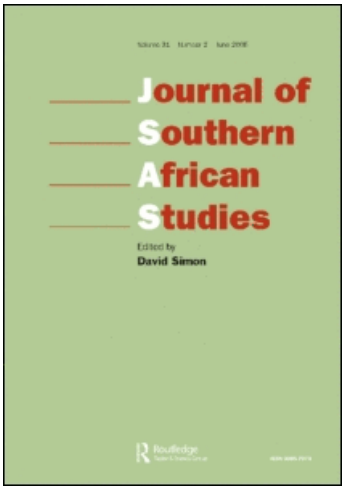

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'We must infiltrate the tsotsis'*: school politics and youth gangs in Soweto, 1968-1976*

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'We must infiltrate the Tsotsis': School Politics and Youth Gangs in Soweto, 1968–1976

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By the late 1960s, two major associative structures dominated youth culture in Soweto: the school and the gang. Despite secondary school expansion during the early 1970s, no more than a third of the teenage and adolescent population of Soweto attended school by the middle of the decade. Gangs, which offered a powerful alternative to schooling, attracted a large proportion of unemployed and non-schoolgoing male adolescents. While the gangs were absorbed by localised competition, a political culture gradually took root in Soweto's high schools. Conflict mounted between high schools and gangs in the lead-up to the 1976 uprising. It was an uprising of school students rather than 'the youth', a contemporary catch-all category which often obscures deep cultural divisions. School and university-based activists, recognising the political potential of gangs, made some attempt to draw the gang constituency into disciplined political activity but they were largely unsuccessful. Gangs participated spontaneously in the uprising but the Soweto Students Representative Council, in order to maintain credibility with a broader Soweto support base, distanced itself from all gang activity and even mounted anti-gang operations during late 1976 and 1977.

On 16 June, South Africans now enjoy a public holiday called Youth Day. It salutes 'the youth' of Soweto who in 1976 sparked a renaissance of political resistance to apartheid. But who exactly constituted 'the youth'? Contemporary iconography of the uprising tends to collapse the categories of 'youth' and 'students'. This is probably because the political movement which triggered the uprising developed almost entirely within the school system. Yet, even after the rapid expansion of secondary schooling in Soweto in the first half of the 1970s, school students represented perhaps a third of Sowetans aged between fourteen and twenty. What has generally been ignored is the extent to which young non-schoolgoing males in Soweto were involved in a gang subculture in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The relationship between school students and the gang constituency was fraught with tension in the lead-up to the Soweto uprising. In fact the cultural and political traditions of the two worlds were so divergent that it becomes tenuous even to think of 'the youth' as a coherent category.

This article opens with an analysis of the political culture in Sowetan high schools which began to re-emerge in subtle forms as early as 1968. It argues that the link between the South African Students Organisation and the school-based South African Students Movement during the early 1970s greatly accelerated the politicisation process in high schools. Second, the article surveys the gang culture of Soweto during the late 1960s and early 1970s. It argues that tensions mounted between high school students and street gangs and that the two groups developed a heightened sense of separate identity during the 1970s. Third, it shows that, despite the eagerness of SASM and other Black Consciousness groups

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to politicise and embrace street gangs during the mid 1970s, the organisations made little concrete progress in this respect. Finally, it examines the role of gangs during the 1976/7 uprising itself and argues that no formal links between gangs and political organisations were established. Moreover, in order to enhance its credibility with the wider Soweto community, the Soweto Students Representative Council actively curbed gang involvement in political campaigns and even took upon itself the responsibility of combating gang crime during 1976/7.

Soweto High Schools: 1968–1976

The gathering grievances of Sowetans during the 1970s have been well documented: deteriorating services and rent increases under the West Rand Administration Board, rising inflation, spiralling crime, intensified pass controls, poor quality mass schooling, job shortages for school-leavers.[1] Despite socio-economic hardships and discrimination, the adults of Soweto remained politically compliant during the early 1970s. There was widespread fear of the Security Police and informers were perceived to be pervasive. Workers seemed concerned primarily to keep their jobs and stay out of trouble. The adults of the 1970s had experienced the political clampdown of the early 1960s, the banning of the ANC and PAC and the Rivonia trial. Politically demoralised, they held out little hope for substantial changes to the status quo. The teenagers of the 1970s were a fresh generation filled with dissatisfaction and unfamiliar with the bitterness of defeat. As school-based youths began to search for political expression they found most parents, even those sympathetic to their ideals, frequently unresponsive and fearful.[2]

From the late 1960s, an autonomous, albeit fledgling, political tradition began to emerge in several Sowetan high schools. As I have shown elsewhere, Morris Isaacson and Orlando High led the way.[3] They were followed by Naledi, which was converted from a standard eight-level to a matric-level high school only in 1974. Sekano Ntoana and Orlando West High were three or four years behind. Nozipho Diseko, in her study of SASM, is dismissive of Harold Wolpe's suggestion that the high school environment provided a partially protected 'space' in which ideological opposition to the apartheid system could take hold. She points out, correctly, that the Department of Bantu Education was highly vigilant in keeping politics out of the schools.[4] Nevertheless, Diseko under-estimates the more subtle forms of political space which schools offered. There were opportunities for discussion and debate, even if informal. High schools were also important in bringing together literate, inquisitive youths with similar social backgrounds and grievances. The state-run schools were not total institutions. Inspectors, however pervasive, could not be everywhere at once. Some teachers adopted cautiously critical approaches and students themselves could not be

1 The relative importance of these various socio-economic elements has been widely discussed. See, in particular, J. Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction* (Johannesburg, 1978); B. Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?* (London, 1979); A. Brooks and J. Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm* (London, 1980); T. Lodge, *Black Politics since 1945* (Johannesburg, 1983), final chapter. See also P.M. Cillie (chairman), 'Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16th of June 1976 to the 28th February 1977', RP 55/1980 (Cillie Report). For an analysis specifically of the education crisis in the lead-up to the uprising see J. Hyslop, 'State Education Policy and the Social Reproduction of the Urban African Working Class: the case of the Southern Transvaal 1955–1976', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14, 3 (April 1988).

2 Interviews (all with the author unless otherwise stated on first reference): M. Morobe, History Workshop Soweto Film Project, videotaped interviews, 1991/92 (henceforth HWSFP), B. Makhabela (HWSFP), Seth Mazibuko (HWSFP), T. Mohapi (HWSFP), K. Seathlolo (September 1992), C. Nkondo (September 1992), L. Duma (August 1992).

3 For more detail on Soweto school culture in the 1960s see C. Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics in Soweto, 1958–1976', PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 1994, ch. 4.

4 N. Diseko, 'The Origins and Development of the South African Students Movement (SASM)', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18, 1 (March 1991), pp. 45–46.

prevented from discussing what they read in books and newspapers. Moreover, Diseko fails to differentiate between Soweto's schools. There can be little doubt, for example, that more space for political expression existed in Morris Isaacson, Orlando High and Naledi Secondary than in other schools.[5]

By the late 1960s, most of Soweto's secondary schools had active debating societies and christian youth groups. School debating societies were apolitical until about 1971 or 1972 but they were crucial early incubators of political ideas and student leadership. Inter-school debating meetings attracted good audiences and allowed participants to meet students from other schools. Although students debated innocuously apolitical topics, they developed confidence on public platforms and learnt important intellectual skills.[6]

Perhaps the most important political space available to youth existed in the numerous church youth groups in Soweto. The Student Christian Movement (SCM), which was established in the mid to late 1960s, was a crucial early politicising influence in Soweto's schools. Although the SCM had many church contacts beyond the schools, it was a specifically high school-based church group organised entirely by students themselves.[7] The movement was relatively well-funded through its church affiliation and actively encouraged by school administrations. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the SCM had attracted substantial membership in all the high and secondary schools of Soweto.[8] The concerns of the SCM were primarily christian but it was increasingly exposed to, and intertwined with, Black Theology, the christian arm of the emerging Black Consciousness movement. The various SCM branches held regular, well-attended weekly or fortnightly meetings which included both hymn singing and discussions with socially relevant themes. Meetings at Naledi, for instance, attracted up to a hundred students.[9] Christianity gave cover to mounting political awareness and debate. Numerous respondents attest both to the pervasiveness of the SCM at Sowetan high schools during this period and to the penetration of political themes into its discourse.[10]

In 1968, the African Students' Movement (ASM) was set up by a group of school students who attended various christian youth clubs in Soweto. The ASM was the first organisation in South Africa aimed specifically at representing secondary school students.[11] It concentrated on educational issues and, because it had no explicit political agenda, was able to establish small branches in a number of Soweto's secondary and high schools from an early stage. The ASM attempted to raise money for bursaries and organised after-school and holiday classes to supplement ordinary teaching. In a 1971 Christmas circular, the ASM exhorted parents to prioritise their children's education rather than spend extravagantly on clothing and food in the festive season.[12] The ASM emerged as a response not only to poor educational conditions but also out of a perceived need to give voice to student grievances.

5 Diseko does not provide one clear instance of substantial repression at any of these schools and points out herself that Orlando High, in particular, co-operated with ASM in its early efforts. See 'Origins and Development of SASM', pp. 52–53.

6 Interviews: K. Mthembu (Tom Karis and Gail Gerhart, February 1989), F. Mazibuko (December 1991), S. Lebelo (September 1991), I. Motaung (November 1991), Mr Mawela (Meverett Koetz, December 1992), A. Tsotetsie (Koetz, September 1992), K. Shubane (August 1992), M. Mxadana (January 1992), J. Msimanga (January 1992).

7 Interview, Seathlolo.

8 Diseko, 'Origins and Development of SASM', p. 52; interview, Seathlolo.

9 Interview, M. Siluma (December 1991).

10 Interviews: Mawela, A. Ngobese (Koetz, April 1992), D. Nkosi (Koetz, September 1992), S. Masoka (Koetz, December 1992), 'Zakes' Thotela (Koetz, July 1992), Tsotetsie, S. Khumalo (Koetz, August 1992), Mrs Dlamini (Koetz, September 1992), Lebelo, Shubane, Msimanga, Mohapi, Seth Mazibuko, Makhabela, A. Masondo (Gail Gerhart, July 1989).

11 Diseko, 'Origins and Development of SASM', pp. 42–43; interview, Mthembu.

12 *Rand Daily Mail* [hereafter *RDM*], 24 December 1971. See also UNISA SASO Acc 153, Brigadier P. J. Coetzee, 'South African Students Movement (SASM)', Security Police memorandum, pp. 1–2 and *RDM*, 1 February 1972, 'New body not for Africans only'.

Foremost amongst these, Diseko argues, were authoritarianism and corporal punishment. One of the ASM's key concerns was to institute SRCs at schools to enable students to air their grievances and negotiate changes.[13] The leaders of the organisation were politically vague between 1968 and 1970. Nevertheless, they read widely and were searching for ideas. They were increasingly exposed to Black Consciousness ideology through their christian links and, as I showed earlier, by 1971 they were eager to align themselves to the Black Consciousness movement.[14]

Outside the formal structures of debating societies, ASM and SCM branches, students were exposed to newspapers, particularly *The World* and *Post*, with politicising local and foreign news. Civil rights struggles and ghetto riots in the United States and anti-colonial struggles in Africa received regular news coverage. The newspapers even ran some penetrative local news and commentary which slipped through the censorship net. Informally and privately, then, many students discussed these issues.[15]

The South African Students' Organisation (SASO), launched in 1968 under Steve Biko, represented the first significant instance of internally organised black political expression since the 1960 State of Emergency. SASO, along with the Black Theology movement, formed the core of the Black Consciousness movement. Between 1968 and 1971 the embryonic movement was based almost entirely in the rural bantustan colleges. From around 1971 it recognised the need to reach beyond the isolated campuses, to forge links with a wider black community. In 1971 SASO began to think seriously in terms of extending its influence to urban high schools.[16] It established close ties with the school-based ASM which was eager to participate in Saso's community programmes. SASO expressed enthusiasm about this link in its 1971 annual report.[17] By the following year ASM sent observers to SASO conferences and leadership seminars and the two organisations drew ever closer. Throughout 1973 and 1974 SASO placed a good deal of emphasis on a strategy for 'conscientising' high schools.[18] Noting the difficulty of penetrating Bantu Education Department schools, a 1973 SASO memorandum recommended organising student meetings initially outside school premises and establishing a core of active students.[19]

During the second half of 1972 and 1973 a number of Black Consciousness-aligned ex-bush college students, particularly from the University of the North at Turfloop, were absorbed into Soweto schools as teachers. These teachers played a pivotal role in transmitting Black Consciousness ideology to the schools.[20]

During Turfloop's 1972 graduation ceremony, Ongopotse Tiro, a member of the university SRC and SASO activist, instead of sounding the expected ceremonial platitudes, gave a rousing speech condemning apartheid and the education system. Tiro was summarily expelled, sparking a wave of protests and walk-outs in May and June. The 'student revolt'

13 Diseko, 'Origins and Development of SASM', pp. 46–52.
14 Diseko, 'Origins and Development of SASM', pp. 42–43; interview, Mthembu.
15 Interviews: Motaung, Seathlolo, Morobe, Mthembu.
16 SASO was also instrumental in setting up the Black People's Convention (BPC) which drew together somewhat older, non-student, generally urban-based, adherents to Black Consciousness (BC) ideology. BPC became the 'adult branch' of the Black Consciousness movement. See Black Community Programmes, *Black Review 1973*, pp. 67–68.
17 SASO annual report, 1971, quoted in UNISA SASO Acc 153, Coetzee, 'SASM', p. 1.
18 See, for instance, UNISA SASO Acc 127: Minutes of Sixth General Students' Conference, Resolution 51/74. See also 'Commission Report: Community Development', undated (c 1973/4)
19 See UNISA SASO Acc 127: B. Langa, 'Bannings and Intimidation: proposals', SASO memorandum, 17 May 1973. On the tight state monitoring of Bantu Education schools see: *The Star*, 30 September 1972 and 9 October 1972; interviews: T. Kambule (October 1991), Mxadana, Makhabela.
20 Interviews: Mthembu, Msimanga, Mawela, F. Mazibuko. See also Diseko, 'Origins and Development of SASM', pp. 56–57.

started at Turfloop when SRC president, Aubrey Mokoena, called for a boycott of lectures which then spread to other bush colleges around the country. Many more students were expelled for their role in the demonstrations.[21] Unable to continue with their academic careers, most of the expelled students sought teaching jobs. Khehla Mthembu estimates that over thirty 'SASO dropouts' from around the country became high school teachers.[22] Turfloop, at the centre of the disruptions, was the most heavily affected bantustan campus. Many of its students had Witwatersrand connections and a large proportion of the SASO rejects filtered into Soweto, where schools were crying out for relatively qualified teachers. Some of these expelled students struggled to find jobs because they had been black-listed by the Department of Bantu Education. Nevertheless, school boards and headmasters, although answerable to the department, had a certain practical autonomy in making appointments and many less prominent individuals slipped through the net. Moreover, it was particularly difficult for the department to screen out the many early 1970s graduates, influenced by the protests and by Black Consciousness politics on campus, who had escaped expulsion or prosecution.

Undoubtedly the most controversial of the ex-Turfloop teaching appointees was Tiro himself. Morris Isaacson school, despite his blacklisting, appointed him as a history teacher. In October, a dispute broke out between the Department of Bantu Education and the Morris Isaacson school board over his post. The department refused to pay his salary but the Morris Isaacson school board and the headmaster, Lekgau Mathabathe, continued stubbornly to employ Tiro, paying his salary out of private funds.[23] Tiro carried on teaching at Morris Isaacson until early 1973 when he was forced to leave his post because of political pressure and persecution. Shortly thereafter he fled to Botswana where he became involved in exile politics until he was murdered by a parcel bomb in 1974.

During his short stay at Morris Isaacson, Tiro made a huge impact. Mary Mxadana, who studied and taught at the school, recalls that students talked enthusiastically about Tiro's teaching. He asserted the need to move away from rigid syllabi, 'to challenge the poison of Bantu Education'. There was great sorrow at the school when his assassination was announced.[24] Tiro's influence seemed to stretch beyond Morris Isaacson itself. Khehla Mthembu, a student leader of the 1970s, recalls that Tiro was instrumental in strengthening the South African Student Movement (SASM), which was the new name for ASM from around the middle of 1972. Emergent student leaders often consulted him and he was asked to be the guest speaker at SASM and SCM meetings. He was 'very forceful, very emotional'.[25]

Jake Msimanga, who attended Sekano Ntoana High School during 1972, recalls that ex-Turfloop students played a key role in the 'conscientisation process'. 'There were about four or five young teachers from Turfloop; some had been expelled and some had graduated.' Despite the conservatism of the Sekano Ntoana headmaster, the young teachers were prominent in organising debates and public speaking and constantly introduced controversial topics. They became role models for many of the students. Through his contacts with other schools it became clear to Msimanga that young bush college graduates had made a similar impact at other Soweto schools. 'Wherever these guys were planted they seem to have brought this kind of awareness to the students they taught.'[26]

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21 Black Community Programmes, *Black Review 1972*, pp. 174–180. Tiro's speech was probably in very late April or early May, although I have found no clear reference to this. See also *The World*, 5 May, 8 May, 12 May, 15 May, 16 May, 17 May 1972.

22 Interview, Mthembu.

23 *RDM*, 20 October, 26 October, 31 October, 4 November 1972; *The World*, 4 October 1972; *The Star*, 9 October, 11 October 1972. See also *RDM*, 22 February 1973.

24 Interview, Mxadana.

25 Interview, Mthembu. See also interviews: Mohapi, Tsotetsie.

26 Interviews: Msimanga, Motaung.

School students were also exposed to bantustan campus politics through holiday teachers. Many university students, freshly armed with Black Consciousness ideology, returned during their holidays to help out with supplementary teaching at their old Soweto schools. Frank Chikane, for instance, taught at Naledi during his university holidays.[27]

Once the ASM made substantial contact with the Black Consciousness movement during 1971 and 1972 the organisation radicalised quite suddenly. The Black Consciousness-oriented teachers consolidated the links and strengthened the organisation generally. In early February 1972, ASM officially transformed itself into a nationwide body and changed its name to the South African Students' Movement. At its launch, SASM dedicated itself to instituting SRCs in schools, to promoting academic support programmes and to spreading the concept of Black Consciousness. Unlike the ASM, membership was opened to coloured and Indian school students.[28] This latter shift, like the name change, reflected the movement's strengthening ties with SASO. In line with SASO, SASM shed its 'African' identity for a more inclusive 'black' South African identity.[29] SASM fought tirelessly to widen student representation at school. Mary Mxadana recalls that Morris Isaacson students, spurred on by SASM, became increasingly assertive in articulating their needs and grievances. By 1974, they insisted on being thoroughly consulted on any issue that concerned them, from administrative decisions through to corporal punishment and school uniform.[30] By 1973/4, SASM had well organised branches at Morris Isaacson, Orlando High and Sekano Ntoana. SASM came somewhat later to Naledi, where a particularly assertive Student Christian Movement branch dominated political activity.[31] Outside of the three strongholds, SASM had a smattering of support at other high and secondary schools.[32] It sent delegates to SASO conferences from 1973 onwards and received a small financial grant from the university body.[33] The movement published a newsletter which, in language that lacked the constraint, polish and professionalism of SASO, bluntly attacked apartheid and the Bantu Education system. In one article, for instance, it asserted: 'Truely (sic) speaking, we are schooled to please Baas Whitey more than to serve our Black Nation'.[34] SASM's more overt political approach increasingly exposed it to Security Police repression and in 1974, in the wake of a series of Frelimo solidarity rallies, the movement was battered by detentions. Nevertheless, by then it had a grassroots momentum of its own which could not be stopped by simply removing its leadership.

From around 1972/3 debating societies became a central arena of political activism in the schools. This was particularly true at Morris Isaacson and Naledi, the two schools which, from around 1974, seemed to take the lead in Soweto school politics. Khotso Seathlolo, Isaac Motaung and Mike Siluma, all of whom overlapped at Naledi between 1973 and 1975, emphasise the importance of the debating society. By 1973, the society had been thoroughly penetrated by SCM and SASM activists. According to Motaung, 'People were saying that this was not in fact a debating society but really part of SASM but we were acting within school regulations'. The debates were infused with political issues. 'I can't remember a single debate', recalls Seathlolo, 'in which the topic wasn't political'. Debating encouraged intellectual inquisitiveness and research. Banned books were smuggled into the schools and passed around amongst members. For Seathlolo, 'debates were really enriching

27 Interview, Motaung.
28 *RDM*, 1 February 1972.
29 Diseko, 'Origins and Development of SASM', p. 57.
30 Interview, Mxadana.
31 Interview, Seathlolo. Also interviews: F. Mazibuko, Kambule.
32 Interviews: Shubane, Seathlolo, S. Mofokeng (October 1991), Mohapi, Morobe.
33 See UNISA SASO Acc 153, Coetzee, 'SASM', Security Police memorandum, pp. 1–5.
34 UNISA SASO Acc 127, *SASM Newsletter*, undated (c1974), 'The role of the educated'.

because you couldn't be a good debater if you didn't keep track of current events, if you weren't an avid reader'. As topics became more relevant and immediate to students so the popularity of the debating society grew. Despite the fact that debates were held on Friday afternoons when students were free to go home, the meetings attracted crowds of two to three hundred, packing the school hall to capacity. The better debaters were recognised as leadership figures at the school; they tended to be well-read, forceful people with oratorical skills. They were even called on to make speeches at parties and informal gatherings.[35]

Fanyana Mazibuko recalls that the established debating society at Morris Isaacson transformed in the early 1970s. SASM members effectively took over the school's debating. They introduced political issues and dynamised debates. The debating society had always had its core of followers but once it became politicised students clamoured to participate. More wanted to join than the society could accommodate.[36] SASM and SCM also dominated increasingly popular debating societies at Orlando High and Sekano Ntoana from around 1972.[37] Politicised debating societies even flourished at some of the new secondary schools, such as Diepkloof Junior Secondary, during 1975 and early 1976. Linda Duma, who attended the school during those years, recalls that inter-school debates, which invariably discussed political issues, packed two full classrooms of spectators. Some even spilled out into the playground. The school also made crucial contacts with the bigger, more established high schools through debating.[38]

Debating also provided a link between leadership figures from the various high schools. Both Motaung and Seathlolo, for instance, first encountered Morris Isaacson's 'leading light', Tsietsi Mashinini, through debating. Mashinini was the chairman of the Morris Isaacson debating society and a 'very powerful speaker'. According to Motaung, he 'dominated at Morris Isaacson; there's no question about that'. Both Mashinini and Seathlolo were later to become Soweto Student Representative Council presidents but Seathlolo, when he first met Mashinini, was not a member of SASM. Seathlolo was a leading figure in the Student Christian Movement and rejected SASM as too reformist; the two leaders had a fruitful 'exchange of ideas' through their debating contact and Seathlolo came to accept the validity of SASM's methods.[39]

By 1974/5, there was a politicised core of between fifty and a hundred senior students at each of the leading Soweto high schools. Although the number of signed-up SASM members remained relatively small, SASM-organised activities attracted large audiences and levels of sympathy for the Black Consciousness Movement were high.[40] Political ideas seeped through from Morris Isaacson, Naledi, Orlando High, Sekano Ntoana and Orlando West High to other secondary and high schools in Soweto. Links were made through debating societies, SASM, the Student Christian Movement and other christian youth groups. In the mid 1970s Black Consciousness ideology spread rapidly in many of the new post-1972 schools such as Lomula High, Diepkloof Junior Secondary, Phefeni Junior Secondary, Orlando North Secondary and Dr Vilakazi Secondary.[41] Almost from their

35 Interviews: Seathlolo, Motaung, Siluma. See also interview, Makhabela. Bongi Makhabela, the sister of Khehla Mthembu (she was better known then as Susan Mthembu), attended Naledi High in 1975 and 1976. She too was a keen debater who later became an executive member of the SSRC.

36 Interview, F. Mazibuko.

37 Interviews: Kambule, Msimanga.

38 Interview, Duma. Murphy Morobe also talks about active and politicised debating at Orlando North Junior Secondary, which he attended until 1975.

39 Interviews: Seathlolo, Motaung.

40 Interviews: Masondo, Msimanga, Motaung, Siluma.

41 The Department of Bantu Education finally decided to 'unfreeze' the building of African urban secondary schools in 1972. Within two years the number of secondary schools in Soweto had at least doubled. See C. Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics', ch. 7.

inception the new schools were exposed to an atmosphere of mounting political assertiveness, unlike the older schools which had experienced many years of political vacuum.

Soweto Gang Culture, 1968–1976[42]

Towards the end of the 1960s there was a striking resurgence of big gang culture in Soweto. During the mid-1960s it was possible to identify perhaps ten distinctive youth gangs in the Soweto area; by the early 1970s there were well over fifty. As in the 1950s and 1960s, the new gangs were fiercely territorial; numerous wars erupted as they competed over women and attempted to assert control over local streets and facilities. Each gang tended to have a core membership of between fifteen and thirty youths. The more influential gangs, though, had dozens of 'hangers-on' and seemed able to mobilise over a hundred followers in times of conflict and crisis. Their criminal activities were concentrated on transport routes and in the Johannesburg city centre. Far more than in the 1960s, gangs indulged in conspicuous consumption. They stole less in order to survive than to look good and acquire social status in their neighbourhoods. By the beginning of the 1970s, flash and display became fashionable again. The early 1970s, then, saw a shift not only in the range and intensity of gang conflict but also in the degree of concern with youth subcultural style. The Hazels of Mzimhlophe were the most famous and the most feared, and probably the most important subcultural role models, of this new wave of youth gangs.

The gangs were a young male peer group phenomenon. They emerged at the intersection of personal and territorial familiarity as teenage boys, with the social space to be independent and mobile, grew up together on the streets. Play networks gradually evolved into gangs as the sense of masculine competitiveness heightened in the congested neighbourhoods of Soweto. Local peer groups formed gangs and drifted out of them more or less simultaneously without reproducing themselves; gangs tended, consequently, to have a short life-span. They dissolved when core members went to jail for long periods, were killed or simply drifted out of gangsterism, usually in their mid- to late-twenties, when it was no longer fashionable to be a gang member. Girls, socialised into domesticity, were drawn only peripherally into the gang culture. It was a culture, in many respects defined in opposition to femininity, which subjected women to terrifying levels of coercion and sexual violence. When girls, or young women, sought a social space beyond the household, they were, not surprisingly, far more attracted to the school and church environments.

Most young males growing up in Soweto in the late 1960s and early 1970s had some exposure to gang culture. It was almost unavoidable once street networks shaded into gangs. Most of these youths felt a strong sense of neighbourhood loyalty and, by extension, some sense of loyalty to the local gang. Although only a fairly small minority were drawn into violent or criminal activity, the gangs were powerful, stylish role models widely admired by male teenagers. With extraordinarily high rates of urban juvenile unemployment, formal employment was a fairly marginal option, at least until youths reached their early twenties. By the 1970s, most Sowetan youths were exposed to at least some primary schooling but numbers dropped off rapidly, particularly among boys, in early high school. Whereas the gangs represented an almost exclusively male world, males and females were drawn together in the co-educational school system. Numerically, girls actually outnumbered boys in the schools, especially in junior secondary classes. Secondary schooling expanded dramatically in Soweto during the first half of the 1970s, almost tripling intake within five years. By 1976, roughly 34,000 students, one fifth of Soweto's schoolgoing population,

42 The themes in this section are dealt with in great detail in my PhD dissertation, 'Youth Culture and Politics in Soweto'. See particularly ch. 5 and 8.

were in secondary school. The bulk of these were concentrated at junior secondary level (standards six to eight.) Officially 109,000 Africans between the ages of fourteen and twenty resided in Johannesburg by 1970. At the height of Soweto's school intake, then, secondary school students represented roughly a third of their peer group.[43]

Not surprisingly, antagonism mounted between street gangs and schools during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Despite the interaction of school and non-school youth at the neighbourhood level, the two groups had widely divergent aspirations and experiences. The gangs saw new schools as challenging their territorial prestige, particularly the higher primary and secondary schools which, unlike the junior schools with their narrow neighbourhood intake, drew together students from a wide geographical area. These schools ran against the grain of neighbourhood identity and competed with the gangs for membership and loyalty. In addition, more teenage girls were exposed to gang harassment as the new schools drew them out of their relatively protected neighbourhoods in increasing numbers. It was the harassment of schoolgirls, more than any other issue, that triggered violent clashes between school students and gangs.

Although the gangs often expressed spontaneous rage against the social order, historically they had kept their distance from political organisations. The peaceful and disciplined methods of organisations such as the ANC nonplussed youth gangs during the 1950s and early 1960s.[44] They concentrated their attention on consolidating local prestige and on territorial feuding.

School and Street: 1972 to Early 1976

School and gang identities polarised during the 1970s. This is not to suggest that male youth identity divided neatly between schoolgoers and gang members. Rather, school and gang sharpened as two opposite poles in a continuum of possible masculine identities. At one end were committed, and increasingly politicised, high school students whose aspirations were based on education and professional achievement. At the other end were members of large and distinctive gangs, such as the Hazels and Dirty Dozen, who understood social prestige in terms of territory, physical prowess, street wisdom and style. Probably the majority of Sowetan male youths floated between these two poles. Identities were often blurred and ambiguous and shifted through time. There were a few gang members who attended school and there were probably many schoolgoers who admired gangs and even aspired to gang membership. These students, however, were unlikely to complete their primary schooling; polarisation made this sort of overlapping identity increasingly unlikely. Most of the ambiguity existed amongst the vast number of male school 'pushouts' who did not clearly associate with gangs.[45] Many were employed and many aspired to return to school while simultaneously mixing at the neighbourhood level with both gang youths and students. The

43 See 1970 Census: Johannesburg 02-05-19. These figures can only give some idea of the numerical breakdown. On the one hand, it is necessary to deduct the population of Alexandra and the smattering of African youths who lived in the white suburbs. Schooling numbers should also be interpreted upwards given that many fifteen and sixteen year-olds were still in primary school. On the other hand, these figures fail to take account of illegal urban residents. Also worth noting is that while males made up a small majority of the 109,000, females constituted a small majority of the secondary schoolgoing population. In other words, the numerical minority of schoolgoing youths was more pronounced among males. For a discussion of male and female school attendance in Soweto see Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics', pp. 132–134.

44 See C. Glaser, 'When Are They Going To Fight? Tsotsis, Youth Politics and the PAC', in P. Bonner, P. Delius and D. Posel (eds), *Apartheid's Genesis 1935–1962* (Johannesburg, 1993).

45 The term 'pushout' is favoured by many observers because 'dropout' implies a voluntary process, whereas 'pushout' emphasises structural dead-ends and constraints. I use 'pushout' but not without some reservation because the term underplays the voluntary dimension of early school-leaving. The relatively few youths who received no schooling at all are also embraced in this category.

gang member and the committed senior student, each with his separate style and value system, acted as the most important alternative role models for the large floating majority of male youths.

We have seen that high school students in Soweto developed a strong sense of self-identity during the 1960s. If anything, school identities strengthened during the process of politicisation. Politics provided students with a new sense of common purpose; high school students were no longer united purely by their educational aspirations but also by political camaraderie. Young activists emerged as powerful new role models. There was growing participation in school-based political and cultural activities which continued well after teaching hours. Within the world of the high school it became increasingly fashionable to be politically active and knowledgeable. Clearly, students at Morris Isaacson, Orlando High, Naledi and Sekano Ntoana had developed a powerful sense of self-identity by 1972/3.[46] School pushouts did not necessarily join hardened gangs and, even by early 1976, only an active minority of high school students were intensely involved in politics. Nevertheless, the worlds of the high school and the gang drew further apart.[47]

Gang harassment of school students mounted steadily from the late 1960s and peaked during the phase of secondary school expansion between 1973 and 1976. Two Sowetan headmasters observed in October 1972 that students were staying away from certain schools for fear of gang intimidation.[48] By 1973, it was reported that several school students died at the hands of gangsters annually and 'the toll of brutally assaulted pupils' was 'on the increase'.[49] Harassment solidified school identification as students came together to defend themselves and organise reprisals against troublesome gangs.

The tradition of anti-gang solidarity at Morris Isaacson and Orlando High continued into the 1970s. Mary Mxadana was impressed by the unity with which students 'disciplined' criminal elements during the 1970s. 'If you wore a school uniform you were really protected.... Often you'd come to school and one student or another had been waylaid somewhere. Students would be summoned and go and get revenge'.[50] In February 1976, Morris Isaacson students made headlines when they beat up a youth who had allegedly been molesting students. Students resisted attempts by the police to intervene and proceed with official charges. They claimed that the police were ineffective and that students had their 'own courts' to deal with the youth.[51] Orlando High retained its reputation for forceful reprisals against gangsters who molested schoolgirls. The school had relatively little trouble from gangs in the 1970s.[52] Naledi High and Sekano Ntoana developed a similar reputation in the 1970s. At Naledi the students had a real sense of 'self-identity and solidarity'. If any student suffered at the hands of gangsters the student body would organise self-defense units to 'punish' the culprits.[53] At Sekano Ntoana, Jake Msimanga recalls, the gangsters 'really lacked the guts to pounce on you. There would be no school for two or three days until they were apprehended. So they knew what it meant.... People had no faith in the police. People would go out, even teachers would go out together with the students, to

46 Interviews: F. Mazibuko, Mxadana, Seathlolo, Shubane, 'Spokes' Ndlovu (Koetz, June 1992), 'Oupa' Ndala (Koetz, September 1992), P. Mabhena (Koetz, September 1992).

47 Interviews: F. Mazibuko, Msimanga, S. Zikalala (October 1992), Mofokeng, C. Hlatswayo (Koetz, April 1992), M. Khoza (Koetz, April 1992), A. Ngobese (Koetz, April 1992), Duma, Motaung.

48 G. M. Simelala, headmaster of Madibane High in Diepkloof, and T. W. Kambule of Orlando High in *The World*, 4 October 1972; Kambule observed earlier that year in *The World*, 2 February 1972 that many students refused to go to Orlando North Secondary School, the first of the new Soweto secondary schools, for fear of the Hazels.

49 *RDM* 30 April 1973.

50 Interview, Mxadana. See also interviews: Mofokeng, Tsotetsie, Mrs Moosie (Koetz, August 1992).

51 *The World*, 13 February 1976.

52 Interviews: Kambule, Nkondo.

53 Interviews: Seathlolo, Siluma, Motaung.

hunt the thugs, apprehend the thugs, bring them back into the schoolyard and thrash these guys'.[54]

Gangsters were killed and assaulted in a number of school offensives during the 1970s. In August 1972, sixteen Pimville school students appeared in court following the death of an X5 gang member in a school reprisal.[55] In April 1974, a Zola youth, who had apparently been involved in ongoing gang harassment, was stoned to death by a group of students from the recently built Jabulani Junior Secondary School.[56] The best publicised incident occurred in November 1974 when students from the Phiri Higher Primary School clashed with members of Phiri's most prominent gang, the ZX5. Two gangsters were killed and five injured after being cornered in a house by a large group of students.[57] In early 1976, Diepkloof Junior Secondary School organised reprisals against the local Damarras gang. 'After the Damarras butchered one of our boys', an ex-student recalls, 'we went to their homes; we rounded them up and quite a lot of them were severely beaten up.... We were wild'.[58] In another well publicised case in May 1976, two young men who were molesting a school teacher on her way to work were beaten to death by students in Orlando North.[59]

These incidents illustrate the intensity of anger school students felt towards intimidatory gangs and the unity with which they responded to harassment.

Black Consciousness and the Non-school Youth

Beyond the schools Black Consciousness ideology had little impact on young Sowetans. Non-school youth had low levels of literacy and no institutional access to the ideas of the movement. The hardcore male pushouts, generally involved in neighbourhood gangs, were absorbed in immediate parochial rivalries. Although they felt anger over blocked mobility, pass controls and racial discrimination, they had no interest in politics and no sense of social or community responsibility. Apart from very localised loyalties, they chose their victims indiscriminately; they targeted the most vulnerable rather than the most prosperous or privileged.[60]

From as early as 1972, SASO recognised the need to penetrate and 'conscientise' the urban youth constituency beyond the schools. A resolution to this effect was carried unanimously at the 1972 General Students' Council. It noted that most black organisations had ignored 'the large number of black youth who have been condemned by the system to be virtual outcasts' and called for youth programmes aimed at 'instilling a sense of belonging in this group' and 're-orientating their basic values towards Black Consciousness and Black Solidarity'.[61] The Cillie Commission noted that 'SASO decided as long ago as 1972 to infiltrate the *tsotsi* (young criminal/gangster) community so that they could propagate their objectives there and use the *tsotsis* in their struggle against the authorities'.[62]

SASM, meanwhile, came independently to the conclusion that it was important to make contact with non-school youth. Between January and June 1973, SASM, in collaboration

54 Interview, Msimanga. See also interview, Mabhena.
55 *The World*, 23 August and 27 September 1972. The newspaper did not report on the outcome of the trial.
56 *The World*, 9 April 1974.
57 *The World*, 13 November 1974, 15 May 1975 and 24 September 1975; interview, Ndlovu.
58 Interview, Duma.
59 *The World*, 13 May 1976; *Weekend World*, 16 May 1976.
60 Interviews: Zikalala, Siluma, Mawela, C. Hlatswayo, Mrs Gibi (Koetz, August 1992), Simelane.
61 UNISA SASO Acc 153, Minutes of the proceedings of the Third General Students' Council of the SASO, St Peter's Seminary, Hammanskraal, 2–9 July 1972, resolutions 19/72 and 24/72.
62 RP 55/1980, pp. 416–417, para. 2.2.4. See also p. 140, para. 4.3.9.

with SASO, set up first the Transvaal Youth Organisation (TRAYO) and then the National Youth Organisation (NAYO) primarily to organise amongst the non-school youth constituency.[63] Khehla Mthembu, an ASM and SASM leader during the early 1970s, explains why SASM felt its constituency was too limited:

> I come from a very tough area called Zola. Just to give you a perfect example: I think I am the only university graduate in my area. All my friends were just what you can call ordinary boys in the street.... So we felt a bit distanced [at] the Deep Soweto branch [of SASM] because this was not only me, all of us in Deep Soweto felt that we cannot be seen as just a student body out there. We want to have something that would include the other people in the community ... to have an organisation that includes all the youth and everybody ... that was the birth of [TRAYO and] NAYO.... These were formed after SASM, these were the projects of SASM. SASM said, we are the student movement but we feel we are incomplete, we need the so-called *tsotsis*, the so-called thugs, we need to involve them.... We wanted an organisation to relate to the youth irrespective of whether they were students or not.[64]

Between 1973 and 1976 there was ongoing discussion within the Black Consciousness movement over the need to draw in the unemployed street youth. SASO's Commission on Community Development, for instance, addressed the issue of 'social drop-outs': 'Voluntary group workers and professional social workers and other relevant and interested parties should join in the recruitment of the so-called "Outcasts", towards redirecting their thinking towards Black Consciousness'.[65] In July 1973, the Black Consciousness-affiliated People's Experimental Theatre stressed the importance of 'redirecting the energy of so-called juvenile delinquents into something positive'.[66] From around 1974, the Black Consciousness movement began an internal debate over the use of violence in the resistance struggle. There tended to be a general move away from the idea of principled non-violence. Khotso Seathlolo recalls that, in the debate between the traditions of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, the movement tilted towards Malcolm X by the mid-1970s. Many Black Consciousness activists began calling for armed insurrection.[67] At a SASO 'Formation School' in September 1974, Rubin Hare, SASO's Vice-President, argued that the Black Consciousness movement had to infiltrate the '*tsotsi* element' in the cities and turn their criminal energy towards whites. In a later organisational report on the Formation School, the writer (possibly Hare himself) argued for the need to recruit members who are prepared to fight. 'Whilst we are intellectualising, the *tsotsis* are far more brilliant than us. If any infiltration is to be done, we must infiltrate the *tsotsis*.'[68] Amos Masondo, who was a SASM national organiser until his arrest in September 1975, recalls that by 1975 the Black Consciousness leadership knew that it 'had to go down to the masses and grassroots conscientising. The high school students were not grassroots; the grassroots were those who weren't conscientised, organised to prepare for the next stage, to fight'.[69]

In practice, Transvaal Youth Organisation and the National Youth Organisation seem to have concentrated on coordinating the activities of a number of youth clubs and

63 UNISA SASO Acc 153, Security Police memorandum on Youth Organisations, pp. 1–3; interviews: Seathlolo, Masondo, Mthembu. See also Diseko, 'Origins and Development of SASM', pp. 58–59.
64 Interview, Mthembu; see also interview, Seathlolo.
65 UNISA SASO Acc 163, 'Commission Report: Community Development', undated (probably presented during the Fourth GSC, 14–22 July 1973).
66 UNISA SASO Acc 153, Report of the People's Experimental Theatre to the Fourth GSC, St Peter's Seminary, Hammanskraal, 14–22 July 1973.
67 Interview, Seathlolo.
68 UNISA SAS Acc 153, Coetzee, 'SASM' and 'Memorandum on attempts by black organisations to recruit tsotsis, school students and teachers'. Hare claims to have made contact with coloured gangs in western Johannesburg, such as the Spaldings, Fast Guns and Vultures, in an attempt to influence them.
69 Interview, Masondo.

associations, most of which were church-affiliated and already operational.[70] The clubs may have drawn in non-school youth but there is little evidence to suggest that the organisations engaged substantially with the gang constituency. The Cillie Commission and Security Police memoranda point only to the *intentions* of the Black Consciousness organisations; none of their evidence suggests effective influence or recruitment within the gang constituency.

Seathlolo argues that many school pushouts were politicised 'outside of the schoolyard' through youth clubs and the church, but it is unlikely that he is referring to hardcore pushouts who had very few years of schooling.[71] Fanyana Mazibuko does recall some gang members becoming politicised during the early to mid-1970s. Tiro, in particular, used to make an effort to engage with street youths who molested Morris Isaacson students. Occasionally, according to Mazibuko, a few gang members even came to BPC meetings in Soweto. They were always distinctive not only by their clothes but by their emotional and spontaneously 'unsophisticated' approach to political issues.[72] It is probable that some individual gang members were 'converted' through neighbourhood or familial contacts. Black Consciousness activists at schools recognised that gang youths were social victims. During anti-gang reprisals they were uncomfortable with mere beatings; they always attempted to talk to the apprehended youths, to convince them that what they were doing was wrong, to redirect their energies positively.[73]

Despite the rhetoric to the contrary, Black Consciousness groups made no systematic attempt to draw the street youth into political structures. SASO and SASM had a highly intellectual political tradition which was inaccessible to youths outside of school or university.[74] Moreover, the Black Consciousness philosophy was 'best articulated in English'. The gang constituency spoke *tsotsitaal* (gangster argot) and was largely inarticulate in English. Few activists seemed able or willing to engage with gangsters in their own language.[75] The Black Consciousness movement, it appears, disapproved of *tsotsitaal* both because of its criminal connotations and because of its substantial Afrikaans component.[76] The movement was also out of touch with the interests of the street youth; it concentrated on issues which affected students directly, such as student representation, corporal punishment and Afrikaans medium teaching.[77] Even the homeland issue, which became an increasingly important focus of Black Consciousness once the Transkei received 'independence' in 1974, must have seemed rather remote to street youth. An ex-member of the Damarras of Diepkloof emphasises the remoteness of Black Consciousness politics to his own world during 1976:

> I did not know why they were fighting. Some were saying it was because of the Afrikaans language. Aah, but I was no more at school so I never involved myself in those things. All I wanted for myself was just money, that's all. I would just go and do housebreaking and gain something. Then I wouldn't give anyone any trouble. All what the school kids were doing had nothing to do with me.[78]

70 Interview, Masondo.
71 Interview, Seathlolo.
72 Interview, F. Mazibuko.
73 Interviews: Motaung, Mofokeng, F. Mazibuko.
74 Interviews: Mthembu, Motaung, Msimanga, Mofokeng, Siluma.
75 Interview, Msimanga.
76 See UNISA SASO Acc 118, SASO memorandum: 'Commission on the Damaging Effects Of Afrikaans as a Medium of Instruction', undated. One point of the memorandum is that Afrikaans 'encourages thuggery, i.e. tsotsitaal'. The observation itself is tautologous and absurd. Nevertheless, it reveals the writer's association of *tsotsitaal* with criminality as well as his distaste for the Afrikaans content in the street language.
77 Interviews: Siluma, Msimanga.
78 Interview, "Ndoza" (HWSFP).

Student Protests in Soweto: April–June 1976

Recessionary cutbacks in Bantu Education spending occurred in the wake of great expansion and at a moment of heightened educational expectations. During 1973/4 the government began to alleviate urban secondary school overcrowding and under-resourcing, but this process slowed down significantly during the second half of 1975.[79] Frustrations mounted within the increasingly politicised secondary school constituency.

In this context two converging issues brought student anger to a head in early 1976. First, following a policy decision in late 1972, the Department of Bantu Education implemented the abolition of Standard Six at the end of 1975, thus shortening primary education by one year.[80] This caused a sudden bottleneck in the 1976 Form One intake. The space and teaching available were hopelessly inadequate to cope with an almost doubled intake. Moreover, teachers encountered students with widely divergent levels of preparedness and competence. Junior secondary schools, in particular, were thrown into chaos.[81] Second, the Department of Bantu Education began to implement far more stringently the use of Afrikaans medium teaching in a number of subjects. For several years prior to 1976, the department had attempted to extend Afrikaans medium teaching through a mixture of persuasion and threat but with little tangible success. In 1976, junior secondaries came under tremendous pressure to toe the departmental line on the language issue and many of them began teaching subjects such as Maths and Science in Afrikaans. This caused massive dissatisfaction as difficult learning conditions were exacerbated by the adjustment. Teachers themselves often struggled to teach in Afrikaans and many resorted to reading out aloud from text books. Bantu Education officials persisted stubbornly with this policy despite vociferous criticism from students and some teachers.[82]

In May, a series of protests and boycotts took place at Sowetan junior secondary schools in opposition to Afrikaans medium teaching. Orlando West Junior Secondary was joined spontaneously by several junior secondary, secondary and 'feeder' higher primary schools. New consignments of Afrikaans text books which had been sent to the schools were publicly burnt in what angry students called a '*braaivleis*' (barbecue). SASM then decided to initiate solidarity boycotts at all its affiliated secondary schools.[83] An affiliation drive was launched in an attempt to create a united student opposition to Afrikaans. On 13 June, SASM called a meeting which was attended by between three and four hundred students with representation from most secondary and higher primary schools in Soweto. An Action Committee was mandated to organise a massive protest march. Part of the Action Committee's brief was to draw in schools which had not established SASM branches. The committee was chaired by Tsietsi Mashinini and included Seth Mazibuko, Bongi Mthembu (later Makhabela) and Murphy Morobe. The leadership felt there was adequate support to press ahead with the march only three days later on 16 June. The SASM meeting decided that the march should be peaceful, although students made it clear that they were prepared to defend themselves physically if the police attempted to stop their action. During those three days leaders went around to a variety of schools addressing mass meetings and

79 See Hyslop, 'Schools, Unemployment and Youth', p. 64.

80 Prior to 1975 the South African system involved thirteen years of schooling: Sub A and Sub B, Standards One through to Six and Forms One through to Five.

81 *The Star*, 9 November 1972; *RDM*, 14 November 1975; *The Star*, 13 December 1975; Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, pp. 97–99.

82 Interviews: Kambule, Nkondo, C. Mbuli (Koetz, December 1992), Masoka, Mrs Zodwa (Koetz, December 1992), T. Nkosi, G. Morwa (August 1992). Kane-Berman, Hirson, and Brooks and Brickhill, as well as Cillie, deal extensively with the language medium issue. All see Afrikaans instruction as a crucial catalyst to revolt within a context of wider educational and socio-economic grievance.

83 Interview, Seth Mazibuko; *The World*, 18 May 1976; the Cillie Report RP 55/1980, pp. 78–92, gives a day-by-day account of the days leading up to the 16 June demonstrations.

canvassing last minute support. The student leaders had so little confidence in their parents' generation that they went ahead with preparations in secret. Seathlolo recalls that most of the parents in the early and mid 1970s used to say, 'Don't talk politics or you'll land up in prison'. This forced the students to 'talk politics in whispers'.[84]

On the morning of 16 June four key high schools, Morris Isaacson, Naledi, Sekano Ntoana and Orlando High, coordinated separate marches which were to converge on Orlando West Junior Secondary, the school which had been out on boycott longest. The march, according to those who participated, was peaceful and well-coordinated. The Action Committee only lost control of events once the police, feeling cornered and threatened, panicked and opened fire on the advancing crowd of singing children. Police violence changed the mood of the demonstration entirely. In the evening anger overflowed and riots, looting and arson broke out spontaneously.[85] Over the following two weeks of unrest and repression the Action Committee transformed itself into a more permanent structure known as the Soweto Students' Representative Council. The council, which was elected by, and answerable to, a body made up of two representatives from virtually every secondary and higher primary school in Soweto, attempted to coordinate and direct student, and wider, political activity in Soweto.

The participants in the initial demonstration on 16 June were exclusively uniformed students. Hirson estimates that there were fifteen thousand students ranging in age from ten to twenty.[86] After the shootings the picture became more confused. That evening students were central actors in a vengeful rampage against West Rand Administration Board property and anything identified as a symbol of 'the system'. But it is clear that street youth joined in at this point.[87] According to the Cillie Report, '*tsotsis*, skollies and vagrants in general showed a tendency towards crime and violence. Where they constituted a large proportion of a rioting group, their contempt for justice and the law and their urge to commit crime and demonstrate their power probably carried the others along to further and worse riots and violence'.[88] One observer suggests that gang members 'were often regarded as leaders' during attacks on government property 'because they knew how to fight'.[89]

In the days and months that followed, looting and robbery became an increasingly prominent feature of the unrest. Criminal activity was dominated by the gang youth but it was by no means exclusive to them. There was a carnival atmosphere in Soweto as government authority in the area broke down. Residents helped themselves to large quantities of liquor which flowed from the shattered beerhalls.[90] 'Liquor was free', recalls a Meadowlands resident, 'so they got gloriously drunk'. A Zola resident claims that, as a twenty-year-old, he 'started drinking on June 16; I drank everything I lay my hands on'.[91] Goods trucks and delivery vans entering Soweto from Johannesburg were hijacked

84 Interview: Seathlolo. See also interviews: Morobe, Seth Mazibuko; Cillie Report RP 55/1980, pp. 92–98; UNISA SASO Acc 153, Coetzee, Security Police memorandum: 'SASM', pp. 12–14.

85 Interviews: Morobe, Mofokeng, Nkondo, Seth Mazibuko, Masoka.

86 Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, p. 181.

87 *SRRSA* 1976, pp. 24–25; *The Star*, 17 June 1976; Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, p. 194; interviews: Gibi, Masoka, Tsotetsie, Mofokeng, Zikalala, J. Mkhonza (HWSFP), Seth Mazibuko. 'Doctors at Baragwanath hospital', according to *The Star* 17 June 1976, 'have gained the distinct impression that amongst the casualties are a number of known *tsotsis*'. Unfortunately, no information exists on the social profile of those arrested. Police records seemed to detail age and gender but little else. Police simply stated that 99% of the arrested 'offenders' during police crackdowns in the months that followed were 'students and young drop-outs'. See Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, p. 142.

88 Cillie Report RP 55/1980, p. 479.

89 Interview, Zikalala. See also Cillie Report RP 55/1980, pp. 480, Parag 8.3.3. The Commission points out here that 'the misdeeds of the violent sometimes became feats worthy of emulation in the eyes of young people'.

90 Interviews: Zodwa, Masoka, G. Dlamini (Koetz, December 1992), J. Khanyeza (HWSFP).

91 Interviews, respectively, G. Khumalo and Masoka.

continuously; this became almost a sport for local youths which they dubbed '*sibamba ama* targets' or 'catching targets'. Occasionally students joined in but this was primarily the sport of the gangs. The vans were stopped, the drivers forcibly ejected and the goods distributed freely to participants and passers-by.[92] Attacks on beerhalls and West Rand Administration Board offices were primarily politically motivated but the *tsotsis*' were never far behind stealing money, liquor, furniture and anything else of value.[93] An ex-Phefeni student relates a typical scene: 'Down the road a beerhall was destroyed and the youths found a safe which they struggled for hours to open. There was jubilation once they opened it and everyone was grabbing money, helping themselves to money. Kids were running past my house clutching notes'.[94]

In the second major wave of unrest in August the pattern repeated itself. *The World* reported that there were clear instances of *tsotsis*' criminal activity when thousands of students poured into the streets to attack beerhalls. 'Eyewitnesses said the situation got out of hand when *tsotsis* joined the students.' In one incident, 'a dry-cleaner's van was hijacked by a mob of *tsotsis* who looted it and took clothing. They later overturned the van. It was then set alight'.[95]

Political and criminal activity often became difficult to distinguish, as did the gang element from students. The usual spatial separation broke down once the students were on boycott. Although students initially wore uniform to demonstrate solidarity and unity, they came to realise that they were making themselves easy targets for the security forces and switched to the anonymity of civilian clothes. For anyone who lacked intimate local knowledge, it became extremely difficult to differentiate the various youth elements.[96]

Did youth gangs play a purely criminal role in the uprising? The general consensus amongst residents is that gangsters simply took advantage of the upheaval. The police were stretched to contain political opposition and gangs were protected by large volatile crowds. Moreover, in an atmosphere of racial polarisation, robbery of white-owned or 'collaborationist' property lost all criminal stigma in Soweto; it was seen almost as a positive act of symbolic revenge.[97] Gangs, according to a Pimville resident, 'continued with their criminal activities in the name of the struggle'.[98] In assessing the role of *tsotsis* the Cillie Report comments: 'Some witnesses said that the scholars created a situation which was then exploited by the *tsotsis*. There is no doubt that, with their criminal tendencies, *tsotsis* welcomed the opportunities for violence, theft and looting that the situation offered them'.[99] Mbulelo Mzamane, in his semi-autobiographical novel about the uprising, supports this impression. 'The attacks on the beer halls and bottle stores produced an interesting assortment of allies. The Hazels [gang of Mzimhlophe] came, already prepared with petrol cans, empty cardboard boxes and a truck, the moment our boys approached the bottle store in Dube.'[100]

The attitudes of the youth gangs during the uprising were, however, more complex than

92 Interviews: Lebelo, Maseko, C. Mbuli, Zodwa.
93 Interviews: Duma, Maseko, Zodwa, Mrs Mhlambi (Koetz, December 1992), G. Simelane (Koetz, December 1992), Lebelo. See also Mzamane, *Children of Soweto*, (Harlow, 1982), p. 112, in which the Hazels participate in a beerhall attack.
94 Interview, Mkhonza.
95 *The World*, 6 August 1976.
96 Interviews: Mofokeng, Simelane, Maseko. See also P. Frankel, 'The Dynamics of a Political Renaissance: the Soweto Students Representative Council', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 7, 3 (1980), p. 174, and Cillie Report RP 55/1980, p. 138, para 4.3.1.
97 Interviews: G. Khumalo, G. Dlamini, M. Xhaba (Koetz, December 1992), Tsotetsie, Mxadana, Duma; *The Star*, 17 June 1976; *The World*, 6 August 1976; Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind*, p. 151 and p. 208. See also Mzamane, *Children of Soweto*, pp. 149–150.
98 Interview, Gibi; similar observations are made in interviews: C. Mbuli, G. Dlamini.
99 Cillie Report RP 55/1980, p. 140, para 4.3.8.
100 Mzamane, *Children of Soweto*, p. 112.

this picture suggests. Brooks and Brickhill are correct to point out the uneven response of the gangs: 'Countless *tsotsis*, like many unemployed youth (and how is one to draw a clear line between them?) were drawn to the side of the students'.[101] In many instances the gangs displayed clear sympathies with the students. They could identify with immediate and violent political action. Gang participation in attacks on government and white-owned property was not always merely opportunistic. Many gangsters were expressing an anti-establishment rage and, for once, felt themselves in common cause with the wider youth constituency. Gangs also carried out numerous acts of spontaneous political sympathy in which they stood little to gain, such as confronting boycott breakers or other individuals perceived to be undermining black unity. They played a prominent role in waylaying and intimidating workers who ignored the stayaway calls. There can be little doubt that they contributed to the effectiveness of stayaways. Some gangs did apparently become more selective in their criminality by concentrating on 'white' targets or uncooperative local shop-owners. For instance, after a Diepkloof shop-owner refused to allow students to take refuge in his shop during a police offensive, the local Jaws gang, 'were at the forefront of the looting of the shop'.[102] In the wake of the June and August shootings, students and street youth could identify most easily through their common hatred of the police. Students, following Malcolm X's dictum, were now prepared to defend themselves 'by any means necessary', something which the gangs had always taken for granted. Gang members joined in the stoning and petrol bombing of security force vehicles with relish.[103]

The political links between students and gangs, it must be stressed, were informal and spontaneous. Gangs were never mobilised by the Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC), nor were alliances negotiated. In fact, the official SSRC position was extremely antagonistic towards gangs. Nevertheless, a number of individual gang participants, particularly those few who attended school or had close familial ties with students, did convert to politics during the uprising.[104] According to Snuki Zikalala, who was centrally involved in ANC recruitment in Botswana at the time, many of the exiles who fled from Soweto to the ANC camps during 1976/7 were 'raw' street youth. They were unsophisticated politically, but very willing military recruits. They often became very effective soldiers because 'they were not scared of death' and were prepared to take on dangerous assignments. They were, however, difficult to discipline because they were not interested in political education and were generally unable to shake off their addictions to *dagga* (cannabis) and alcohol.[105] For many unemployed Sowetan youths who had wavered on the fringes of gang life, politics became 'more cool' than gangsterism. These youths looked increasingly to the SSRC for role models and leadership rather than big time gangs.[106]

The 1976/7 Soweto Students' Representative Council

For more than a year after the 16 June upheaval the SSRC was the most effective political force in Soweto.[107] This represented an astonishing shift in the balance of authority between

101 Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind*, p. 208.
102 Interview, Lebelo.
103 Interviews: Lebelo, Khoza, Tsotetsie, Morwa, S. Khumalo; Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind*, p. 151. See also Mzamane, *Children of Soweto*, pp. 149–151.
104 Interviews: Gibi, Tsotetsie, Simelane, F. Mazibuko.
105 Interview, Zikalala.
106 Interviews: Masoka, Simelane, Mrs Dlamini.
107 For a detailed, blow-by-blow account of the SSRC's lifespan see Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, ch. 9 and 10, pp. 109–152. For an assessment of the SSRC's effectiveness and popularity in Soweto see Frankel, 'The Dynamics of a Political Renaissance'. This section is not a thorough account of the SSRC; rather, I concentrate on the divisions within the youth constituency and generational aspects of the council's activities.

parents and children, between young and old. For several years prior to the uprising antagonism had deepened between students and their parents, who were seen as quiescent to the point of being tools of the apartheid system.[108] The determination and assertiveness of the students during the uprising, Frankel argues, 'produced a mixture of fear and awe in the townships' which shattered traditional family hierarchy. From 1976 onwards, youths took the political initiatives and set the rules for social and political conformity.[109] An elderly Rockville resident recalls, for instance, that 'parents were dominated and punished by students.... No father could even leave his home and go and stay with another woman [without being] disciplined by the students'.[110] During 1976, Murphy Morobe observes, 'We had a sense of power as youth and students'. The student leadership felt that they could act 'without the respect, consultation or guidance of older people'.[111] The 1976 uprising marked an important turning point in the generational balance of power in Soweto, as in other urban centres. Parents, although often alarmed at the power invested in inexperienced youths with few responsibilities, generally accepted student leadership because, as one older resident puts it, 'they opened our eyes'. They knew that they had to support their children to win back their respect, particularly after so many youths had been killed in police shootings.[112]

The SSRC, as its name suggests, was most effective within the school student constituency. It established a remarkably successful system of representation and communication within Soweto high schools. From its inception the SSRC's structure included two representatives from each Soweto secondary and higher primary school. There were regular secret SSRC meetings during 1976/7 attended usually by about 100 students from a wide spread of schools.[113] The council was largely dependent on the school institution to mobilise students and disseminate information. In the early chaotic days of spontaneous boycotts following 16 June, the SSRC explicitly called for a return to school because it felt unable to regroup and organise outside of school networks.[114] Amongst students, the SSRC was able to maintain a fairly disciplined and united support base, although serious temporary splits did emerge even within the student constituency over the boycott of examinations in 1977.[115]

The SSRC recognised the importance of winning over the support of a wider community and of broadening its focus beyond educational issues. Prior to June 1976, SASM had some links with an older generation through the Black People's Convention and the allied Black Parents' Association (BPA). Through the BPA the SASM leadership had attempted to negotiate parental support for its educational demands. However, the BPA, rather than represent wider parent interests, consisted of a group of politically sympathetic

108 See *SRRSA* 1976, pp. 24–25 and Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, pp. 125–126. It is also worth noting that with the expansion of secondary schooling the younger generation found itself better educated than its parents' generation. Cillie, RP 55/1980, p. 621, argues, with some justification, that this often gave children an unusual position of strength within the family. Frankel, 'The Dynamics of a Political Renaissance', p. 175, makes a similar observation; student activists were more 'urbane' than their parents' generation, he argues, partly because of their greater exposure to schooling and partly because of their greater distance from rural culture.

109 Frankel, 'The Dynamics of a Political Renaissance', p. 171; see also p. 169.

110 Interview, Tsotetsie.

111 Interview, Morobe.

112 Interview, Kheswa. Many informants observed a marked shift in the generational balance of power; see interviews: Moloantwa, Tsotetsie, 'Thabo', Duma, Mrs Dlamini, N. Bothile (HWSFP), Morobe. The generational dynamics appear to have been similar in the African townships of Cape Town; for an interesting eye-witness account of the revolt in Guguletu, Nyanga and Langa see C. Hermer, *The Diary of Maria Tholo* (Johannesburg, 1980), particularly pp. 21–29.

113 Interviews: Morobe, Duma.

114 Interviews: Seathlolo, Makhabela, Morobe, Gibi; *The World*, 3 August and 17 August 1976; Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, p. 132; Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind*, p. 62; Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, p. 207.

115 See Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, pp. 135–138.

parents. The SSRC had no ready channels of communication with older residents, trade unions, migrants or even non-student youth. Although it did make some attempts to negotiate and consult with non-student sections of the community, the council ultimately depended on taking political initiatives and hoping that Sowetans would accept its leadership through a mixture of moral persuasion and threats.

The initial strong approval which parents gave to the SSRC began to dilute during the series of stayaway calls between August and November 1976. The SSRC distributed pamphlets to parents and workers asking for their support, but failed to explain adequately what they stood to gain from risking their jobs.[116] Pamphlets were sometimes threatening. A pamphlet calling for a stayaway in September, for instance, concluded: 'N.B. Your sons and daughters and all Black leaders shall be on the watch-out for sell-outs and traitors of the Black struggle! UNITED WE STAND'.[117] During December student–parent relations came under further strain as the SSRC called for a boycott of white-owned shops and, in respect for the dead, a sombre, ascetic Christmas season. The SSRC's tone became distinctly intimidatory. Soweto residents who ignored the buy at home campaign 'would regret it if found carrying goods bought in Johannesburg', a spokesman of the SSRC warned.[118] This caused much dissatisfaction amongst hardpressed workers since white-owned shops in Johannesburg were cheaper than the small Soweto stores.

Resentment built up between many adult residents and the students. Workers often felt that students disregarded their interests; that they were inadequately consulted. Many older residents began to resent being treated as equals by unmarried youths. The students, they argued, were too young, and had too few responsibilities, to wield such authority.[119] Workers also complained of coercion. During stayaways, bands of youths often waylaid workers on their way to work and motorists were stopped at makeshift roadblocks.[120] Shoppers were searched and often had their goods confiscated. The SSRC made genuine attempts to stop intimidation of workers by students and blamed the coercive excesses on the 'criminal element', over whom the council had no control. The council officially dissociated itself from coercive activity.[121] Nevertheless, the blurring of students and *tsotsis* damaged the image of the SSRC in the eyes of most Sowetans.

The residents most antagonistic towards the SSRC were the migrant workers who lived in Soweto's hostels. In the early days of the uprising the students made no effort to communicate with the hostel residents. They were ignored entirely as a constituency. The students had preconceptions of them as apolitical and unsophisticated outsiders. Migrants were enraged by the August stayaway calls. They were the most vulnerable workers who stood the most to lose if fired; they felt unconsulted and neglected. Moreover, their more traditional attitudes made youth leadership and the apparent disrespect for elders all the more unpalatable. The involvement of *tsotsis* in looting and the coercion of workers enraged migrants, who had a long history of victimisation at the hands of youth gangs. Migrants drew no distinction between *tsotsis* and students and reacted violently and randomly against Soweto youth during August. Students defended themselves with stones and petrol bombs in a series of bloody clashes with the migrants.[122] In September the students made a

116 For some examples of SSRC pamphlets, see Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, Baruch Hirson: Soweto collection (ICS BHS), file B.

117 ICS BHS, file B, 'Azikwhwelwa', SSRC pamphlet, September 1976.

118 *RDM*, 13 December 1976.

119 Interviews: Morobe, N. Bothile (HWSFP). See also ICS BHS file C, 'The Story of the Soweto SRC', Part One, clipping from *The World*, *ca* mid-1977.

120 See, for instance, reports on harassment of workers in *The World*, 4 August, 6 August and 9 August 1976. Interviews: Xhaba, Mrs Mtshali (Koetz, December 1992).

121 Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind*, p. 208.

122 Interviews: Morobe, Zodwa, C. Mbuli, Mkhonza; Glen Moss, 'Crisis and Conflict: Soweto 1976–7', MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1982, pp. 67–69; Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, pp. 113–114.

concerted effort to approach hostel leaders and discuss the clashes. Their efforts at reconciliation proved remarkably successful. It was important for the SSRC to stress its opposition to *tsotsis*' crime and coercion. Migrant hostility was largely neutralised; some migrants even came round to supporting the students' stand against apartheid.[123]

Relations between the SSRC and non-student residents improved during the first half of 1977. Stayaways stopped and the council took up issues which affected the wider community. The SSRC's successful campaign against rent increases and its onslaught against the Urban Bantu Council system were both extremely popular.[124] The anti-liquor campaign was more controversial but it was widely supported by wives who resented the squandering of limited household income at shebeens and beerhalls.[125] Later, the SSRC's apparent ability to curb crime also enhanced its credibility and authority in Soweto.

The relationship between the SSRC and the non-student youth was a complex one. Despite SASM and the Black Consciousness movement's enthusiasm for the idea of mobilising and recruiting youth gangs, they made very little real progress in this regard. Certainly some attempts were made. Tsietsi Mashinini was apparently 'street-wise' and acquainted with many gang members in his area. He addressed several open-air meetings in the early days of the uprising and tried to win gangs over in a disciplined way.[126] There is little evidence to suggest that he had any striking success. Mashinini fled into exile at a very early stage of the uprising and this probably set back much of the contact which had been achieved. The rapid turnover of SSRC leadership as a result of state repression (there were four SSRC presidents in the space of sixteen months) probably hampered the council's ability to build personal contacts and trust with gang leadership. Khotso Seathlolo, who succeeded Mashinini as the SSRC president, claims that, via neighbourhood networks, the council was able to disseminate information and instructions to youth beyond the schools; 'almost every street had someone who was at school'. School students felt a responsibility to keep other neighbourhood youths informed.[127] Nevertheless, communications with gangs worked at best on an *ad hoc* basis; ties were never formalised and activities were never coordinated. The political participation of gangs throughout 1976/7 was spontaneous and sporadic.

As the uprising progressed the SSRC found itself increasingly forced to dissociate itself from gang activity. In fact, it was not long before it was declaring open hostility towards gangs. Like the Pan Africanist Congress during 1959/60, the Black Consciousness movement argued that an alliance with the street youth was essential. The gangs, as I have shown, were recognised to have great revolutionary potential. The intellectual influences of the American Black Power and Black Panther movements no doubt strengthened the BCM's attraction to the lumpen youth. Once the 1976 uprising was under way, however, the SSRC realised the political dangers of such an alliance. First, the gang constituency proved to be uncontrollable; almost by definition, the gangs rejected external disciplines. The language and codes of the gangs were too distant from those of the politicised students. Moreover, too many of the students' political demands seemed to be centred around educational issues which were of no concern to the street youth. The gangs could identify easily with the anti-establishment rage of the students but their methods and intellectual

123 Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, p. 114. See Moss, 'Crisis and Conflict' for a general analysis of the relationship between students and migrants during the Soweto uprising.
124 Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, pp. 127–128; ICS BHS, file C, 'The Story of the Soweto SRC', Part Two, clipping from *The World*, *ca* mid 1977.
125 Interviews: J. Nzimande (Koetz, December 1992), G. Khumalo, Tsotetsie.
126 Interview, Mofokeng.
127 Interview, Seathlolo.

paradigms were worlds apart. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the SSRC began to find any association with the gangs politically embarrassing and divisive. The SSRC, with remarkable political maturity, recognised the importance of forging township unity and consensus. Reconciliation with the migrants, for instance, would have been unthinkable without a clear declaration of hostility towards *tsotsis*. In order to retain sympathy with workers and parents, the SSRC had to curb coercive excesses; this involved discouraging gang participation in political activity and even at times apparently using *tsotsis* as scapegoats for its own internal breaches in political discipline. Third, the SSRC began to recognise the importance of crime as a popular grievance. By actively combating crime the SSRC could demonstrate its authority and community responsibility.

The SSRC formed special squads to prevent gang excesses during political campaigns and to curb gang crime generally. 'We didn't want our people being harassed', Seathlolo explains. The student squads disarmed 'out-of-control' youths and monitored gang involvement during campaigns.[128] Of equal importance, the students cracked down on gang crime, in many ways taking over the patrol functions of the Makgotla civil guard movement. They were, however, more effective in 'disciplining' the gangs. The SSRC was able to mobilise on a larger scale than the Makgotla and the student activists could operate virtually full-time, particularly during the long months of school boycott. With fewer responsibilities and greater muscle, students, unlike middle-aged fathers, were prepared to engage in violent confrontation. Gangs throughout Soweto were thrown into retreat.[129] Ex-member of the Bandido gang, Oupa Ndala, comments: '1976 stopped all our fun. These school kids started terrorising us as gangs. They started burning our houses. When the students turned against us I started realising that gangsterism was a bad thing. 1976 gave the students the power to do anything they wanted to do. Students used to hunt us and, if they do not get you, they burn your family house'.[130] On one occasion, after receiving complaints that train passengers were being molested by criminal youths, two hundred students patrolled a Soweto station to protect commuters.[131] Residents recall that there was a noticeable lull in crime and gang activity during the 1976/7 uprising. Students managed to achieve what the police and Makgotla could not. The Christmas of 1976 proved to be the most peaceful festive season in Soweto for many years.[132] The drop in gang crime was primarily a result of student crackdowns. However, as I showed earlier, the political and community consciousness of the gangs was partially raised during the uprising. Some individual gang members did embrace the 'struggle' while many more at least became more scrupulous in their choice of victims.

Conclusion

Unlike the Black Panthers of the American inner city ghettoes, the SSRC, and the Black Consciousness movement generally, ultimately withdrew from any potential alliance with lumpen elements in 1976. The Black Panthers were aware that they could not realistically overthrow the American government. Perhaps out of despair, they dedicated themselves to

128 Interviews: Seathlolo, Duma.

129 Interviews: Ndala, Nzimande, Maseko, Mhlambi, G. Khumalo, Zodwa, G. Dlamini, Mofokeng, Xhaba, H. Mokgotsi (Koetz, September 1992), Duma, Seathlolo. See also Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, p. 125 and p. 132. For a detailed account of the Makgotla movement see C. Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics in Soweto', Chapter Nine.

130 Interview, Ndala.

131 Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, p. 125.

132 Interviews: Mowela, D. Nkosi, Thotela, Masoka, Mabhena, Mokgotsi, Mrs Dlamini. See Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, pp. 119 and 132; Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, p. 194.

defending black territory, encouraging something approaching ghetto secessionism. Gang territoriality and parochiality could therefore be harnessed effectively to their objectives.[133] The Black Consciousness movement, by contrast, sensed that it could play a crucial role in defeating the apartheid government. Political victory was too realistic to allow for apocalyptic politics. Moreover, as the township revolt of 1976/7 unfolded, the Black Consciousness movement gradually came to understand that it had more in common with ordinary working class residents than it did with the gang subculture. Although Black Consciousness was primarily a political movement of black urban youth, cultural rifts within the youth constituency proved to be too wide to enable the movement to forge a common black youth identity. Like the ANC of the 1950s, the Black Consciousness movement, although sympathetic to the plight of the street youth, was too concerned with the creation of a broader township consensus to risk taking on board the volatile and feared gang constituency. Like the ANC in the 1950s, the Black Consciousness movement could only contemplate recruiting youths involved with gangs once the youths had undergone a process of 'rehabilitation'. Few politicians were able to accept or understand the cultural logic of the gangs in spite of the fact that they were associative structures of enormous importance in the everyday lives of thousands of urban youths.

The school and the gang spawned two very different traditions of political and social defiance. The high school provided a space for an intellectual and disciplined form of politics to emerge. Student activists were idealistic and broad in vision; they saw themselves, by the mid-1970s, as the vanguard of a national black community. The gangs expressed themselves through subversive styles and through violent territorial opposition to outsiders, including police and administrators. Their objective was to maintain *de facto* control of their streets; to make their turf, in a sense, 'ungovernable'. They cordoned off and defended a space in which they were significant. Whereas the gang world was, almost by definition, internally divided and antagonistic, school knitted together a student identity. The cohesive tendency of the school environment, coupled with the sudden expansion in high school numbers, explains the dramatic rise in importance of Soweto's student constituency during the first half of the 1970s.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s the Soweto Youth Congress, as well as other youth congresses, appear to have been more successful in attracting non-student youth. This politicisation process began with the less hardened street youth in the 1976/7 period. The effective disciplining of the gangs probably forced non-student youth in the subsequent years to look increasingly to political movements for an alternative sense of belonging. Moreover, as the education crisis deepened with students almost perpetually out on boycott during the mid 1980s, the student–non-student divide blurred further. The 'Comrades', theoretically, embraced all youth. Gangs, however, did not disappear. Before long they re-emerged in the *mapantsula* subculture and the *jackroller* gangs of the 1980s and 1990s.[134] The political incorporation of the gang subculture, though more advanced than during the 1970s, was uneven and unstable during the 1980s. It was during this period that the term *'com-tsotsi'* came into vogue to describe ambiguously criminal and political youth. What it represented was the partial fusion of two historically divergent youth cultures. While youth politics broadened and school identity lost its sharpness, gangs became more politically conscious and participative. But this fusion, it appears, was transient; with

133 For a useful discussion of Black Panther tactics in the inner cities see M. Davis, 'Los Angeles: Civil Liberties between the Hammer and the Rock', *New Left Review*, 170 (July/August 1988); S. Stern, 'The Call of the Black Panthers, in A. Meier and E. Rudwick (eds), *Black Protest in the Sixties* (Chicago, 1970).

134 For some detail on the *jackrollers* see Steve Mokwena, 'The Era of the Jackrollers: Contextualising the Rise of Youth Gangs in Soweto' (Project for the Study of Violence seminar paper no. 7, University of the Witwatersrand, October 1991).

political 'demobilisation' since 1990, criminal youth gangs, made up primarily of school pushouts, became resurgent.

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