' in South Africa', *South African Historical Journal*, 62/1 (2010), 7-28.

Also see C. Dickerman, R. Gocking, et al., 'Court Records in Africana Research', *History in Africa*, 27 (1990), 305-318.

³² Bizos, *Odyssey to Freedom*, 465.

ideology were deeply intertwined with the judicial system in South Africa, as Dennis Davis has pointed out.³³

Under the watchful eye of the audience, angry outbursts followed tears, defence lawyers and prosecutors attacked and insulted each other, tempers were lost on frequent occasions, witnesses were discredited as liars and an 'expert witness' on revolutions turned out to know very little about the subject he claimed to be an expert on (to the great embarrassment of both judge and prosecution).³⁴ On happier occasions new relationships were blossoming and one of the accused, Lazarus Mohapi More was married in the same court room where he was standing trial.³⁵ While Judge Kees van Dijkhorst had initially shown certain sympathies for the accused – and brought cake to court on at least one occasion – he became increasingly impatient. The relationship between him and the defence lawyers began to turn sour particularly when he dismissed one of his assessors, Professor Joubert, for having signed the Million Signature Campaign of the UDF.³⁶ His other assessor, a Magistrate known to be a member of the Broederbond – a secret organisation of the Afrikaner elite – remained. Judge van Dijkhorst was accused of political bias by the defence lawyers. The title of the documentary made by independent film maker Kevin Harris *Delmas, the Passion, the Pain* certainly mirrors the emotional context of the trial. It attracted widespread media attention both in South Africa and internationally. Various organisations including the Black Sash, the South African Council of Churches and the Detainees' Parents Support Committee lobbied for the release of the accused.

³³ Davis, 'Violence and the Law', 305.

³⁴ Interview, Gilbert Marcus, Johannesburg, 18 March 2010.

³⁵ I am indebted to advocates George Bizos and Gilbert Marcus for sharing many of the background stories with me; interview, Gilbert Marcus, Johannesburg, 18 March 2010; interview, George Bizos, Oxford, 23 February 2011; also see P. Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches: The Final Dramatic Events that Scuttled Apartheid* (Bellevue, 2003), 143-155; Bizos, *Odyssey to Freedom*, 442-469.

³⁶ Interview, Gilbert Marcus, Johannesburg, 18 March 2010; interview, George Bizos, Oxford, 23 February 2011; *Boston Review*, February 1989, accessed 10 January 2013 at <http://bostonreview.net/BR14.1/moss.html>.

Judge van Dijkhorst claimed that no trial he presided over would last longer than six months but Delmas became one of the longest running political trials in South African legal history.³⁷ It commenced on 16 October 1985 and lasted until 8 December 1988, including 437 days in court. The indictment initially ran to 368 pages and was later expanded to more than 565 pages when the defence sought further particulars. Judgement consisted of over 1520 pages. The closing argument presented in court by the prosecution ran to six volumes, that of the defence to 28.³⁸ The testimony of 278 witnesses ran to 424 Volumes and 27,194 pages while 1,556 exhibits consisted of 14,425 pages. The witness testimonies not only provide insights into the making of an uprising but reflect a discourse over the legitimacy of expressing political dissent. The struggle for freedom was thus closely interlaced with a struggle over words and narratives. The court rooms more often than not reflected a discourse over rights, freedom, politics, community as well as perceptions of violence. Apartheid power was contracting and the state was fiercely struggling to win the propaganda war. At the heart of it was its attempt to discredit the banned liberation movements, the SACP as well as the UDF, by associating them with violence in the country.

Eventually, on 15 November 1988 judgement was delivered. 11 of the defendants were convicted – the others had already been acquitted during the course of the trial. Six were given suspended sentences while the ‘UDF three’, Thomas Manthata and Gcina Malindi were sentenced to prison terms on Robben Island.³⁹ Manthata and the ‘UDF three’ were convicted of treason, the others were found guilty of terrorism. The prosecutions’ inability to prove beyond doubt the link between the UDF and the ANC in exile and to establish a connection between violence on 3 September and the organisation of political protest by the Vaal Civic Association most likely saved the 22 men. Their sentences were, in an apartheid context, rather light. Relating to the Vaal Civic Association, the judge’s bias, however, was

³⁷ Bizos, *Odyssey to Freedom*, 443.

³⁸ WHP AK2117, K, Closing arguments.

³⁹ WHP AK2117, O, Pronouncement of Sentence.

clear when he stated that 'Never before have so many been manipulated by so few.'⁴⁰ In 1989 the case went on appeal and judgement was set aside. It was the dismissal of Joubert that eventually led to the acquittal of the 11 convicted as the 'court was no longer properly constituted', Bizos remembered.⁴¹

At the centre of the case, as Mark Swilling states in his paper prepared for the defence, was the relationship between crowds and the civic leadership.⁴² Both the narratives of the police and those of civic leaders argue that violence, ultimately, was committed by 'crowds'. The key difference in analysis between state prosecution and defence was whether or not crowds were controllable and whether a 'revolutionary climate' that inflamed collective violence had been created antedating 3 September. Such debates were part of the propaganda war between the South African government and the liberation movements.⁴³

The portrayal of violence in court and in the media showed however profound differences. As Deborah Posel has argued in her analysis of the state discourse on violence, crowd behaviour was depoliticised when reported in the media.⁴⁴ A secret memorandum to members of the State Security Council, dated 12 November 1984, outlined the terminology and analytical framework to be used when reporting on, or referring to, political protest.⁴⁵ Large gatherings of black people, according to the government's perception, constituted a 'mob', which was, by its nature believed to be likely to engage in

⁴⁰ WHP AK2117, L12.3, Judgement, 794.

⁴¹ Bizos, *Odyssey to Freedom*, 469.

⁴² WHP AK2117, S8.10.1, M. Swilling, Interpretation of Crowd Behaviour, Protest and 'Riots': Some thoughts on the Vaal Uprising (no date).

⁴³ R. Moosage, 'The Impasse of Violence: Writing Necklacing into a History of the Liberation Struggle' (University of the Western Cape MA thesis, 2010).

⁴⁴ D. Posel, 'A "Battlefield of Perceptions": State Discourse on Political Violence, 1985 – 1988', in J. Cock and L. Nathan (eds.), *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (Cape Town, 1989), 262-274; also see Moosage, 'The Impasse of Violence', 188.

⁴⁵ D. J Louis Nel (Adjunk-Minister van Buitelandse Sake), 'Aan alle lede van die Staatsveiligheidsraad: Onlussituasies: Voorgestelde Terminologiese Riglyne Vir Amptelike Segsmanne', 12 November 1984, accessed 10 January 2013 at

http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com_displaydc&recordID=mem19841112.040.024.084. I'm indebted to Riedwaan Moosage who informed me about the document.

violence.⁴⁶ To delegitimise and criminalise political protests, crowds were portrayed as faceless masses whose actions were viewed as being excessive and guided by emotions. The semantics are particularly interesting: violence was seen as 'erupting' hence implying its erratic nature.

Violence was described as 'unreasonable' or 'senseless' when perpetrated by youth who 'went on a rampage' or by 'mobs'.⁴⁷ Incidents such as the stoning of bakery vehicles or the burning of people, according to an article in *The Star* 'defied reason'.⁴⁸ Few newspaper reports portrayed mass protest in nuanced terms, supported by communities with political consciousness and strategies. This framework of representing collective action was in line with government's belief that the majority of black South Africans were not prone to resistance. And it tended to disguise the strength of popular support for a People's War.⁴⁹ Instead, a few key leaders or 'agitators' were seen as instigating violence and 'inciting' the crowds.

In contrast to media discourse, collective violence, according to the prosecution of the Delmas Trial, served a particular purpose and was not perpetrated by 'mindless mobs' that engaged in 'senseless violence'. Instead violence was regarded as part of a revolution orchestrated by the ANC and the SACP in collaboration with above ground structures inside the country. Captain Kruger of the security branch in Krugersdorp, who had taken over investigations in late 1984, very directly linked the formation and strategies of VCA and COSAS to the ANC in exile.⁵⁰ Prosecution hence argued for the rationality of political violence and the purposeful nature of crowds to substantiate claims that it had been controlled by the political and civic leadership who in turned had followed instructions from the ANC. It aimed to prove several claims: namely that the civic leadership had created a revolutionary climate in which

⁴⁶ G. Simpson and L. Vogelmann, 'The Myths of Mobs and Marches', accessed 10 January 2013 at <http://www.csvr.org.za/wits/articles/artmobs1.htm>.

⁴⁷ *The Star*, 18 April 1985.

⁴⁸ *The Star*, 18 April 1985.

⁴⁹ Posel, 'A Battlefield of Perceptions', 262.

⁵⁰ WHP AK2117, G2.1.65, Pieter Ernst Johannes Kruger verklaar.

violence had been advocated, that they had been familiar with, and guided by, strategies and policies of the ANC and the SACP and that crowds on 3 September acted under the leadership of local activists. Hence, as the notes of the defence lawyers indicate, the court was conflating 'riotous behaviour' with 'political protest'.⁵¹ It was, as an international Commission of Jurists envoy remarked, a means to 'criminalise as many individuals and organisations opposed to the government as possible'.⁵²

Police testimonies in particular need to be read within a framework of apartheid discourse which aimed to delegitimize and criminalize any black political protest that was taking place through an emphasis on certain acts of violence and the use of particular language on one hand, and the strategy to link crowd behaviour to incitement by the political leadership on the other hand. Attacks on councillors' houses for example were narrated in a way that aimed to substantiate such claims. Police argued that that crowds of people were urged on by activists.⁵³ Brigadier Viljoen stated that it appeared to him that violence had been planned as specific targets were chosen and attacked. According to the prosecution, the civic leadership had created an atmosphere in which violence was promoted and encouraged. Major Steyn of the security branch testified that violence against the members of the Lekoa Town Council and their property had been advocated during a meeting on 19 August 1984 in Sharpeville.⁵⁴ Brigadier Viljoen further claimed having seen protestors carrying placards on the 3rd inscribed 'Kill Dlamini' and 'We follow Moselane'.⁵⁵

Such evidence was most likely fabricated and was refuted by defence lawyers. They went to great lengths to disassociate the violence from the civic leadership. Emphasising the legitimacy of socio-economic grievances, they argued for the peaceful nature of meetings preceding 3 September, the

⁵¹ WHP AK2117, K2.1.8, Random notes for argument, 2.

⁵² Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 151-52.

⁵³ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,367-68 and WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.68, Testimony Riekert, 3,599.

⁵⁴ WHP AK2117, I1.1, Vol.4, Testimony Steyn, 198.

⁵⁵ WHP AK2117, I1.9, Vol.64, Testimony Viljoen, 3,365.

absence of broader ideologies of the ANC and the SACP in shaping localised understandings of protest and most importantly, the uncontrollability of crowds on 3 September. Although contacts with the ANC in exile existed, the defendants denied any relations. The narrative produced by the defence was thus equally biased. Defence lawyers stressed that once the protest march was broken up by police, the situation got out of hand. Furthermore, as chapter three discusses, the aggressive interaction between police, councillors and crowds had led to a volatile and emotionally charged context in which certain sections of protestors 'retaliated' in defence. The attacks on councillors, the defence alleged, were hence contingent and reactive, triggered by the shootings in particular.

Sekwati Mokoena, one of the leaders in Boipatong argued that people only became violent and started to 'fight back' once the police had broken up the march.⁵⁶ Participants of the march had, according to witness testimonies of the defendants, been peaceful 'in such a way that we did not even see one of them lifting a stone, throwing it at the police'.⁵⁷ Gcina Malindi stated that violence against councillors was not in their interest: 'I mean that was the least of the things that we wanted. Because we knew that we were going to be the first to be arrested, it was going to be us.'⁵⁸

In court, Malindi emphasised the dichotomy between the peaceful nature of the protest march and the excessive brutality of the police. An extract between him and George Bizos, gives an impression of the scene:

George Bizos: Was any warning over the loudhailer or other means used by any police officer to direct the march or asked any questions or asked you to disperse?

Gcina Malindi: No, none of that happened.

George Bizos: What did the police do?

⁵⁶ Interview, Sekwati John Mokoena, Sharpeville, 30 March 2010.

⁵⁷ WHP AK2117, I2.3, Vol.171, Testimony Nkopane, 8,839.

⁵⁸ Interview, Gcina Malindi, Johannesburg, 25 March 2010.

Gcina Malindi: The police got off from their vehicles and also stood just across the road like they did in obscuring the road with their vehicles and preparing their firearms.

George Bizos: And having prepared their firearms?

Gcina Malindi: I then thereafter heard some shots being fired as a result of which the people in the street dispersed.⁵⁹

To stress the excessive use of violence by police, Bizos challenged Viljoen's claim that police had shown restraint and only used necessary force. Viljoen who was called an 'impressive witness' who 'testified calmly and answered questions forthrightly' by Judge van Dijkhorst, was discredited by Bizos during cross-examination when he confronted Viljoen with evidence of wanton police conduct.⁶⁰ Yet even this account left out the shadings of meaning in some youth activists' account of being ready for action.

The defence's argument had specific legal aims and cannot be considered an adequate historical account, especially in relation to the role of leadership and ideologies of resistance. However, the narrative denying planned physical violence against councillors is supported by civic leaders and youth activists in interviews. But as chapter three highlighted, a close analysis of the spatial and temporal character of the Vaal Uprising and an inclusion of different narratives demonstrate the complex relation between violence, collective action and political ideology. While the police testimonies in many ways were tainted and biased, they nevertheless provide insights into incidents of violent confrontations. Furthermore, as interviews demonstrated, many civic leaders were guided by broader political ideologies and strategies promoted by the ANC and other liberation movements.

⁵⁹ WHP AK2117, I2.7, Vol.207, Testimony Malindi, 10,831.

⁶⁰ WHP AK2117, L14.7, Z496, Comments on witnesses, Brigadier G.J. Viljoen.

A miscarriage of justice: The trial of the Sharpeville Six

I have all along tried to convince you not to accept this testimony. Nevertheless you and your wisdom have accepted it. What else can I say?⁶¹ [Francis Don Mokhesi after hearing his death sentence].

My Lord, I cannot understand at all how I can be found guilty.⁶² [Reid Mokoena after hearing his death sentence].

My Lord, I wish to ask for mercy.⁶³ [Theresa Ramashamole after hearing her death sentence].

By the time the Delmas Treason trial commenced, another legal (and indeed human) drama that focussed on collective violence was unfolding at the Supreme Court in Pretoria. The trial of the Sharpeville Six begun on 23 September 1985. While the Delmas trialists were accused of having fomented a revolutionary climate that aimed to overthrow the South African government through violence, the eight young people were directly charged with the murder of the deputy Mayor of the Lekoa Town Council, Kuzwayo Jacob Dlamini on 3 September 1984 in Sharpeville.⁶⁴ It was the most infamous of four murder trials that dealt with the death of the councillors during the Vaal Uprising. The trial was historic in its unfairness as it rested on coerced and disputed testimonies. Police were anxious to provide suspects in the murder cases of the four councillors; their death had proved a major blow for government as it was seen as a direct attack on the state and its reform programme. Furthermore it was vital to depoliticise the murders so as to maintain the claim that the council system held validity amongst township communities. In this case ironically, in contrast to the Delmas trial, the prosecution divorced the murders from the broader context of protest and the dynamics of intergroup relations on that day were not examined in detail.

⁶¹ WHP AK2243, B, Vol.15, Vonnis, 1510.

⁶² WHP AK2243, B, Vol.15, Vonnis, 1508.

⁶³ WHP AK2243, B, Vol.15, Vonnis, 1510.

⁶⁴ P. Diar, *The Sharpeville Six. The South African Trial that Shocked the World* (Toronto, 1990); P. Parker and J. Mokhesi-Parker, *In the Shadow of Sharpeville: Apartheid and Criminal Justice* (Basingstoke, 1998); H. Bernstein, 'Who Will Sing for Theresa?', *Feminist Review*, 29 (1988), 5-9.

Based on the judicial doctrine of common purpose, the presence of the accused near the scene of the murder was sufficient to sentence six of them to death – although even evidence that some of them had been near the scene was disputed and no direct involvement in Dlamini's killing could be proven.⁶⁵ The doctrine of common purpose was not only particularly notorious but also reflected the perception that crowds formed coherent entities that followed a particular logic. As Chabani Manganyi has observed, this approach portrayed the crowd as an ahistorical homogenous entity that acted outside the realm of social and political struggles.⁶⁶ This, as he has pointed out, meant that 'the justice system is able to constitute the individual on trial in such a manner that the significance of intergroup conflict is made peripheral. In other words, political, economic and social antagonisms are ignored.'⁶⁷ As such, the crowd was seen as (to some extent) controlled and acting rationally. For the prosecution it was vital to argue for the rationality of crowd behaviour; an emphasis on emotional or irrational behaviour could have called for mitigating circumstances.

On 10 December 1985, Justice Human sentenced Reid Mokoena, Theresa Ramashamole, Reginald Mojalefa Sefatsa, Duma Kumalo, Francis Don Mokhesi and Oupa Moses Diniso to death by hanging.⁶⁸ Motsiri Gideon Mokone, who had been shot by Dlamini on the 3rd, and Motseki Christian Mokubung were acquitted on charges of murder but found guilty of alternative charges of public violence and subsequently sentenced to eight years imprisonment. Justice Human, in a grossly unfair judgement, rejected most of the evidence given by the defendants. He accepted statements made under duress and based his findings largely on the testimony of two state witnesses. Pleading for their lives, their brief

⁶⁵ On the doctrine of common purpose see N. Matzukis, 'Nature and Scope of Common Purpose', *South African Journal of Criminal Justice*, 1/2 (1988), 226-234.

⁶⁶ C. Manganyi, 'Crowds and their Vicissitudes: Psychology and Law in the South African Court-Room,' in Manganyi and du Toit, *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa*, 293.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ WHP AK2243, B, 15, Vonnis, 1508-11.

speeches after being sentenced are harrowing. While at first some of them asked for clemency, their words speak of increasing resignation and frustration. By that time, South Africa's annual execution rate regularly exceeded a hundred hangings per year.⁶⁹

After being sentenced to death, Duma Kumalo recalls, he could not sleep all night: 'It was difficult. I was crying all night long until I fell asleep.'⁷⁰ Kumalo had been studying at the Sebokeng Teachers' Training College at the time of his arrest. He recalls that he had no particular interest in politics but 'some inklings'. He joined the march on 3 September without having attended any of the meetings predating it. Like many other local residents he equated town councillors with oppression. When hearing that Dlamini had died, he stated during his hearing at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 'I was sort of happy because I felt that the reign of the boers had fallen down.'

Reginald Mojalefa Sefatsa, a 29 year old street hawker who had left school after standard six was arrested on 9 November 1984.⁷¹ The two policemen searching his house punched him resulting in a broken jaw. His wife, eight months pregnant by that time, was slapped in the face. At the police station, Sefatsa was blindfolded and tortured with electric shocks. The other accused recounted similar stories of assault and torture, leading them to make false statements under duress. During an interview Sefatsa recalled that he was not politically involved and had not planned to join the protest march.⁷² Instead, he argued, he assisted in helping a security branch policeman who was being attacked by a group of youth on that day. In court, the policeman refuted Sefatsa's alibi.⁷³ During his imprisonment, Sefatsa like the others was trying to grapple with his fate: 'You see, if you are in jail, you start to ask yourself "why me?

⁶⁹ WHP AG2918 (Kairos Collection), 2.3.1.1.1, SATIS, Save the Sharpeville Six. No to Apartheid Executions, (1986).

⁷⁰ Truth and Reconciliation, Human Rights Violations. Submission Duma Joshua Kumalo, Case No.861 (5 August 1996), accessed 10 January 2013 at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/sebokeng/seb861.htm>.

⁷¹ WHP AG2918, 2.3.1.1.1, SATIS, Save the Sharpeville Six. No to Apartheid Executions (1986).

⁷² Interview, Reginald Mojalefa 'Jaja' Sefatsa, Vereeniging, 3 July 2010.

⁷³ WHP AK2243, B, Vol.14, 1,379.

Why only me?" And then I didn't take any part [in the killing of Dlamini].'⁷⁴ Sefatsa recalls his thoughts after hearing that all attempts had failed to overturn the judgement:

That three chances had failed, all of them. We were supposed to be killed on Friday. You see I accepted that. Because apartheid was too difficult for everybody. If they say to you, you have to do this, you have to go to court. Although you didn't commit any crime. They forced you, they will sentence you. Without any proof. If they said we have committed a crime under act, they called it the common purpose. Common purpose, I wanted to know what is common purpose. [...] I was ready to die. I was not scared anymore. What I've noticed on death row, I'm not the only one or only person who have been punished under apartheid laws. Or apartheid regime. We were so many. Who get the death sentence even we didn't do any crime. I said 'no ok. It's how the government runs the country. They kill me, it's ok.'⁷⁵

In his understanding, the reason why he was detained was because the police failed to arrest the perpetrators and hence turned them into scapegoats: 'The government want to show the people that they can do whatever they want with us. You see. Without proof.'⁷⁶ Theresa Ramashamole, the only woman among the six, who was 24 years old at the time of her arrest, was accused of having incited the crowd to kill Dlamini.⁷⁷ She had made her statement in which she implicated herself and others under duress.⁷⁸ Ramashamole, who had left school after standard eight, was living with her mother and her siblings. She recalls similar feelings of resignation. Like many other prisoners on death row, Ramashamole, a Catholic, sought comfort in religion: 'There, there is no muthi. It's you and God.'⁷⁹ When she was finally reprieved, after years of torment and trauma, Ramashamole recalls she felt anger: 'I was

⁷⁴ Interview, Reginald Mojalefa 'Jaja' Sefatsa, Vereeniging, 3 July 2010.

⁷⁵ Interview, Reginald Mojalefa 'Jaja' Sefatsa, Vereeniging, 3 July 2010.

⁷⁶ Interview, Reginald Mojalefa 'Jaja' Sefatsa, Vereeniging, 3 July 2010.

⁷⁷ Interview, Theresa Ramashamole, Vanderbijlpark, 15 June 2010.

⁷⁸ WHP AK2117, S8.11, Theresa Ramashamole verklaar.

⁷⁹ Interview, Theresa Ramashamole, Vanderbijlpark, 15 June 2010. On her experiences on death row also see Truth and Reconciliation, Human Rights Violations, Special Hearings: Prison Hearings. Submission Theresa Ramashamola, (22 July 1997), accessed 10 January 2013 at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/prison/ramasham.htm>.

crossed. Because I was already accepted. I was angry when they say they are not going to hang me. I was accepted by God. I said "I'm ready Father.""⁸⁰

After three years on death row and winning two stays of execution, the case was taken to the Court of Appeal to hear new evidence. The defence for the accused argued that two of the key state witnesses had been forced by the police to implicate the six.⁸¹ On 18 June 1988 one of the state witnesses recalled his evidence during a conversation with one of the lawyers. The hearing was scheduled for 7 September 1988. Joyce Mokhesi, the sister of one of the accused, toured Europe and the United States during August of the same year to lobby for support from various organisations and governments to reopen the case.⁸² Pressure was mounting inside South Africa as well as abroad. The South African Council of Churches and the Southern African Bishops Conference in particular served as a vital link to foreign governments, media and pressure groups.⁸³ In Sharpeville, the local branch of the Detainees' Parents Committee in collaboration with the UDF launched the 'Save the Sharpeville Six' campaign.

On 16 March 1988, five months before Joyce Mokhesi addressed the United Nations Church Centre, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 610, urging the South African government to commute the sentences and to stay execution of the Sharpeville Six, which was scheduled for 18 March. One day after the adoption of Resolution 610, a one-month stay of execution was granted. Appeal was rejected in June 1988, leading the Security Council to adopt Resolution 615 on 17 June 1988. Resolution 615 stated that the hanging of the six would 'further inflame an already grave

⁸⁰ Interview, Theresa Ramashamole, Vanderbijlpark, 15 June 2010.

⁸¹ WHP AK2243, G6.

⁸² *Washington Notes on Africa*, Summer 1988, 7.

⁸³ Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches*, 23-24.

situation in South Africa'.⁸⁴ In August 1988 the House of Representatives in the United States passed HR1530 that called for comprehensive sanctions against South Africa.⁸⁵

The trial of the Sharpeville Six captured the imagination of South Africans and various communities, governments and groups abroad. Two urgent telexes sent to Helen Suzman reflected the widespread publicity and concern the trial attracted. The principal of St. Hugh's College in Oxford for example expressed the College's concern and encouraged Suzman to 'make any representation you think appropriate on our behalf'.⁸⁶ Joyce Mokhesi had studied at the University of Oxford and had been a member of the College. The director of Freedom House in New York sent a telex on 16 March 1988 stating that it was 'imperative that clemency be granted to the Sharpeville Six'.⁸⁷ In Britain, TV presenter David Frost confronted the South African ambassador over the fate of the Sharpeville Six.⁸⁸ The trial not only highlighted the reality of racial oppression in South Africa but mirrored the rottenness of a system for which, according to Mojalefa Sefatsa, one of the condemned, it was enough to be black to be sentenced to death.⁸⁹ The moral outrage the trial caused in many countries was unprecedented and increased the pressure on the South African government. And it was a major blow in the government's attempt to influence international opinion. Eventually the death sentence was commuted into prison terms ranging from 18 to 25 years. In 1991 they were finally reprieved but not acquitted leaving them with a criminal record. Sefatsa was one of the last to be released. On 26 September 1992, after almost eight years in prison, he finally stepped out into a South Africa that was profoundly different to the one he had last seen. Freedom came at a very high price. The reverberations of the criminal record as well as the severe trauma inflicted by years on death row continue to this day.

⁸⁴ *Washington Post*, 18 June 1988; WHP AG2918, 2.3.1.1.2, Resolution 615 (1988), Adopted by the Security Council at its 2817th meeting on 17 June 1988.

⁸⁵ *Washington Notes on Africa*, Summer 1988, 5; American Committee on Africa, *Action News*, Fall 1988, 25.

⁸⁶ WHP AK2084, Af9.

⁸⁷ WHP AK2084, Af9.

⁸⁸ WHP AK2243, G7, Transcript of interview between David Frost and Rae Killen, South African ambassador to Britain.

⁸⁹ Interview, Reginald Mojalefa 'Jaja' Sefatsa, Vereeniging, 3 July 2010.

(II) 'Our mothers and our fathers they must know we are fighting for freedom!':⁹⁰
Youth militancy, 1984 - 1986

Militancy and the reimagination of community

We wanted this freedom so so much that we were impatient, we did not want to listen and we were convinced that through violence we'd solve everything.⁹¹

In 1985, as the trial in Delmas and the Sharpeville Six trial were underway, political violence in the country reached unprecedented levels.⁹² But contrary to claims of the prosecution in Delmas and in spite of the ANC's call for ungovernability, it was not engineered and contrived by the ANC in exile. Empirical evidence and interviews in particular attest to its localised nature and the prevalent role youth in particular played in the proliferation of attacks on government property and officials. Although the insurrections and mass protests were supported across generations, youth came to play a vital role as 'shocktroops' of the struggle.⁹³

As Monique Marks examines in her thesis on youth politics in Diepkloof, groups involved in planning and executing acts of violence were by no means beyond the control of formalised structures.⁹⁴ Membership between above ground groups such as COSAS and underground units often overlapped; yet formalised structures were careful not to be associated with violence. Their age and the conditions under which they became politicised made the new youth leadership impatient. Some lacked political education, as Oupa Modikoane recalled and expanded their knowledge on history and politics mostly

⁹⁰ Interview, Dineo 'Mapikoko' Mokoena, Sebokeng, 22 October 2011.

⁹¹ Interview, Oupa Modikoane, East Rand, 1 July 2010.

⁹² C. Manganyi and A. du Toit. 'Editorial Introduction: The Time of the Comrades. Reflections on Political Commitment and Professional Discourse in a Context of Political Violence', in Manganyi and du Toit (eds.), *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa*, 326-340.

⁹³ For a personal account on youth units during the 1980s, see N. Mazibuko, *Spring Offensive. Youth Underground Structures in South Africa During the 80s* (Johannesburg, 2006).

⁹⁴ M. Marks, 'Organisation, Identity and Violence amongst Activist Diepkloof Youth, 1984 – 1993', (University of the Witwatersrand MA thesis, 1993), 264.

during their time in prison.⁹⁵ And many of those who were very young lacked experience. This upsurge of militancy is captured by the word 'siyayinyova' which both implied an expectation of confrontation, the willingness to challenge and a sense of trepidation. It became one of the rallying cries of youth in particular and reflected the determination to fight for freedom.

In his book on youth politics Seekings argues that much of the literature on the generation of young activists in the 1980s portrayed the so-called 'young lions' either in an apocalyptic manner - associating them with violence and destruction - or as liberators of the country, glorifying their sacrifices and bravery. The truth lies somewhere in between.⁹⁶ Contrary to popular media discourse, the use of political violence was often neither random nor 'senseless' but served a clear purpose: namely to rid the townships of informers, police and anyone hostile to the struggle for freedom so as to ensure that the townships would become ungovernable. Certain types of violent confrontations, however were contingent. Protest marches, stay-aways and funerals in particular led to street battles between police and youth. As the police showed little restraint, youth 'retaliated' and fought back with stones and petrol bombs. Contingent confrontations thus produced reactive and defensive violence by youth in addition to more organised campaigns. By that stage, police violence was widely expected by anyone engaging in popular protests.⁹⁷

In the aftermath of the Vaal Uprising, with the deployment of troops on 23 October 1984 during Operation Palmiet and the heavy presence of police, the townships became embattled areas. The struggle between liberatory forces and the apartheid regime in the aftermath of the Vaal Uprising was one over the collective psyche of the population in the townships as well as over access and production of knowledge. Belinda Bozzoli points out that the youth of the 1980s not only fought against the regime

⁹⁵ Interview, Oupa Modikoane, East Rand, 1 July 2010.

⁹⁶ J. Seekings, *Heroes or Villains: Youth Politics in the 1980s* (Johannesburg, 1993), xi-xii. For media coverage see *Newsweek Special Report*, 16 September 1985.

⁹⁷ Interview, Oupa Masankane, Vereeniging, 29 June 2010.

but for a new moral order and control over space.⁹⁸ Youth were digging trenches in the streets to prevent armoured vehicles from moving around while roads were blocked with burning tyres and rocks.⁹⁹ To prevent police from identifying houses, house numbers were frequently painted over; although such strategies did not protect people against detention and harassment, it delayed the process and made policing increasingly difficult.¹⁰⁰ Creating 'liberated areas' where no police, informers or members of government could go was at the heart of making the townships ungovernable.

The presence of police in the townships infuriated many youth. Toy Manqa remembered that 'Now what happens is that every time we saw police then we saw people that killed people. You know. We would always react when we see them. But we were young then! We enjoyed, it was almost a game to us.'¹⁰¹ The intersection of Moshoeshoe Street and Wessels Mota, where Zone 11, 12 and 13 converged, became one of the most important sites of resistance and confrontation in Sebokeng: the post office as well as Nyolohelo Catholic Church, one of the churches that became a key site for political mobilisation in the 1980s, could be found at this intersection. This area, according to Manqa, was renamed Beirut in 1984: 'We'll go to the post office, we call it Beirut. Our small Beirut. Ja. Ja. The Beirut.'¹⁰² He further remembered that 'It used to be a centre of attraction. [...] It was the main link with the town. [...] Because the police they know that if you want to crush the resistance you go to the post office.'¹⁰³

Challenging Casspirs full of heavily armed policemen with stones was not for the faint-hearted. Bravery, courage and physical prowess were key. The years after 1984 were therefore marked by a new

⁹⁸ B. Bozzoli, B., *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Johannesburg, 2004).

⁹⁹ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010; interview Andries du Toit and Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 10 May 2011.

¹⁰⁰ In some areas of Sebokeng it is still evident that the old house numbers were painted over; Interview, Oupa Modikoane, East Rand, 1 July 2010.

¹⁰¹ Interview, Toy Manqa, Vereeniging, 26 May 2011.

¹⁰² Interview, Toy Manqa, Vereeniging, 26 May 2011.

¹⁰³ Interview, Toy Manqa, Vereeniging, 26 May 2011.

and to some extent militaristic political culture that prevailed amongst the young comrades: toyi-toying and the use of songs in particular aimed to instil courage and bravery, to scare the police and to urge the comrades on.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, it was a highly masculine political culture in which young women often played supportive roles.¹⁰⁵ Mass protests and street battles with the police followed an internal logic that may not have been apparent from the outside. Targets were clearly defined and selected. Advancing towards police was usually accompanied by slogans to which the group would respond. Oupa Masankane, who emerged as one of the youth leaders in the region and who was involved in an underground youth unit recalls the role and importance of songs as follows:¹⁰⁶

Ja and whenever we went to general meetings or we march, we always sing 'Phambili.. phambili'. So it means that we are going forward. Whether they kill us, whether they chase us away. We are going forward. And then there was this song, revolutionary song that was called Siyaya ePitoli. Ja. And so then when we sing those songs, people become very militant. Ja ja.

Thula Simpson distinguishes between 'organised violence with sophisticated weapons' and 'local outbursts of unplanned rioting conducted with rudimentary arms'.¹⁰⁷ However, this thesis rather suggests that although the level of sophistication varied the goals were often similar - namely to take the armed struggle into the townships.¹⁰⁸ Although a few arms such as rifles or handgrenades started to be brought into the area around 1985, stones and petrol bombs or Molotov Cocktails were the majority weapons youth could access in the immediate aftermath of the uprising. The lids of garbage bins served as makeshift shields. Both were easily accessible; stones simply had to be picked up from the street and

¹⁰⁴ See A. Sitas, 'The Making of the 'Comrades' Movement in Natal, 1985-91', *JSAS*, 18/3 (1992, Special Issue: Political Violence in Southern Africa), 629-641 and M. Marks, *Young Warriors: Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 2001).

¹⁰⁵ On masculinity see footnote 67, page 40. For an analysis of the historical legacy of 'struggle masculinity' see T. Xaba, 'Masculinity and Its Malcontents: The Confrontation Between "Struggle Masculinity" and "Post-Struggle Masculinity" (1990-1997)', in R. Morrell (ed.), *Changing Men in Southern Africa* (London and Pietermaritzburg, 2001), 105-24; M. Ramphela, 'Teach Me How to Be a Man: An Exploration of the Definition of Masculinity', in V. Das, A. Kleinman, M. Ramphela et al. (eds.), *Violence and Subjectivity* (Berkeley, 2000), 102-119.

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Oupa Masankane, Vereeniging, 29 June 2010.

¹⁰⁷ T. Simpson, "'Umkhonto we Sizwe, We are Waiting for You: The ANC and the Township Uprising, September 1984 - September 1985', *South African Historical Journal*, 61/1 (2009), 174.

¹⁰⁸ Simpson, "'Umkhonto we Sizwe, We are Waiting for You'".

petrol bombs were easy to make, cheap and effective in destroying buildings. Bongani Mhlobo recalled that 'We couldn't take hammer and chisel.'¹⁰⁹ Although the ANC provided instructions on how to produce petrol bombs through Radio Freedom or underground printed literature, many youths taught each other.¹¹⁰ All that was needed was an empty bottle, petrol - which was supplied voluntarily or involuntarily by local petrol stations or motorists - sand and Sunlight soap to ensure that the petrol would burn longer and be adhesive. A piece of cloth, pushed into the neck of the bottle, served as a fuse.

As many interviewees recalled, they felt they had continue the struggle for freedom from within the country instead of joining Umkhonto we Sizwe in exile.¹¹¹ Besides contingent street battles with police, organised violence was increasingly regarded as the most efficient means to achieve freedom and to bring the government to its knees. Oupa Modikoane explained

We became more daring because that group of young people it is the group that was not scared to confront you know but also it was because of our lack of political education. You know we thought that everything would be solved through violence. You know we wanted this freedom so so much that we were impatient, we did not want to listen and we were convinced that through violence we'd solve everything.¹¹²

Peter Nhlapo, another former COSAS member argued that freedom could only be gained by making the country ungovernable. Ungovernability, according to him would be achieved through violence: 'The plan was so simple. That we will mobilise people to be violent in the country. [...] To make sure that the political violence lead to a situation whereby all councillors resign.'¹¹³

Government authorities such as councillors and policemen were regarded to be hampering the

¹⁰⁹ Interview, Bongani Mhlobo, Vereeniging, 12 July 2010.

¹¹⁰ Interview, Morris More, Sebokeng, 2 December 2011.

¹¹¹ Interview, Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Boipatong, 16 September 2011; interview, Toy Manqa, Vereeniging, 26 May 2011.

¹¹² Interview, Oupa Modikoane, East Rand, 1 July 2010.

¹¹³ Interview, Peter Nhlapo, Vereeniging, 8 July 2010 (name has been changed); on youth violence also see M. Marks, "'We are Fighting for the Liberation of our People": Justifications of Violence by Activist Youth', *Temps Modernes*, 585 (1995), 133 - 58.

struggle for freedom, as Nhlapo remembered: 'People wanted their liberation not to be postponed. They wanted it now. And the police were barriers.'¹¹⁴ Besides the burning of their houses, policemen were beaten up and in a number of instances disarmed. A majority of interviewees recalled that their intention was not to kill policemen but to enforce their departure.¹¹⁵ Petrol bombings and other attacks formed a deliberate strategy by clandestine youth groups to rid the townships of any form of government authority.¹¹⁶ Attacks were usually planned and discussed beforehand.¹¹⁷

Besides the conceptual strategy to make the townships ungovernable, attacks on government buildings and houses belonging to state representatives also aimed to express anger and dissent.¹¹⁸ It was a way to 'emphasize our action', as Oupa Masankane remembered.¹¹⁹ Some youth believed that they needed to 'put sense into the white government'.¹²⁰ Others yet saw it as a means to defend the communities against police brutality.¹²¹ Furthermore, the burning of houses created a spectacle that sent a message and warning to other state officials, informers and the community. It was a public demonstration and assertion of power and a clear drawing of boundaries of community.¹²² By that stage policemen were no longer regarded as being part of local communities.¹²³ Violence against perceived collaborators was hence a form of social and political control.

A more institutionalised form of establishing a new moral and social order was the formation of People's Courts. In contrast to Bozzoli's detailed case study of Alexandra, no similar records could be

¹¹⁴ Interview, Peter Nhlapo, Vereeniging, 8 July 2010.

¹¹⁵ Interview, Peter Nhlapo, Vereeniging, 8 July 2010; interview, Oupa Masankane, Vereeniging, 29 June 2010.

¹¹⁶ Interview, Themba Goba Vereeniging, 18 June 2010; interview, Oupa Masankane, Vereeniging, 29 June 2010; interview, Toy Manqa, Vereeniging, 26 May 2011.

¹¹⁷ Interview, Bongani Mhlobo, Vereeniging, 12 July 2010 (name has been changed).

¹¹⁸ Interview, Roy Matube, Vereeniging, 20 April 2010.

¹¹⁹ Interview, Oupa Masankane, Vereeniging, 29 June 2010.

¹²⁰ Interview, Bongani Mhlobo, Vereeniging, 12 July 2010.

¹²¹ Interview, Oupa Masankane, Vereeniging, 29 June 2010.

¹²² See for example A.Appadurai, 'Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalisation', *Public Culture*, 10/2 (1998), 225-47.

¹²³ Interview, Roy Matube, Vanderbijlpark, 17 June 2010.

located for the Vaal and hence the information remains parochial. People's courts, established to take over policing functions, were set up that dealt with a variety of offences including marital disputes, adultery, drunkenness, child beatings, the breaking of boycotts, theft or sexual assault.¹²⁴ Local residents, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi recalled, would run into trouble if they reported conflicts and crime to the police but were instead encouraged to seek the assistance of such courts.¹²⁵ Serious offences such as murder or rape were, however, reported to the police, as Themba Goba stated.¹²⁶ The main goal of People's Courts was to ensure safety in the townships and to turn townships into 'liberated' or self-governed areas by taking over functions of the state. Belinda Bozzoli has argued that in the case of Alexandra they were 'ordered - even ritualised - and at the same time used theatrical methods to appropriate a degree of power'.¹²⁷ Popular justice was hence both punitive, redemptive and aimed to deter other from violating perceived social norms.

In some instances these courts gained notoriety for imposing harsh sentences. Meant to be under the control of street committees and headed by respected elderly community leaders, some were run by local youth who accounted to none of the civic structures or street committees.¹²⁸ One incident that highlights the harsh punishment that was meted out occurred in Sebokeng in July 1986. Two men had poured petrol over a house in which they had locked their girlfriends, killing the two as well as a visitor and a small baby.¹²⁹ Subsequently a group of comrades bailed them out of jail and allegedly stoned them to death in an open field. Whether or not the punishment was meted out by a group that perceived itself to be part of a People's Court remains difficult to establish but it appears that such incidents were

¹²⁴ W.Schärf and B.Ngcokoto, 'Images of Punishment in the People's Courts of Cape Town, 1985-7: From Prefigurative Justice to Populist Violence', in Manganyi and du Toit (eds.), *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa*, 326-340.

¹²⁵ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011.

¹²⁶ Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

¹²⁷ Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid*, 151.

¹²⁸ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011.

¹²⁹ *City Press*, 20 July 1986.

beyond the control of organised structures. While evidence from Alexandra suggests that specific locations came to serve as People's Courts, Motubatsi recalled that they were run ad-hoc in Sebokeng.¹³⁰

From 1985 onwards, the threat of violence against anyone associated with the apartheid regime produced widespread anxiety, fear and paranoia in the townships and hence while militant comrades in favour of political violence were not in a position to collectively punish large masses of people, the threat of violence aimed to deter residents from co-operating with the police. Some young comrades came to be feared by the older generation.¹³¹ Punishment of so-called collaborators was a public event and hence assumed a spectacular function. The use of fire through petrol bombings of houses or the infamous necklace as well as public floggings and beatings not only affected those who were punished but a broader audience of township residents who directly or indirectly witnessed such events and their consequences. Youths on occasion forced the purchasers of goods bought in shops that were boycotted to drink solutions of soap or cooking oil. The publicity of punishment was therefore an important aspect in the struggle over the psyche of the township populations. However, as Nokuthula Mazibuko notes for Soweto, the use of violence was controversial as arguments arose that it alienated people instead of encouraging them to join the struggle.¹³²

The uprising not only altered the political landscape of the townships of the Vaal but profoundly changed the social fabric. Many youth activists frequently had to change their location - usually every second or third night. As Themba Goba explained, they were trained to be 'vigilant'.¹³³ Moving between safe houses, churches or sleeping in open fields was not only physically exhausting but emotionally

¹³⁰ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011.

¹³¹ Interview, Oupa Modikoane, East Rand, 1 July 2010. Belinda Bozzoli analyses the role of generational conflicts during this period, see Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle*.

¹³² Mazibuko, *Spring Offensive*, 33.

¹³³ Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

draining.¹³⁴ Because of their life in hiding they became independent from their parents at an early age. The youthful comrades I interviewed were sought by the police and could therefore not set up permanent bases or homes.¹³⁵ Furthermore, as Modikoane pointed out, the period between 1984 and 1987 was marked by a shift in family relations as young people took the lead. He recalled that 'We could see fear in our parents' eyes.'¹³⁶

Evading arrest necessitated coping strategies that included a variety of different precautions, including sleeping at safe houses - either in the Vaal or in other parts of the country - and using different names. The urban character of popular struggles as well as the difficult topography thus required access to private houses, schools and churches in the townships. What constituted a 'safe house', however, was different from activist to activist for most of them stayed at the houses of relatives, the parents of school friends or anyone else who had no reputation with the security branch and who was willing to accommodate them.¹³⁷ This necessitated two key prerequisites: the ability to assess the trustworthiness of a potential host and the support of local communities to provide food and shelter. In addition it was of vital importance that not only the hosts but also the community living in the immediate vicinity was not collaborating with the police in any sense. Oupa Modikoane argues that

Almost everybody in our community, whether deliberate or by default, became conscientised to say these kids are actually fighting for our own freedom. And it is at a time where every house especially in Zone 7 and Evaton became a base. You could sleep in any house, you could run into any house. Everybody knew that we have to protect these kids.¹³⁸

Despite its rigid structure, Sebokeng provided a number of hiding places for those who knew the

¹³⁴ Interview, Dineo 'Mapikoko' Mokoena, Nthabiseng Christina Mofolo and Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Sebokeng, 22 October 2011.

¹³⁵ Leslie Banks writes about the impact politics had on generational relations and family structures, see L.Bank, *Home Spaces, Street Styles: Contesting Power and Identity in a South African City* (Johannesburg, 2011), 112-137.

¹³⁶ Interview, Oupa Modikoane, East Rand, 1 July 2010.

¹³⁷ Interview, Oupa Modikoane, East Rand, 1 July 2010; interview Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 23 May 2011; interview, Tebogo 'Exec.' Moepadira, Vanderbijlpark, 23 June 2010; interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011; interview, Tsietsi 'Speech' Mokatsanyane, Pretoria, 13 July 2010.

¹³⁸ Interview, Oupa Modikoane, East Rand, 1 July 2010.

territory. Thami ka Plaatjie remembers that 'We knew the terrain like the back of our hand. We knew passages. That if you take this passage it will take you to the other side. The police can't go through that passage.[...] We had sympathetic churches. Sometimes you spend four, five days without sleeping at home.'¹³⁹ Knowing the territory included the knowledge about which houses were 'safe houses', which areas were 'hostile blocks' where people were too friendly with local councillors, knowing when an area had become a 'hot area' as the police had arrived and knowing passages, dead-ends and short-cuts. This spatial knowledge helped both to avoid arrest by the security branch and to escape from members of the riot squad during the uprising. Shaka Radebe confirmed the importance of spatial knowledge:

When you are caught in a situation with the police the only way of you escaping, from being arrested, is for you to know the area correctly. Is for you to know when I jump this street takes me to which end. This street takes me to which passage [...]. The majority of people who got arrested is because they got into dead end streets.¹⁴⁰

None of the activists I interviewed was able to avoid arrest indefinitely, but some managed to avoid detention for several months by frequently changing location.

Street wisdom and the ability to evade the police therefore required an intimate knowledge of the spatial landscape of the townships; an ability to recognise landmarks and develop efficient ways to move around and to read situations and people. These skills were rooted in everyday interactions and experiences - knowledge that was difficult to transfer to an outsider as it further required the ability understand the fluidity and contingency of spatial formations and situations.

¹³⁹ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Johannesburg, 26 May 2011.

¹⁴⁰ Interview, Shaka Radebe, Vereeniging, 23 May 2011.

The organisation of political violence

In contrast to Soweto for example, where petrol bombings occurred prior to 1984 and the South African Suicide Squad was engaged in a widespread campaign of violence against police and councillors from early 1984 onwards, newspaper reports of that time show few similar occurrences for the Vaal Triangle.¹⁴¹ One exception was the petrol bombing of Constable Jeremiah Matshola's house on 7 December 1978. From early 1985 onwards, petrol bombings became more frequent. Targets included classrooms, principals' offices as well as the houses of policemen, informers and other buildings associated with the apartheid regime. While the targeting of houses of policemen and informers followed the logic of ungovernability and the reconstitution of moral and social boundaries, the burning of schools aimed to enforce student demands. A report amongst papers collected by the defence lawyers for the Delmas Treason Trial demonstrates that principals' offices were mostly attacked from January 1986 onwards.¹⁴² Usually it was those principals who were seen to be aiding the police and who were unpopular. On 11 January 1986, the principal of a higher primary school in Sebokeng was replaced by a particularly unpopular new principal.¹⁴³ Students appeared to be aggrieved by the lack of consultation and a few days later the principals' office was burnt down. A month later on 15 February a female teacher was severely injured after being stoned by a group of students. Another teacher was reported to have been stabbed. Accusing them of being collaborators, some students allegedly bundled the staff of the school into a room and threatened to set them alight; however, they were eventually released. During the following months, more schools were stoned and burnt down. Most incidents appeared to have occurred in Zone 7 and Zone 12 in Sebokeng, coinciding with the areas from which organised

¹⁴¹ Simpson, "Umkhonto we Sizwe, We are Waiting for You". There is little information on the South African Suicide Squad in the secondary literature. Newspaper reports highlight that the majority of attacks occurred in and around Soweto.

¹⁴² WHP AK2117, S8.10, The Township crisis – Vaal townships, 3.

¹⁴³ WHP AK2117, S8.10, The Township crisis – Vaal townships, 3.

clandestine youth units were operating. Other incidents that were reported included the stoning and robbing of delivery vehicles.

Confrontations between police and local residents intensified as well. A cycle of violence began between Council Police and local residents around March 1986, after Council Police shot a priest and a student.¹⁴⁴ Established in 1985, they had become unpopular very rapidly due to their trigger-happiness and their role in enforcing evictions and attempting to break the rent boycott. In April 1986, houses of local leaders in Sharpeville were attacked and rumours began to circulate that the assailants had been driving in a vehicle owned by the Town Council. From then on houses of Council Police were burnt down while some policemen were stabbed and assaulted. On 23 May, a 22 year old student was shot dead by Council Police. Local residents alleged his death was an act of vengeance for the petrol bombings of policemen's houses. The sequence of violence clearly suggests the retributive nature of the attacks.¹⁴⁵ Besides Council Police, members of the security branch were increasingly targeted.

In 1985 two militant youth groups were formed: the Vaal Liberation Movement (VALIMO) and Ace Mates. Most likely, there existed many more. They shared an understanding that the townships had to be rid of police and informers but varied in degrees of militancy. Both groups had been inspired by the ANC's call to render the country ungovernable and to wage a People's War. The initiatives for their formation were, however, localised; the formation of Ace Mates however was certainly encouraged by local ANC underground contacts. The ANC in exile had declared police, informers and other 'enemy personnel' to be legitimate targets.

¹⁴⁴ WHP AK2117, S8.10, The Township crisis – Vaal townships, 5.

¹⁴⁵ *The Sowetan*, 16 September 1986;

The Vaal Liberation Movement owed its birth to two events, as Themba Goba remembered.¹⁴⁶

Around March 1985, students from a number of schools met to compete against one another at an athletics competition. As was common practice at that time, freedom songs were sung. The athletic event was soon disrupted by police who used teargas against the students. A few weeks later, on 26 June 1985 the annual celebration of the Freedom Charter was held at the Roman Catholic Church in Evaton Small Farms - the church that had hosted a large number of political gatherings. Police teargassed the meeting, causing panic and a stampede. Goba recalled the debates amongst members of COSAS after the disruption of the two meetings as follows:

So after that meeting was disrupted there was a feeling within the leadership, I was not part of the leadership although I was part of that meeting, that we cannot forever continue to have our meeting disrupted without us responding. And if we had to respond in terms of marches and all other things we'll be exposing ourselves further into another harassment into the police. And you must remember at that time some of us had already started to listen to Radio Freedom. So a decision then was taken that we have to begin a campaign of driving security police outside the township. [...] It was an emotional decision that we took after the meeting was disrupted... [...] And the very same evening we went on to burn houses of security police.¹⁴⁷

One of the houses that was burnt that night was the house of Matshola, the policeman who had been attacked in 1978 as well. Due to methodological constraints, it is impossible to determine the extent of petrol bombings VALIMO was responsible for. However, it appears that many of the petrol bomb attacks were organised; hence, as argued before, this type of political violence was neither random nor contingent but formed part of a broader strategy to achieve ungovernability by chasing policemen out of the townships. VALIMO had a further aim. It was, according to Masankane, established 'for the purpose of defending us'.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

¹⁴⁷ Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

¹⁴⁸ Interview, Oupa Masankane, Vereeniging, 29 June 2010.

While VALIMO was a localised group based in Sebokeng, it had contacts with groups employing similar strategies in the East Rand.¹⁴⁹ Presumably their contacts had been established through their involvement with COSAS. Toy Manqa, a close friend to Themba Goba and member of VALIMO at whose house Goba used to listen to Radio Freedom, recalled the incentive for its formation differently: 'I think the idea started from jail. Said no man, this MK is wasting time. We can't fight in England.'¹⁵⁰ According to Manqa, the structure of VALIMO was modelled after MK cells and aimed to guide people to 'fight a proper war'. To avoid infiltration, the organisation was kept decentralised. MK not only served as an inspiration in terms of providing impetus on how to structure armed underground units. VALIMO, as Manqa recalled, also hoped to link up with MK. The group included between ten and 20 youth activists, most of whom were detained in 1985 for public violence, arson or intimidation.

Manqa argued that during their stay in prison they managed to establish links with members of the ANC underground and MK. In 1986, the year after its formation, Manqa claims that members of VALIMO underwent some military training and received weapons.¹⁵¹ Oupa Masankane, another member of VALIMO, recalled that the principle of secrecy guided VALIMO's actions.¹⁵² Nobody knew how many people were really involved in VALIMO, due to its decentralisation. He remembers less than ten members: 'Because everybody was having a responsibility in terms of their unit. Look, if you're ten. You have your own five that we don't know. You account to us what is happening.'¹⁵³ Despite its decentralised nature, members were supposed to follow strict discipline and anyone who didn't comply was reprimanded and eventually thrown out.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Interview, Oupa Masankane, Vereeniging, 29 June 2010.

¹⁵⁰ Interview, Toy Manqa, Vereeniging, 26 May 2011.

¹⁵¹ Interview, Toy Manqa, Vereeniging 26 May 2011.

¹⁵² Interview, Oupa Masankane, Vereeniging, 29 June 2010.

¹⁵³ Interview, Oupa Masankane, Vereeniging, 29 June 2010.

¹⁵⁴ Interview, Oupa Masankane, Vereeniging, 29 June 2010.

According to Masankane, VALIMO acted independently from the Vaal Civic Association whose members were not informed about the operations of VALIMO. Masankane pointed out 'We are not going to tell anything about arson and so on. They only discover at some stage.'¹⁵⁵ The membership of VALIMO and COSAS overlapped; however, as Masakane recalled, they chased the leadership of COSAS away as they did not want to attract the attention of the police. This corresponds with Monique Marks' analysis of youth activism in Diepkloof. The organisation of violence by above ground structures posed two key dangers: violence would be regarded as 'an extension of formal political activity' and secondly it exposed the leadership.¹⁵⁶ Another underground group, Ace Mates, was established a few months after VALIMO. While the members of the two groups knew each other and occasionally collaborated in planning their actions, their degree of militancy differed. The most radical action Ace Mates envisaged was to attack a white high school in Vereeniging in late winter 1985.

Vereeniging's white population was probably blissfully unaware of the planned attack. Just off Voortrekker road that leads into Vereeniging, surrounded by a vacant strip of open field, General Smuts High School had been selected by Ace Mates to be attacked around September 1985.¹⁵⁷ The plan, according to its leader Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, was simple: the group would walk into the morning assembly, shoot as many students as possible and finally throw in handgrenades.¹⁵⁸ Expecting to be killed 'in action', Ace Mates had prepared letters explaining their motivation for the attack. Dineo Mokoena, one of its members, stated that 'Our mothers and our fathers they must know we are fighting for freedom!'¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Interview, Oupa Masankane, Vereeniging, 29 June 2010.

¹⁵⁶ Marks, 'Organisation, Identity and Violence amongst activist Diepkloof Youth, 1984 – 1993', 258.

¹⁵⁷ The exact date of the planned attack remains unclear.

¹⁵⁸ Interview, Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Boipatong, 16 September 2011; interview, Dineo 'Mapikoko' Mokoena, Nthabiseng Christina Mofolo and Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Sebokeng, 22 October 2011.

¹⁵⁹ Interview, Dineo 'Mapikoko' Mokoena, Nthabiseng Christina Mofolo and Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Sebokeng, 22 October 2011.

Ace Mates, included seven members and had been formed after the banning of COSAS in 1985 as a clandestine unit that regarded itself to be part of MK. By this time, the boundaries between formal MK units and clandestine youth groups had become increasingly blurred. Members of the group saw its aim in taking the armed struggle into the townships instead of leaving for exile, as Motaung explained: 'We can not afford all of us to go to exile. We must remain here and carry the struggle forward.'¹⁶⁰ One of their members, Benedict 'Tina Turner' Mashoke had contacts to the ANC in exile, partly through his mother who was a member of the Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW). Mashoke had gained his nickname for wearing a woman's wig at night to move through the townships unnoticed. The incentive for the formation of the group was both inspired by the ANC's call to form armed units inside the country, popularised through Radio Freedom, and by the daily experiences of violence, police brutality and oppression.

Based in Zone 7 in Sebokeng, the group was known for its militancy and came to be widely feared among anyone associated with the apartheid regime. They promoted political violence against informers and policemen in particular. Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, who was already in hiding by then, recalled their reputation:

It was an open secret. You'll only hear from comrades but you'll hear people talking. Proudly so to say yo yo yo. Ay. I want to join the Ace Mates. [...] They were feared! Feared in Sebokeng. In Zone 7. [...] Anyone who was associating himself with the police or the system we call it, any impimpi, sell-out, they will attack. That's what they were doing. So you see anything you do is against the community you know Ace will be with you. Ace Mates will be with you.¹⁶¹

While VALIMO was mainly involved in the burning of policemen's houses, Ace Mates went a step further. Their political strategy included three levels of 'operations': firstly to petrol bomb houses, secondly to attack General Jan Smuts High School and thirdly to attack police stations. The attack on General Jan Smuts, members of Ace Mates believed, would shake the government and ensure that South

¹⁶⁰ Interview, Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Boipatong, 16 September 2011.

¹⁶¹ Interview, Edwards 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011.

Africa's white population had to experience the same trauma of having to bury their children in masses.

Ace Motaung recalls the incentive for the planned attacks as follows:

We must ensure that we fulfil that mission. Although we know that we're going to be killed. [...] Because we must ensure that whites also bury in mass. Same as the blacks in the township. Because each and every weekend, each and every weekend during that time [...] we bury the people in mass. We decided that now we must ensure that even the white community they must do the same thing. [...] We got that idea. That if we can maybe kill white students in mass, even if we'll be killed, the message will be clear.¹⁶²

In a second interview Motaung further explained the purpose of the planned attack when he stated that 'we had accepted that something must be done. We need to shake the government.'¹⁶³ Dineo Mokoena argued that their aim was to 'get the government down.' She further said that 'To get the government down we have to go and hit them.'¹⁶⁴ The group didn't expect to survive the action and as Motaung explained, he would rather have blown himself up with a handgrenade than be arrested: 'I was with a handgrenade. If it's going to be bad I'm going to blow myself. Because that was the mission. Because if we got arrested we're going to be hanged. So we told ourselves that we're going to fight until the last bullet.'¹⁶⁵

By 1985, Ace Mates had acquired a handful of handgrenades and rifles including R1's, R4's and R5's. The rifles were weapons typically carried by policemen. Firearms brought in by MK included AK 47's, Makarovs and Tokarevs. The handgrenades had been given by a former Robben Islander who had close contact with the ANC in exile and who provided basic training in the handling of weapons.¹⁶⁶ The rifles were acquired by disarming police, a common practice not only among clandestine youth groups

¹⁶² Interview, Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Boipatong, 16 September 2011.

¹⁶³ Interview, Dineo 'Mapikoko' Mokoena, Nthabiseng Christina Mofolo and Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Sebokeng, 22 October 2011.

¹⁶⁴ Interview, Dineo 'Mapikoko' Mokoena, Nthabiseng Christina Mofolo and Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Sebokeng, 22 October 2011.

¹⁶⁵ Interview, Dineo 'Mapikoko' Mokoena, Nthabiseng Christina Mofolo and Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Sebokeng, 22 October 2011.

¹⁶⁶ Interview, Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Boipatong, 16 September 2011.

such as Ace Mates but also APLA.¹⁶⁷ Although the incentives for developing particular political strategies did not come from exile, Ace Mates co-operated with local ANC veterans who facilitated the link to MK. Training however never went much beyond the handling of weapons and thus the group operated in a perhaps naive manner as they openly displayed their weapons in Sebokeng. This lack of professional training and the carelessness with which they treated issues of secrecy and security added to their exposure to police surveillance that led to their arrest.

Mokoena and Motaung allege that the group had received a warning from their ANC contact prior to their planned attack on General Jan Smuts High School that the Minister of Law and Order had issued an order for them to be killed; they were therefore urged to leave South Africa and to go into exile. But the group ignored the warning and decided to go ahead with the planned attack on the high school before leaving for exile.¹⁶⁸ The day before the scheduled attack on General Jan Smuts High School, Motaung was arrested. His mistake, Motaung recalled, was that he visited Jordan high school in Evaton where he was a student to rally support for MK and to encourage students to go into exile. The rest of the group was arrested during the following months. To protect herself against arrest, Mokoena was using traditional medicine - uMuthi or 'African magic' as the group called it. Among other reasons she felt that she was finally detained due to her discontinuation of the use of uMuthi. During an interview she explained that she was 'tired of running'.¹⁶⁹ Other interviewees did not mention the use of uMuthi. While information on Ace Mates remains limited, it appears that the group was functional only for a few weeks until Motaung was arrested. Its character was thus highly ephemeral.

¹⁶⁷ Interview, Thami ka Plaatjie, Vanderbijlpark, 14 June 2010 and Johannesburg, 26 May 2011.

¹⁶⁸ Interview, Dineo 'Mapikoko' Mokoena, Nthabiseng Christina Mofolo and Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Sebokeng, 22 October 2011.

¹⁶⁹ Interview, Dineo 'Mapikoko' Mokoena, Nthabiseng Christina Mofolo and Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Sebokeng, 22 October 2011.

In the aftermath of their arrest, members of Ace Mates were severely tortured as the security branch tried to uncover where the weapons had come from.¹⁷⁰ They were taken to the Vaal river, put in large mealie meal bags and thrown into the water - presumably to create a sensation of drowning and suffocation similar to the wet-bag torture that was made public during the amnesty application of former policeman Jeffrey Benzien.¹⁷¹ A few months later, on 26 March 1987, one of the group, Benedict 'Tina Turner' Mashoke was found dead in his cell in Burgersfort in the Eastern Transvaal. Police alleged that he had 'hanged himself'.¹⁷² The state pathologist confirmed that Mashoke had died as a result of hanging and the local magistrate concluded the inquest into his death by stating that Mashoke had committed suicide.¹⁷³ The circumstances of his death remain unclear. In the sceptical words of defence lawyer George Bizos, 'no one was to blame' for deaths in detention like this one.¹⁷⁴ On the night of his night vigil, detainees in Vereeniging's prisons commemorated Mashoke's death by singing songs all night.¹⁷⁵ The commemoration soon led to clashes between warders, police and detainees. On 11 December 1987, Motaung was imprisoned on Robben Island from where he was finally released on 30 April 1991 while Mokoena was placed under house arrest - apparently because she had a small baby.

¹⁷⁰ Interview, Dineo 'Mapikoko' Mokoena, Nthabiseng Christina Mofolo and Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Sebokeng, 22 October 2011; interview, Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Boipatong, 16 September 2011; unrecorded conversation with Dineo 'Mapikoko' Mokoena and Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Sebokeng, 17 December 2011.

¹⁷¹ A. Krog, 'The Wet Bag and Other Phantoms', in N.Scheper-Hughes and P.Bourgois (eds.), *Violence in War and Peace. An Anthology* (Malden, Mass., 2004), 372-377; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Amnesty Hearing Jeffrey Benzien (14 July 1997), accessed 10 January 2013 at http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_benzien.htm.

¹⁷² The circumstances and causes of Mashoke's death remain unclear.

¹⁷³ See Independent Board of Inquiry (IBI), Dr. Gluckman: Persons who died in police detention, accessed 10 January 2013 at http://truth.www.wits.ac.za/doc_page.php?did=1165&li=.

¹⁷⁴ G. Bizos, *No One to Blame?: In Pursuit of Justice in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1998).

¹⁷⁵ Unrecorded information Khulu Malindi.

(III) The ANC, MK and the underground

The ANC in exile: Policies and strategies

Between 16 and 23 June 1985, the ANC leadership met in Kabwe in Zambia to discuss the future of the struggle.¹⁷⁶ It was the second National Consultative Conference of the ANC.¹⁷⁷ Kabwe was, in many ways, a turning point. Two of the key documents assessing internal mobilisation were the Green Book and the Morogoro Document on Strategy and Tactics.¹⁷⁸ It reaffirmed the guiding principles and stated that the four pillars of the struggle were vanguard activity of the ANC underground, mass mobilisation, the armed struggle and international solidarity.¹⁷⁹ Needs identified included the strengthening of the underground inside South Africa, an increase in attacks on 'enemy personnel,' the suggestion to consider white farms as military targets, recruitment of workers and peasants into MK, a redefinition of legitimate soft targets, the arming of the masses, the combatting of organisations with differing ideologies, the unionisation of the working youth as well as the extension and intensification of the ANC's women's section and the youth section.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, the presence of MK inside the country should be strengthened by providing training in South Africa.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ For a summary of the conference proceedings and discussions see University of the Western Cape (UWC) Mayibuye Archive (MA), MCH01 (Records of the African National Congress), 47.3; T. Lodge, "'Mayihlome! - Let Us Go To War!': From Nkomati to Kabwe, the African National Congress, January 1984 - June 1985,' in *South African Review* 3 (Johannesburg, 1986), 226-247.

¹⁷⁷ The first was held at Morogoro in 1969.

¹⁷⁸ UWC MA MCH01, 47.3.

¹⁷⁹ UWC MA MCH01, 47.3, Annexures to Agenda - Items E and I.

¹⁸⁰ UWC MA MCH01, 47.3, On the strategy of attacking 'enemy personnel' and institutions, see Further submissions and responses by the African National Congress to Questions raised by the Commission for the Truth and Reconciliation (12 May 1997), accessed 13 January 2013 at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/submit/anc2.htm>.

¹⁸¹ UWC MA MCH01, 47.3, 19.

From 1985 onwards, Radio Freedom and Dawn Breaks broadcast calls to make South Africa ungovernable.¹⁸² In November 1985, Dawn Breaks broadcast a speech that called for the continuing attacks on government institutions and for the arming of the population.¹⁸³ In September 1986, another speech took up the need for a Peoples' War again and suggested ways for listeners to contribute. The speaker linked the actions of youth in township such as stone throwing to the armed struggle.¹⁸⁴ The speaker further stated that 'Nobody can liberate ourselves except ourselves.' It was a call to streamline the actions of MK with those of street committees and any other 'organs of people's power.' The tactics of guerilla warfare should be used to further render South Africa ungovernable by seizing weapons and making local government unworkable.¹⁸⁵ Other speeches for example urged listeners to continue the rent boycotts which had begun in 1984.¹⁸⁶

According to the ANC submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, members of the SAP, the SADF as well as informers were deemed to be justified targets. As the submission stated: 'Informers were essential tools of the security forces; without them, the apartheid regime would have been seriously hampered in their attempts to crush resistance.'¹⁸⁷ While the ANC never officially endorsed or, as the submission states 'ordered' such attacks, they also never publicly condemned them. Instead, the ANC argued in the 1990s,

Although the ANC leadership did not at all times approve of the methods adopted by people, actions of this nature were in essence the result of state repression, and they were in line with the

¹⁸² See Address by Oliver Tambo on Radio Freedom, 22 July 1985, accessed 10 January 2013 at <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=4470>; 'Make South Africa ungovernable' by Oliver Tambo, broadcast on Radio Freedom, 10 October 1984, accessed 10 January 2013 at <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=4457&t=ES%20Reddy>.

¹⁸³ UWC MA MCH01, 15.2, Radio transcript *Dawn Breaks* (5 November 1985).

¹⁸⁴ UWC MA MCH01, 15.2, Radio transcript *Dawn Breaks* (11 September 1986); also see UWC MA MCH02 (Records of the African National Congress), 78, 25 Fighting Years. Umkhonto we Sizwe. Intensify People's War!.

¹⁸⁵ UWC MA MCH01, 15.2, Radio transcript *Dawn Breaks* (5 November 1985).

¹⁸⁶ UWC MA MCH01, Radio transcript *Dawn Breaks* (24 July 1986).

¹⁸⁷ See Further submissions and responses by the African National Congress to Questions raised by the Commission for the Truth and Reconciliation, accessed 10 January 2013 at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/submit/anc2.htm>.

ANC's stated policy to mobilise people against institutions designed to yet further entrench apartheid.¹⁸⁸

A report on internal mobilisation, discussed at Kabwe in June 1985 reaffirms the argument that the organisational capacity of the ANC was rather weak.¹⁸⁹ The document also stated that although in some areas uprisings were related to the work of ANC underground cells, the relation was generally 'uneven and erratic.'¹⁹⁰ The ANC was well aware that its influence over political mobilisation inside South Africa was insufficient. As Howard Barrell pointed out, the ANC in exile 'failed to seize a moment in which popular militancy, together with weakness and confusion within the apartheid state, was at unprecedented levels.'¹⁹¹

MK structures in the Vaal

In October 1984 a group of three men left South Africa to undergo military training in exile. Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi had joined MK in 1982 already and had received instructions to take two other activists including Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele across the border. They spent two months in Botswana where they formally joined MK.¹⁹² Their training included the handling of weapons, secret communication, intelligence and how to organise underground activities and cells. Local MK structures were neither particularly extensive nor very organised. Their presence nevertheless served a number of

¹⁸⁸ Further submissions and responses by the African National Congress to Questions raised by the Commission for the Truth and Reconciliation, accessed 10 January 2013 at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/submit/anc2.htm>.

¹⁸⁹ UWC MA MCH01, 47.3, Internal mobilisation, 2; see also Simpson, "'Umkhonto we Sizwe, We are Waiting for You'".

¹⁹⁰ UWC MA MCH01, 47.3, Internal mobilisation, 2.

¹⁹¹ H. Barrell, 'Conscripts to Their Age: African National Congress Operational Strategy, 1976-1986' (University of Oxford DPhil Thesis, 1993), 8.

¹⁹² Interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

purposes, namely the provision of weapons to local youth groups and providing assistance to those who wanted to leave for exile.

Upon their return in December 1984, the three men went separate ways: Motubatsi was tasked to continue the work towards the formation of youth structures and to act as a courier. However, since he was already known to the security branch and had been detained, he was instructed 'to lie low' in order to avoid arrest.¹⁹³ Mokhele moved to Parys, from where he planned the majority of his operations that included helping others to go into exile and join MK, and to create favourable conditions for ANC cadres to be stationed in the area.¹⁹⁴ This task included finding safe houses and work for MK cadres.¹⁹⁵ Mokhele was involved in facilitating the import of weapons into the country, which would then be kept in Dead Letter Boxes. One of the arms caches, Mokhele recalls, was in a house in the Free State that had a hidden staircase that had been used to hide alcohol from the police. Under the staircase a number of milk canisters were stored containing - besides the milk - handgrenades. Once the weapons were distributed he had no control over how they were used. Mokhele argued that 'How they keep their weapons and where and who they deal with is their own baby.'¹⁹⁶

From 1986 onwards, the flow of weapons into the country intensified and reached its peak during the 1990s, after the unbanning of the ANC. The strategy of a People's War saw the training and arming of people in the townships to ensure that MK would increase its base in South Africa and that the armed struggle was now rooted inside the country. Individual members who had undergone training were given the task to identify youth in particular, give them basic training in the use of weapons and provide handgrenades, rifles and other weaponry. In the Vaal Triangle, there is no clear evidence on how many

¹⁹³ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011.

¹⁹⁴ Interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

¹⁹⁵ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 5 December 2011.

¹⁹⁶ Interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

such intermediaries were providing training to the youth. While their weapons were provided by MK, their strategies did not always correspond with official ANC policy.

Mokhele soon came to be known by local activists as one of the key contacts to MK and exile.¹⁹⁷ By 1985, it has become increasingly difficult to leave via Botswana as border control had tightened. Instead, according to Mokhele, they took the recruits via Ficksburg into Lesotho, using the knowledge of a dagga smuggler on how to cross the border unnoticed.¹⁹⁸ Local people who were known as 'butterflies' assisted the recruits to go into exile. Once they had crossed the border, the next destination was the United Nations Centre for Refugees in Maseru where they were given food and shelter and were eventually airlifted to a country of choice of the ANC.¹⁹⁹ Mokhele remembered assisting dozens of young people to go into exile.

However, despite precautions, Mokhele was arrested on 27 August 1985 and taken to a small police station close to the Vaal river called Barrage.²⁰⁰ Security branch alleged during interviews that Barrage was an ordinary police station and detainees were usually only taken there if the cells in Vereeniging were full.²⁰¹ Mokhele's evidence suggests that the remoteness of the place allowed police to keep detainees away from other activists and public scrutiny. The police station - or farm as Mokhele calls it - which only had a handful of cells, had been emptied of other prisoners. He remembers that 'It was me and God in that place.'²⁰² Mokhele, whom the police suspected to be a member of the ANC underground and MK was a vital witness for the police to prove the link between civic structures and the ANC in exile. Frustrated with their inability to get the information they wanted, the police eventually

¹⁹⁷ Interview, Kedibone Mogotsi, Vereeniging, 26 July 2010.

¹⁹⁸ Interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

¹⁹⁹ UWC MA MCH31 (Records of the International Defence and Aid Fund), ISO34/XIRIOAI, (State v Tsietsi Elias Mokhele), case number unknown.

²⁰⁰ Interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

²⁰¹ Interview, Petrus Niemand, West Rand, 29 September 2011.

²⁰² Interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

drove Mokhele to the border to Lesotho and told him to go to the ANC who would kill him.²⁰³ In the statement collected by the defence lawyers and later retold at the TRC hearings on the kidnapping and disappearance of his partner, Mokhele recalls a conversation between the three policemen who discussed their possession of guns. Mokhele assumed that he would be shot dead and that the police would claim that he had attempted to escape. Hence he refused to walk towards the border.²⁰⁴

Mokhele claims that once he was facing trial, the prosecution offered to drop six out of seven charges if only he admitted to be a member of a banned movement, the ANC. His admission would most likely have sunk the Delmas Treason trialists as well and he refused.²⁰⁵ However, when the defence discovered that one of the key state witnesses, an askari, was using various identities to testify at three different trials, Mokhele was released on bail of R3,000 under the condition that he reported at the Vanderbijlpark police station on a daily basis. On 11 June 1986 Mokhele failed to report; he had skipped bail and was on his way into exile.²⁰⁶ The statement by the security branch policeman who reported his disappearance confirms their in-depth knowledge about Mokhele's affiliations. He only returned in 1993 when he was finally allowed back into the country to attend Chris Hani's funeral. In December 2000 Mokhele appeared before the TRC to testify about the disappearance of his partner Nomasonto Mashiya codenamed 'Nokuthula Nkomo' and the kidnapping of their then two year old son in 1987 in exile. Members of the security branch admitted to having kidnapped Mashiya together with three other MK

²⁰³ Their argument was that since he showed no visible physical injuries and had been released by the police, the ANC would suspect Mokhele to be an informer.

²⁰⁴ UWC MA MCH31, ISO34/XIRIOAI, Statement of Accused, 19.

²⁰⁵ WHP AK2117, G2.1.63, Chargesheet State v. TE Mokhele and Statement DB Erasmus; interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

²⁰⁶ WHP AK2117, G2.1.63, Daniel Beltsasar [sic] Erasmus verklaar.

cadres but claimed that they 'turned' them into askaris and sent them back to Lesotho.²⁰⁷ Mokhele however suspects that she was killed by the police. It remains unclear what happened to her.

It is difficult to gauge how extensive the security branches' knowledge on underground structures was for in some cases the police preferred to monitor activists whom they suspected to be linked to the ANC in order to uncover their network and contacts. Archival evidence on Mokhele's activities however highlight that police had gathered substantial information on local MK activities.

(IV) State terror and repression

We were forced to rely more and more on acts of terror - both against our own citizens and against neighbouring states. We started realising that people who felt so strongly about their ideals and rights could be defeated only by fear.²⁰⁸

It was not knowing what is happening outside. You see you are just in the dark.²⁰⁹

By 1985, insurrections in the townships had become so widespread that a partial state of emergency was declared on 21 July 1985 in 44 magisterial districts, covering the Witwatersrand, the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape.²¹⁰ It was succeeded by a nationwide state of emergency, declared on 12 June 1986. The key features were de-facto military rule, widespread detentions and tight censorship. In 1985 and 1986, thousands of people were detained nationwide. During the second state

²⁰⁷ See Truth and Reconciliation Commission, amnesty hearing Anthony Jagga (15 November 2000), accessed 10 January 2013 at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/2000/201115bl.htm>; amnesty hearing Lesizi Michael Jantjie, application no. AM7107/97 (10 October 2000), accessed 10 January 2013 at <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/2000/201010jb.htm>; interview, Tsietso 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

²⁰⁸ E. De Kock, and J. Gordin, *A long Night's Damage: Working for the Apartheid State* (Johannesburg, 1998), 98.

²⁰⁹ Interview, Edward 'Chippa' Motubatsi, Vereeniging, 22 November 2011.

²¹⁰ According to the Public Safety Act, No 3 of 1953, the head of state was empowered to implement a state of emergency if, according to his opinion, public safety was under threat.

of emergency in 1986 an estimated 10,000 people were detained.²¹¹ In the words of Mokhele, they often 'disappeared from the face of the earth'.²¹² Activists from the Vaal were either taken to Leeuhof or Groenpunt, the two prisons in the vicinity of Vereeniging, de Deur or other institutions such as John Vorster Square, Diepkloof prison (ironically dubbed Sun City) or Potchefstroom.²¹³ If the detainees had links to other regions, investigations were conducted across regional borders, resulting in activists from the Vaal being detained in other regions.

The conditions in prison were ghastly; besides the frequent harassment, beatings and various forms of torture, the food was often of very poor quality and interviewees recalled spending nights without blankets, having no access to any information and no idea how long they would have to stay in prison. Interviewees recall moments of great fear and despair during detention. Hence in spite of new regulations introduced following the recommendations of the Rabie Commission into security legislation in 1982, detention often provided little safety and control mechanisms.²¹⁴ With the declaration of a state of emergency, the security forces were given a wide range of new tools to curb political protests and dissent in the country.²¹⁵ Under emergency regulations, members of the South African Defence Force and the South African Police were almost exempted from civil and criminal prosecution for acts 'done in good faith'.²¹⁶ At the end of July 1985, most of the leading students in the regional branch of COSAS were detained and many of them were questioned about the incidents of arson in Sebokeng in particular.²¹⁷

²¹¹ WHP A2084, Ad6.1.2.1, DPSC report for June/July 1986.

²¹² Interview, Tsietse 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

²¹³ I'm indebted to Natacha Filippi for sharing her thoughts on this.

²¹⁴ D.H. Foster and D. Davis, *Detention and Torture in South Africa: Psychological, Legal & Historical Studies* (London, 1987).

²¹⁵ T. Lodge and B. Nasson, *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s* (Cape Town, 1991), 87.

²¹⁶ Under Proclamation R201, Government Gazette no 9993, 26 October 1985; also see Cock and Nathan, *War and Society*.

²¹⁷ Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010.

The average age of those detained ranged between 16 and 20 years - reflecting the nationwide phenomenon that a large number of detainees by that time were in fact under-age.²¹⁸ While detention and prison sentences were physically and emotionally traumatising and deterred some from further engaging in politics after their release, it entrenched the commitment and convictions of others to continue the struggle against apartheid.²¹⁹ Furthermore and very importantly, it allowed young detainees to engage in political discussions with older prisoners hence educating them while forging links that could be pursued outside prison. Sharing cells with up to 60 people, detention was a time for political discussions often led by senior political prisoners and many youth who had been politicised mainly through experience came to know about politics and history in a much more profound sense.²²⁰

Mass detentions, according to General Johan van der Merwe, head of the security branch from 1986 onwards, were a double edged sword: 'Then we had to detain people on a large scale which was no actual solution. Although it curbed the unrest in certain areas it makes our task almost impossible.'²²¹ From the perspective of the police, detentions could be problematic as they enhanced the status of individuals within their communities: 'But the moment that you detain a person then such a person was immediately regarded by the other members of the population as a person they should look up. It increased the status of such a person, which he had not previously and it makes matters much worse.'²²² According to van der Merwe, the key aim was to 'make sure that we take the activists out of the community. That we isolate them.'

I think that was more or less the main objective at that stage. And further on obviously we tried to

²¹⁸ WHP A2084, Ad6.1.2.1, DPSC Report on Detentions.

²¹⁹ Interview, Morris More, Sebokeng, 2 December 2011.

²²⁰ Robben Island had the nickname 'the University'; however, prisons in general served as places where politics and history were discussed.

²²¹ Interview, Johan van der Merwe, Pretoria, 18 May 2011.

²²² Interview, Johan van der Merwe, Pretoria, 18 May 2011; van der Merwe made the same claim when interviewed for the book by Don Foster and Marésa de Beer. See Foster, Haupt and de Beer, *The Theatre of Violence*, 116-7.

improve relations, there was the security management system. To improve relations with the local population. With the inhabitants and the residents in each township.²²³

The majority of political detainees were detained under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act (ISA), followed by Section 50 of ISA, the act allowing for preventive detention.²²⁴ Detentions and arrests were, however, closely monitored by organisations such as the Detainees' Parents Support Committee (DPSC) and the Detainees' Support Committee (DESCOM), both established in the early 1980s. Prior to the implementation of a state of emergency, detentions and those particularly under Section 28 were challenged in court and in a substantial number of cases declared invalid.²²⁵ Various DPSC reports demonstrate that a substantial number of actions were brought to court relating to torture and assault as well as unlawful detentions.²²⁶ A study conducted by Diane Sandler and Don Foster in 1985 for example found that 83% of detainees had reported physical torture while 'no cases reported an entire lack of psychological abuse'.²²⁷

In some ways, being a more experienced and trained political activist helped with coping with the physical, emotional and psychological consequences of detention. Various pamphlets and lectures by the ANC informed the activists about police interrogation methods. A document titled 'police interrogation methods' identified five stages of interrogation and provided advice on how to cope: 'When you have resolved to resist damn the consequences because as a man you can take what is dished out without squirming. (...) Do anything, think anything about anything but misery and defeatism. Never pity yourself.

²²³ Interview, Johan van der Merwe, Pretoria, 18 May 2011.

²²⁴ WHP A2084, Ad6.1.2.1, DPSC March 1986 Report.

²²⁵ WHP A2084, Ad6.1.2.1, DPSC March 1986 Report.

²²⁶ WHP A2084, Ad6.1.2.1, Various DPSC reports, for example Review of 1987.

²²⁷ AG2918, 2.2.6.5, D.Foster and D.Sandler, 'A study of detention and torture in South Africa: Preliminary Report' (University of Cape Town, 1985), 27-31.

Think of good things at all times.²²⁸ Another document, although emphasising that detainees should not collaborate with the police, accepted that every detainee had a breaking point.²²⁹

The security forces went to great lengths to cover up the killing of activists; coded language such as 'to neutralise', 'to take out' or to 'eliminate' created a vocabulary that allowed insiders to understand commands without being too explicit while corpses were carefully disposed off and traces covered up.²³⁰ As argued earlier, the petrol bombings of policemen's houses in particular became a major problem as the townships could no longer be policed. In the East Rand a group of young comrades were approached by the infamous Vlakplaas askari Joe Mamasela and given handgrenades that had been timed zero seconds.²³¹ During an interview Johan van der Merwe - who had given orders to provide the youth with the handgrenades - denied that any similar action was planned for the Vaal Triangle. Local security branch members also deny such tactics. However, a number of youth activists recall that they had been approached by Mamasela.²³²

Hence while violence committed by comrades relied on publicity, violence *against* the comrades including torture and detention and perpetuated by members of the state often occurred in secrecy. The use of covert operations and the need to cover up deaths in detention and assassinations by the security forces speaks to the particular nature of the apartheid regime during the 1980s and both symbolises a loss of control as well as a need to appease the broader constituency as well as the international community. As suggested earlier, the South African regime was anxious to win the 'propaganda war'.

²²⁸ UWC MA MCH02, 45, Police Interrogation Methods (no date).

²²⁹ UWC MA MCH02, 45, untitled document (no date).

²³⁰ See N. Rousseau, 'The Farm, the River and the Picnic Spot: Topographies of Terror', *African Studies*, 68/3 (2009), 351-69.

²³¹ Interview, Johan van der Merwe, Pretoria, 18 May 2011; also see Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Amnesty Hearing Willem Frederick Schoon, application no. AM4936 (3 August 1999), accessed 10 January 2013 at http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/1999/99080205_pre_990803pt.htm.

²³² Interview, Themba Goba, Vereeniging, 18 June 2010; interview, Lekgotla 'Ace' Motaung, Boipatong, 16 September 2011; interview, Toy Manqa, Vereeniging, 26 May 2011.

Violence was at the heart of this propaganda war; the apartheid government thus aimed to portray anti-apartheid movements and groups as violent while state representatives were depicted as rational, in control and only using necessary force. Political assassinations, torture and other forms of assault hence had to be kept secret.

Statements collected by the legal defence of detainees provide insights into the gruelling interrogation the security branch was infamous for and the difficulties detainees faced in deciding how much to cooperate and what to deny. Mokhele outlined his ordeal in a 30-page statement to his lawyers that demonstrates his increasing feeling of powerlessness, the torture the police subjected him to and his physical and mental battles. During my interview with him he recalled his detention as well. The document, just like the statement by a security branch policeman, indicates that the police knew about Mokhele's involvement with the ANC and his visits to neighbouring countries. It appears, however, that they were lacking evidence that could be used in court. Shortly after the arrest he was informed that he was detained under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act: 'He [the policeman] explained the section to me and told me that I would not see my family or lawyers and that I would be kept until such time as I made a satisfactory statement.'²³³ Mokhele stated that 'I knew they would keep me there as long as I [sic] wanted. I felt helpless. Hopeless and cut off from the world and at their mercy.'²³⁴ After three days of torture, Mokhele recalled having been 'terrified and thought that they would kill me'.²³⁵ After having been identified by an askari, his torture at Barrage was intensified and the security branch took turns to interrogate him without noticeable breaks:

No they then beat me up in earnest. From that day onwards they denied me medical access, they denied me everything. The torture started, became 24-hour torture. I mean. It would be eight to four, at four a new team would come in. And this new team when they come they find you wired,

²³³ UWC MA MCH31, ISO34/XIRIOAI, Statement of the accused, 3.

²³⁴ UWC MA MCH31, ISO34/XIRIOAI, Statement of the accused, 3.

²³⁵ UWC MA MCH31, ISO34/XIRIOAI, Statement of the accused, 7.

neh. You're wired by the last team, cause these gadgets, when they run this thing, man! The electric shocks through your body. No, no man.²³⁶

Dissatisfied with his story, the police continued the interrogation about his involvement with the ANC, the Vaal Civic Association and his relation to the Delmas trialists and the Pietermaritzburg trial for several weeks. Eventually he was presented with three options: to remain in detention under Section 29, to be brought to court or to collaborate with them and become an informer.²³⁷ According to his statement, he chose the second. During an interview Mokhele recalled that being charged was the best option. He argued that 'During the struggle days all you wanted is to be charged. From then on you're out of the hands of the security branch.'²³⁸ Besides physical assault, the police threatened Mokhele that they had been given orders to 'make me suffer'.²³⁹ After five weeks in solitary confinement, he was taken to the Magistrate to make a statement. Distrusting the medical doctor, the inspector of detainees as well as the local magistrate, Mokhele did not disclose the fact that he had been assaulted and coerced into making a statement. On 14 January 1986, almost five months after his arrest, he appeared in court.

The statement not only provides insights into torture and assault by the police but also Mokhele's memory of his reasoning during interrogation on how much to tell and what to deny. Stories and knowledge about torture and assault were common knowledge amongst those involved in opposition to the apartheid state and infamous cases of death in detention had received coverage and publicity through newspapers, speeches, pamphlets, songs and other forms of communication. Thus when the police told Mokhele that 'stronger people had landed in their hands and they ended up telling the truth', he assumed that the police was threatening him with torture, conveying the message that he would eventually provide the information they sought.²⁴⁰ Police hence used both explicit threats to intimidate

²³⁶ Interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

²³⁷ UWC MA MCH31, ISO34/XIRIOAI, Statement of the accused, 16.

²³⁸ Interview, Tsietsi 'Stompi' Mokhele, Bophelong, 18 September 2011.

²³⁹ UWC MA MCH31, ISO34/XIRIOAI, Statement of the accused, 16.

²⁴⁰ UWC MA MCH31, ISO34/XIRIOAI, Statement of the accused, 3.

detainees by stating that torture would be used and pain inflicted, but they also relied on the collective knowledge shared amongst activists and township communities more broadly. Knowledge of police harassment and torture during detention transcended boundaries of individual experiences through narration and rumour and seeped into the very fabric of social relations, creating a collective understanding that perpetuated a sense of terror and fear. Rumour, as argued in previous chapters, came to play a particularly important role as it turned individual experiences into a mediated and collective knowledge and understanding.

(V) Conclusion

In many ways the Vaal Uprising was a turning point that altered the political and social landscape of the region and South Africa more broadly. While political violence by youth groups prior to 3 September 1984 was mostly contingent and resulted from confrontations between youth and police, youth and councillors or youth and school principals, a new political culture was shaped by an understanding that violence was pertinent to pushing the struggle for liberation. Degrees of militancy varied but a sense of urgency, overwhelming anger and frustration was part of a collective mindset of young people in particular. Violence was therefore often neither random nor spontaneous.

While the generation of the 'young lions' have often been portrayed as having been out of control, they in fact kept contacts with senior ANC and MK cadres who provided training, guidance and access to weapons and networks. However, the influence of the ANC and MK was rather limited; the upsurge of popular protest in the townships and the increasing use of political violence were to some extent inspired but not led and organised by the ANC. The concept of ungovernability and People's War had,

however, an impact on the minds of the youth as they perceived themselves to be carrying the armed struggle into the townships.

Weapons were only brought into the country around 1986 and MK was virtually absent until late 1984/85. Thus youth engaging the police in street battles or targeting houses of policemen, councillors and informers relied on the use of petrol bombs and stones. And while their weaponry was rather makeshift, petrol bombs in particular proved to be highly effective, cheap and easy to make. From 1985 onwards, the petrol bombing of policemen's houses in particular became a major issue for the security branch as it hampered effective policing and demonstrated to the police that they could no longer protect their members.

Security forces increasingly began to rely on covert operations and mass detention, which often enhanced the political and social status of detainees in their communities. The use of excessive force by police and the circulating of stories about detention and torture created a climate in which the overcoming of fear was vital. Hence the political culture of youth activists saw an increasing militarisation through songs, toyi-toying and slogans. The use of violence by youth groups began to change the balance of power and redrew the boundaries of township political communities.

Conclusion

(I) Retrospect

In March 2012 a monument was unveiled outside the Magistrate's Court in Delmas, a small town Northeast of Johannesburg. Depicting a hammer and an anvil, symbolic for the force that brought the apartheid regime to its knees, the monument honours the 22 Delmas Treason trialists as well as the 'Delmas Four', a unit of Umkhonto we Sizwe responsible for a number of political assassinations. The caption quotes Nelson Mandela's response to the 1976 student uprisings, published by the ANC in 1980: 'Unite, mobilise and fight on! Between the Anvil of United Mass Action and the Hammer of the armed struggle, we shall crush apartheid.'¹ The 1980s indeed became the decade of mass mobilisation and popular protests that swept across the country and challenged the apartheid regime in unprecedented ways. However, as this thesis argues, the ANC neither organised nor led popular insurrections in the townships but mostly provided ideological and symbolic guidance and inspiration.

About a 100 kilometres away in the township of Sebokeng a tombstone was erected a few months later to commemorate the life and death of Benedict 'Tina Turner' Mashoke, the young man who died in detention in 1987. The event certainly attracted less media attention but publicly affirmed his role as a historical actor. The two memorial sites embody very different aspects and memories of the struggle against apartheid. While the monument in Delmas symbolises the power of

¹ N.Mandela, *The Struggle is My Life* (3rd edn. London, 1990), 189.

mass mobilisation, the honouring of Mashoke represents the inclusion of hitherto marginalised aspects of the struggle into public history. Representing militancy and the promotion of political violence through clandestine action, the voices and experiences of activists like Mashoke have barely found their way into public discourse and dominant historical narratives. The two repertoires of protest – mass mobilisation and clandestine operations - were, however, neither complementary nor discrete. Rather, they were drawn upon by actors for different purposes and reflect at times contending, and at times intertwined, perceptions of appropriate political strategies to achieve change.

Such *lieux de mémoire* [realms of memory], as Pierre Nora reminds us, have widely replaced *les milieux de mémoire* [environments of memory] in recent historical processes and debates.² However, Nora's concepts and distinctions between memory and history cannot easily be translated from their French context to a South African one. His rigid juxtaposition of memory and history has been questioned by Gary Baines who argues that instead, the two are 'mutually constitutive'.³ In response to Nora, British historian Tony Judt points to the relation between memory and history and states that 'The uses to which memory is put are the building blocks of history too.'⁴ Collective memory both in its material and non-material expression hence renders visible the meaning attributed to the past and its relation to the present.⁵

Officially sanctioned mnemonic devices are however rarely divorced from political agendas and serve their own ends. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in particular has been vital in moulding limited perceptions and concepts of the past. Focussing mostly on specific incidents of gross human rights violations it has failed to place them within a broader context of structural and

² P.Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 26 (1989), 7.

³ G.Baines, 'The Politics of Public History in Post-Apartheid South Africa', in H.E.Stolten, *History Making and Present Day Politics: The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa* (Uppsala, 2007), 168.

⁴ T.Judt, *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century* (London, 2009), 199.

⁵ On public history and memory see P.Harries, 'From Public History to Private Enterprise: The Politics of Memory in the New South Africa', in M.Diawara, B.Lategan and J.Rüsen (eds.), *Historical Memory in Africa: Dealing With the Past, Reaching for the Future in an Intercultural Context* (New York, 2010), 121-41.

physical violence and state repression. This emphasis on singular incidents of human rights violations has further obscured more subtle and complex aspects of past engagements and experiences. The experiences of ordinary South Africans in particular – unless they were classified as victims of gross human rights violations - warranted little attention. Furthermore, the proliferation of biographies of ‘big men’ and the overwhelming focus on the life and contribution of Nelson Mandela has demoted other aspects of the struggle against apartheid in public discourse. And yet the everyday experiences of local actors were vital in shaping particular understandings of rights, community, conflict, equality and freedom that infused the liberation struggle with its content.

The burden of remembering a painful past poses particular challenges to the project of nation-building in a democracy as young as South Africa’s. As Neville Alexander points out, one of the greatest challenges is to ‘remember without constantly rekindling the divisive passions of the past’.⁶ Co-existence in small towns like Vereeniging or townships in the region is at times difficult. In the streets, churches and other public venues, participants of the struggle against the regime encounter former policemen, councillors and those they identified as informers. Some of the most notorious members of the security branch still live in close proximity to those they once detained, harassed and assaulted. While little public engagement with past abuse and violence has taken place, former activists confirm that even in private they barely talk about the past. For many, the scars are deep and the horror and trauma of past experiences has affected their lives in one way or another. The TRC held few hearings in the region, most of which focussed on the violence of the 1990s. None of the policemen involved in suppressing the 1980s insurrection applied for amnesty at the TRC and to this day the circumstances of Mashoke’s death remain unclear. It is thus mostly during occasional and uncoordinated commemorations, such as that for Mashoke, that alternative narratives emerge. These give meaning to less prominent activists, in less celebrated places and to everyday experiences within a broader national context.

⁶ N.Alexander, *An Ordinary Country: Issues in the Transition from Apartheid to Democracy in South Africa* (New York, 2003), 117.

The annual commemoration of the Vaal Uprising has often led to the exclusion of contending voices and the production of a dominant narrative. Its interpretation and narration has been influenced by the discursive struggles reflected in the Delmas Treason Trial rather than by the hearings of the TRC. As discussed in this thesis, the prosecution emphasised the involvement of the ANC in exile while the defence lawyers divorced the actions of the civic leadership from broader political objectives. The popular narrative that has emerged post-apartheid straddles the two narratives produced during the Delmas Treason Trial by placing the uprising within the broader framework of the ANC's strategies but emphasising the contingency of violence.

During the commemoration of the Vaal Uprising at the Roman Catholic Church in Evaton Small Farms on 3 September 2008, a former speaker of the Vaal Civic Association argued that the struggle was secretly led by the ANC in an attempt to challenge - if not overthrow - the apartheid regime. Violence she argued was reactive: 'Due to the massive united support of the people singing Siyaya ePitoli, police and the then Councillors panicked and started to shoot. Things went out of control, the masses in defense [sic] fought back with their stones and tyres.'⁷ Subsequent commemorations painted a similar picture. Furthermore, the struggle over memory and who has the space and right to speak reflect political divisions; in 2011 for example, many of those who attended were school children and almost none of the former leaders of the protest march were officially invited.

The framework to explain violence as spontaneous, contingent and reactive is deeply entrenched in the popular narrative of the Vaal Uprising. The language of resistance used to describe violent confrontations usually has recourse to causality and cycles of violence - namely that violence begets violence. The rhetoric further implies that collective violence is an act of venting emotions such as anger, hate or frustration. And yet empirical research demonstrates that the unfolding of the uprising was indeed more complicated. While hostile interactions between crowds and police and

⁷ Speech delivered by comrade Isabella 'Connie' Lethlake, accessed 18 January 2013 at <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/19860684/uprising-speech>.

councillors exacerbated an already tense situation, the extent and form of violence constituted a break from past confrontations. It was neither a by-product of mass protest nor did it simply erupt. The killing of the four councillors in particular was a transgression of social and moral norms that constituted a redrawing of boundaries of community.

The renegotiation of social and moral norms as well as the experiences of repression and violence influenced the development of new repertoires of protest, including political violence as promoted by the group Mashoke belonged to. In the aftermath of the uprising, power relations altered as the local state had lost its ability to enforce rent payments and the security forces were no longer able to protect their members adequately. The Vaal Uprising provided a platform for the use of collective violence against members of the community that were regarded as violating the interests of the community by 'collaborating' with the apartheid regime. In the aftermath of 3 September, this type of violence became engrained in new forms of political protest.

(II) The 1980s: Power and politics

The speech delivered at the annual commemoration of the Vaal Uprising in 2008 not only symbolises the struggle over memory and the production of an official discourse of past political engagements but also highlights the difficulties of researching the relation between violence and political practices. The violence that shaped intense moments of conflict during the insurrectionary period of the 1980s has often either been treated as a by-product of the struggle or as a strategy introduced by the ANC in exile.⁸ However, as this thesis demonstrates, practices and discourses of

⁸Jeffery most forcefully argues that violence was organised by the ANC in exile, see A. Jeffery, *People's War: New Light on the Struggle for South Africa* (Johannesburg, 2009). Other analyses of the 1980s have mostly

violence emerged out of localised conflicts between representatives of the apartheid regime and members of communities. The ANC's call for ungovernability in 1984 and its promotion of a People's War in 1985 certainly influenced the strategies of politicised activists.⁹ And yet by 1984 violence had become ingrained in expressions of conflict. However, while violent confrontations were mostly contingent until 1984 in the region, violence came to be part of a deliberate strategy of challenge and protest during the Vaal Uprising and in its aftermath.

While many geographical areas in South Africa including Soweto, the East Rand or the Eastern Cape have attracted sustained scholarly interest, there has been a lack of research on the history of the Vaal Triangle. The majority of the literature on this region has focussed on the Sharpeville massacre of 1960.¹⁰ While the region does appear to have been less significant as a crucible for anti-apartheid politics after Sharpeville, my thesis places this region close to centre stage in the history of political protest during the 1980s. I have also contributed towards a more nuanced understanding of the complex history of this region that came to play an important role in shaping a new political order. My analysis provides detailed insights into the unfolding of a popular insurrection and its

focussed on mass mobilisation, see for example T. Lodge and B. Nasson, *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s* (Cape Town, 1991); W. Cobbett and R. Cohen, *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (London, 1988). The recently published SADET volume on the 1980s provides the most in-depth analysis of the relation between the ANC underground and popular protests. See SADET (ed.), *The Road to Democracy, Volume 4* (Pretoria, 2010).

⁹ For a discussion on the development of violent strategies see, for example, J. Cherry, 'The Intersection of Violent and Non-Violent Strategies in the South African Liberation Struggle', in H. Sapire and C. Saunders (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Struggles. New Local, Regional and Global Perspectives* (Cape Town, 2013), 142-61; T. Lodge, 'The Interplay of Non-Violent and Violent Action in the Movement against Apartheid in South Africa, 1983-94', in R. Adams and T. Garton-Ash (eds.), *Civil Resistance and Power Politics. The Experience of Non-Violent Action from Gandhi to the Present* (Oxford, 2009), 213-30. For a detailed analysis of youth strategies and their relation to violence see B. Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Johannesburg, 2004); also see M. Marks, '"We are Fighting for the Liberation of our People": Justifications of Violence by Activist Youth', *Temps Modernes*, 585 (1995), 133 - 58.

¹⁰ P. Frankel, *An Ordinary Atrocity: Sharpeville and its Massacre* (Johannesburg, 2001); Lodge, T., *Sharpeville. An Apartheid Massacre and its Consequences* (Oxford, 2011). One of the main exceptions is Noonan, P., *They're Burning the Churches: The Final Dramatic Events that Scuttled Apartheid* (Bellevue, 2003); S. P. Lekgoathi, 'The United Democratic Front, Political Resistance and Local Struggles in the Vaal and West Rand Townships in the 1980s', in SADET (ed.), *The Road to Democracy, Volume 4* (Pretoria, 2010). For case studies on other regions, see for example Bonner, P. and N. Nieftagodien, *Alexandra. A History* (Johannesburg, 2008); Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle*.

impact on power and political dynamics. Issues of conflict, violence, community and political practices that the thesis examines are not unique to this area. The case-study approach allows for close attention to the relation between micro and macro processes, as well as continuities and change in political practice.

Many of the archival records drawn upon in this thesis have not been explored in detail or in some cases not at all. Although the lengthy records of the Delmas Treason Trial have been used by other researchers, few have analysed the collection in great detail. The records provide unusually fine-grained evidence on popular struggles, discourses of freedom and equality as well as everyday life during the early 1980s in the townships. The few dozen interviews I conducted with local actors furthermore provide fresh insights and contrast the archival records.

As chapter one analyses, the roots of violent confrontations date back to the late 1970s when councillors began to be regarded as violating the implied social contract and sense of community in the townships. New literature on resistance and conflict has explored the internal divisions that shaped emerging conflicts beyond a master narrative of struggle.¹¹ As this literature stresses, an exclusive focus on conflict between the white regime and oppositional forces obscures the complex nature of popular politics.

Although the demarcation of conflicting identities was shaped in part by ideology, councillors and local communities were also pulled apart by different interests and personalised grievances. Councillors were accused of political and social behaviour that violated what was perceived as a

¹¹ For an overview, see E.Allina-Pisano, 'Resistance and the Social History of Africa', *Journal of Social History*, 37/1 (2003), 187-98; J.Abbink, M.de Bruijn and K.van Walraven (eds.), *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History* (Leiden, 2003), 1-40. The literature includes, for example, Beinart, W. and C.Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape 1890-1930* (London, 1987); P.Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle: Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal* (Oxford, 1996); N. Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerilla War. Peasant Voices* (Cambridge, 1992); R. Ross, 'Ambiguities of Resistance and Collaboration on the Eastern Cape Frontier: The Kat River Settlement 1829-1856', in Abbink, de Bruijn, van Walraven (eds.), *Rethinking Resistance*, 117-140.

social contract between the mass of people in the township and those who were supposedly serving their interests. They had little popular mandate because few participated in elections. They were seen to take unfair advantage of their political position in expanding their business interests and were accused of womanizing, nepotism, corruption and aggressive attitudes. It was this variety of factors that contributed towards the moulding of political subjectivities and collective identities that ultimately made violence against them thinkable.¹² This thesis adds to the literature that examines the emergence and role of subjectivities.¹³

The formation of political subjectivities, as the two chapters argue, was firmly rooted in everyday experiences of oppression, injustice and violence. Strategies of the political leadership in the region were ideologically driven and influenced by the banned liberation movements, the United Democratic Front and to some extent the Azanian People's Organisation. The development of a political consciousness more broadly was influenced by the intersection between immediate, subjective experiences and ideologies of freedom, liberation and justice. Many ordinary participants in the protests were mobilised by their immediate socio-economic grievances and my thesis stresses the political agency of ordinary actors in the townships of the Vaal Triangle. The ANC's role mostly consisted of providing ideological and symbolic guidance. This thesis therefore contributes towards an analysis of the struggle against apartheid that focuses on the intersection between ideology, political organisation and the role of grassroots struggles.

Besides the limited presence of ANC networks during this period, political networks in the region suffered from discontinuity. Hence although the late 1970s and early 1980s saw the formation of local branches of the Congress of South African Students, AZAPO, the Vaal Civic Association as well

¹² On the relation between collective identity and violence, see for example J. Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington, 2011); M. Mamdani, *When Victims become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, New Jersey, 2001).

¹³ See for example V. Das, A. Kleinman, M. Ramphela (eds.), *Violence and Subjectivity* (Berkeley, 2000); J. Biehl, B. Good and A. Kleinman (eds.), *Subjectivity. Ethnographic Investigations* (Berkeley, 2007); S. Ortner, 'Subjectivity and Cultural Critique', *Anthropological Theory*, 5/1 (2005), 31-52.

as other civic organisations, their ability to provide sustained leadership was limited. By 1984, large sections of the township communities had been mobilised and identified with the demands of local organisations. And yet, as interviews demonstrate, the leadership soon lost control over the emerging protests. The spark that eventually lit the flame, as chapter three discusses, was the announcement of another increase in rent, service tariffs and other municipal levies.

Chapter three analyses the unfolding of the insurrection of 3 September 1984 in detail. It provides new insights into the political dynamics, state response as well as patterns of violence. While scholarly literature has examined insurrections in other parts of the country, including the student uprisings in Soweto and elsewhere in 1976, and the Alexandra rebellion of 1986, this thesis is one of the most detailed case studies of a popular insurrection during the apartheid period.¹⁴ The discussion of the uprising itself highlights the variety of strategies employed by different actors to promote political change and adds to an understanding of the relation between violent and non-violent strategies of protest. It further sheds new light on the multiple forms of violence including contingent confrontations and premeditated strategies of challenge. Moments of violent confrontations constituted a rupture from past experiences; collective violence by crowds in particular often remains elusive in analyses. This thesis attempts to also provide insights into collective action.

The uprising constituted a shattering of the political and social order. A rapid turnover in leadership and the fragmented nature of political organisation provided space for a variety of actors to occupy the political landscape. Violence in particular necessitated new narratives to understand what had transpired. Chapter four therefore examines the impact of the rebellion and the restructuring of the political and social order in the townships. It contributes towards a body of

¹⁴ The literature includes Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle*; S.M.Ndlovu, *The Soweto Uprisings: Counter-Memories of June 1976* (Johannesburg, 1998); C.Carter, 'Community and Conflict: The Alexandra Rebellion of 1986', *Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS)*, 18/1 (1992, Special Issue: Social History of Resistance in South Africa), 115-142; E. Brink, *Soweto, 16 June 1976: It All Started with a Dog...* (Cape Town, 2001).

literature that examines the impact of violence on communities and the nature of political struggles during periods of rapid change.¹⁵

In spite of the might of the apartheid regime and the well-oiled machinery of the security forces, the combination of public protests, mass mobilisation and clandestine operations challenged the state on various levels. The eclectic and multi-layered nature of oppositional politics proved almost impossible to quell. The increasing confrontation between perceived collaborators and local residents further shaped boundaries of political and social communities and therefore expressed contending notions of acceptable political and social behaviour. This period saw the shaping of a popular discourse that focussed on equality, rights, accountability, justice and freedom.

The attacks on black policemen from 1985 onwards proved a serious problem for the security forces, who increasingly lost their ability to police the townships. By 1985, the state had lost its capacity to enforce control and order. By the mid-1980s, the apartheid state therefore increasingly displayed a schizophrenic combination between heavy-handed repression and escalating terror while attempting to win the hearts and minds of the population at large. Both strategies of reform and repression had unintended consequences; while the former opened up space for political contestations, the latter radicalised sections of township communities. Insurrections such as the Vaal Uprising hence highlight the ability to tilt the balances of power through a combination of political practices. The heavy-handed repression of the uprising eventually restored a semblance of state control. However, the success was short lived; by the late 1980s, apartheid power was crumbling and a dismantling of the power structure seemed inevitable.

¹⁵ On the impact of violence see Das, Kleinman, Ramphela et al. (eds.), *Violence and Subjectivity*; N. Scheper-Hughes and P. Bourgois (eds.), *Violence in War and Peace. An Anthology* (Malden, Mass., 2004); G. Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge, 2001); also see for example G. Kynoch, 'Crime, Conflict and Politics in Transition-Era South Africa', *African Affairs*, 104/416 (2005), 493-514; S. Marks and N. Anderson (1990). 'The Epidemiology and Culture of Violence', in C. Manganyi and A. du Toit, *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa* (Basingstoke, 1990), 29-69.

The personal sacrifices and costs for those who became involved were great. As the thesis examines, the threat of being subjected to physical and psychological harm created a climate of fear and an expectation of state violence that shaped everyday relations and ruptured social networks. As chapter five explores, the continuous threat of state violence in turn produced militant strategies amongst some sections of youth in particular. Strategies of repression have been well documented; this thesis contributes towards a closer understanding of the relation between state violence and political strategies of opposition. By 1985, many politicised young people believed that the regime could only be toppled by violence. As argued earlier, such strategies and perceptions were however not a mere reflection of ANC strategies but were often home-grown and in response to state violence.

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